

Young Child Sparks Movement to Help The Homeless

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- realize that age and economic barriers to helping others in need can be overcome through creativity, determination and wisdom
- see how we can make a difference, even with larger problems such as homelessness
- see how we can inspire others to help those in need by addressing a problem in ways that are effective and simple to do
- understand the importance of solidarity in establishing a personal connection with another person in need
- see the value of family support in striving for our goals
- develop a greater level of empathy for the homeless and others in need, become more compassionate in desiring to help, and become inspired to take action and to become generous in helping with their time, talent and / or resources

Primary Virtues / Character Traits

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy, compassion and generosity

Empathy: trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and / or talent.

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

Determination – firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

Family Dedication / Support: complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

Respect for Others: showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by “the golden rule”: do unto others as you would want done unto you

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Leader Introduction

When we look at the world around us and the many problems we face, it's easy to say to ourselves that I can't make a difference, that problems such as homelessness are simply too large. It's also easy to think that we as students, and without a lot of money, can't make a difference. Well fortunately a young girl from Georgia, Bethany Moultry, has shown us that we can make a difference. Let's see what is enabling this young girl and her family to help others, and along the way to inspire people from across the country to do the same.

Lesson Video

<https://www.wtoc.com/2020/11/12/good-news-bethanys-happy-bags-homeless/>

Leader Summary:

It's truly inspiring that a young girl and her family have found a way to effectively help homeless individuals. The homeless often feel helpless, lonely, unseen and rejected by society. Through her "Happy Bags" Bethany, and now many others not only provide essential supplies, but as importantly let the homeless know that they are seen, and that people in society do care about them.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Bethany had a strong and sudden desire to help the homeless person she saw on her trip to Walmart with her mom. What virtue does this desire represent?
(**compassion**)

Do you think **empathy** likely played a role in Bethany experiencing such a strong desire to help, and if yes how? We don't know for certain from the story but what do you think Bethany may have seen, and we have likely seen with homeless individuals, that could have triggered her response and to imagine what it would be like to be in that person's situation?

Let's share some examples of when we saw or experienced something that gave us a greater sense of empathy for another person in need and how it made us more compassionate in wanting to help? These examples can be very simple among our friends and family and within our community, yet still important. Examples can also come from larger events in the world.

2. Bethany and her mom's idea for the Happy Bags is a terrific example of **wisdom** in approaching a problem? Looking at the definition of wisdom, how does the Happy Bags project fit each aspect of wisdom?
(If students don't do it on their own prompt them to discuss how the Happy Bags program reflects knowledge and understanding, is effective and is a lasting good:
 - reflects knowledge and understanding of a homeless person's situation
 - is effective in delivering needed assistance directly to the person in need
 - is effective in using social media and on-line purchasing to mobilize support for the project from people across America
 - can be a lasting project that continues forward for a long time)

3. What are the different ways that the Happy Bags project promotes **solidarity**? (The notes Bethany and others write establish a direct and personal connection between the donors and the homeless person receiving the assistance where they know that someone else cares about them, that they are seen and are important.)

The social media outreach to donors enables people from far away to express their care for another person in need.

Organizing the school to assemble the Happy Bags enables many children to come together in community to learn about the needs of others, and to unify around the purpose of helping others.)

4. Do you think that personal connection/solidarity is just as important for the homeless as their physical needs? Why or why not? (homeless people usually suffer from extreme loneliness, since they are often passed on the street and never acknowledged. Feeling personally connected and seen by someone can make a huge difference in their mental health, sense of well-being and self-worth.)
5. Do you think we can launch a version of Happy Bags in our community to help those who are homeless? If yes, let's drill into the details on how we would actually build this out. (This is also an extended activity below)
6. What are some ideas for how to address the underlying causes of homelessness instead of just meeting the immediate needs of homeless individuals? (Supporting candidates for office who support government programs that will offer rehabilitation services, counseling, job training and job placement for the homeless, supporting private sector charities and programs that do the same work, shopping at businesses that may employ the homeless)
7. At only 6 years old, Bethany couldn't do this on her own as projects like these always require multiple people regardless of their age. Bethany's mom and dad offered ideas and support to help Bethany accomplish her goal of helping the homeless. In what ways do Bethany's mom and dad help her? (creating the amazon page for supplies, recruiting donors through FaceBook, taking her shopping, taking her to deliver the packages, organizing the school to assemble the Happy Bags, being generous with their own time and efforts just like Bethany is)
8. What is inspiring to you about Bethany's "Happy Bag" movement? How do you think she is inspiring others to make a difference as well? (being on the news, inspiring others across the country to do similar things because they see that it's not that hard, people think "if a 6 year old can do that I can too!", seeing how effective her assistance is in helping the homeless)
9. What are some reasons you think people may end up being homeless? (some cannot afford housing and other necessities given the low wage they earn, unemployment, mental illness, domestic abuse, substance abuse and lack of necessary services)

Journal Writing Option

1. Practice solidarity—write a note, like Bethany’s notes in her Happy Bags, to a homeless person. Be sure to brainstorm before writing your note about how you can stand with that person and their struggles and offer them support and encouragement.
2. Write about having lunch with a homeless person, what questions would you ask, what encouragement would you offer, what other topics would you want to talk about?
3. Think of all the gifts that you can give, even at your age. The gift of time, the gift of words of encouragement and affirmation. Write about which gift you would choose to give to another person during this holiday season and how. (This is also an extended activity)

Extended Activities:

1. Come up with a plan on how you would initiate a program like Bethany’s happy bags in your community. Organize students into teams of 2-4 per team. Team assignments are:
 - outline the problem of homelessness in your community or a community close by, and determine which organizations you can partner with to distribute the bags
 - what supplies would you offer in each bag, how much would each bag cost and how would you raise the money to purchase the supplies
 - how would you build awareness of the program within your community and / or to a much broader audience, consider traditional methods of advertisement and spreading the message to various communities as well as using social media.
 - would you want an individual note for each bag, or one note that your team would create for all of the bags, what are some of the themes for an individual or group note
2. Ask each member of your group to think of all the gifts that they can give to another person or organization that helps others during this holiday season. Ask each student to write out what they want to give, when they will do it and why they want to give this gift. Encourage students to think about gifts of time and the gift of words of encouragement and affirmation for another person. After the holiday season ask students to share stories on their experiences in giving their gift, how it affected the person receiving the gift and how it affected them.

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