

SPARKING COMPASSION



25 YEARS

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide to your Sleep Out (or Sleep In) offers stories and questions that we hope will spark meaningful conversations and tap into the transformative power of our collective compassion.

The stories that follow are real, and were generously shared by former program participants of Interfaith Outreach. They describe unique lived experiences of neighbors who have struggled to find a place to call home in the community where they belong. For some, this struggle is new or temporary. For others, struggle has been a part of their family's experience for generations.

At Interfaith Outreach, as we partner with families to address their needs and work toward more hopeful futures, we witness the skills, commitment, resourcefulness, resilience and courage these neighbors demonstrate, often in the face of extraordinary personal or structural barriers.

As you read these stories, we invite you to reflect on not only the needs of our neighbors, but also their strengths, and what it means to be a responsive community that shares its resources and creates a sense of belonging.

OPENING CONVERSATION STARTERS

Before you read on, please take five minutes to reflect about what you spent time or energy on today.

Adults

- What was on your mind today? Meal plans or grocery shopping lists? Concerns about your children or parents? Health issues? World events?
- Make a list of your day's top 10 concerns. As you read the stories, think about what the adults' top 10 concerns might be.

Kids

- What were you worried about today? What made you happy or excited? How did you sleep last night? Did anything unusual happen during school or after school today?
- As you listen to the stories, think about what the kids might be thinking or feeling.

Small children

- Invite young kids to draw a picture of their family, where they sleep, or what makes them feel safe and happy at home.



MINDY'S STORY

Watch our video called [Igniting the Power of Community](#) with Mindy's story (scroll half way down the web page). Watch the whole video OR start at 3 mn 30 seconds.

Mindy grew up in a family where money was tight and she rarely felt safe. She tried to find good jobs, choose the right life partner and find glimmers of light in the only life she knew – poverty and chaos. However, her problems piled up. Her partner was hurtful, not helpful. This strong mother vowed to keep her three children safe and give them a different life.

Mindy returned to this community, where she and her kids slept on an air mattress in a friend's house, “doubled up” and homeless in the suburbs for five months. She learned about Interfaith Outreach and worked with Employment Services, which linked her to a Caring for Kids scholarship for quality child care. She tells us, “I found a daycare so I could go to work and find better employment. It saved us.”

Next in Mindy's journey was Project Success, a two-year transitional housing program at Interfaith Outreach for homeless and near-homeless families with children. From this foundation of stable housing, Mindy was able to go back to school and work on a degree that could lead to a higher wage jobs.

Mindy shares, “I went from having nothing to renting a 4-bedroom house. I'm almost done with my degree and I'm working full time at a law firm. My kids are in one of the best public school districts and I am so thankful. We are going to be an educated and successful family from here on out. I definitely did not see that before I walked through Interfaith Outreach's doors – never. Ever.”



Conversation Prompts:

- How do you think it would feel to sleep on an air mattress in a friend's house for five months? Would it feel different if you didn't know you were going back to your own home?
- Where do you go when you want or need to be alone? How might that be different if you lived with another family?
- What is your bedtime routine? Your morning routine? How would it be different if you were staying in someone else's home?
- How was child care important in Mindy's story?
- What positive attributes do you imagine Mindy has? What difference do they make for her children?
- Are your expectations for yourself higher or lower than your parents' expectations for you? Why do you think that might be?



MELISSA'S STORY

After Nov. 12, you can watch her video story ([linked here](#)).

Melissa remembers not seeing the change coming when suddenly she and her little daughter, Madi, didn't have any support and were forced to leave the place they called home. "Our life went from feeling very secure one moment to upside down the next," she said. "We didn't have that security to call a place home, and feel the comfort of knowing what the next day will look like."

"The most important thing for me was staying positive for my daughter. But the reality was that we needed housing, we needed food and I needed a job," Melissa recalls. The father of a friend brought Melissa and Madi groceries, and he told them about Interfaith. "It was extremely hard for me to ask for help. But what immediately struck me when I walked through those doors was the comfort and support they offered."

"For us, it was only two months that we needed the actual services from Interfaith," Melissa said. "But the impact of that initial meeting has stuck with me forever and given me so much hope. Now, I want to give back and make sure that people know that that hope and those services are available for anyone who needs them."

Today, Melissa is happily remarried, and she gives back to her community as an Interfaith Outreach Ambassador and volunteer. She and Madi have created a family Sleep Out tradition as a way to remember with empathy the struggles that any of us can face, and to inspire others to make a difference.

"What's so beautiful about this community is that we are in this together," Melissa said.



Conversation Prompts:

- Who would you turn to if you had to suddenly leave the place or people you currently consider home? How long would you be able to stay with them?
- If you were the parent in this story, how would you explain to your child what was happening?
- What creates a feeling of stability in your life? What routines do you count on that might be hard to maintain if your family were staying with another family?
- What are some of the rules you have in your own home/from your parents? Have you ever stayed in someone else's home where the rules or routines are different? What did that feel like?
- Melissa described the impact of her first meeting with Interfaith. What do you imagine the person she met did or said that made her feel supported? When do you have opportunities to offer support, and how do you show it?
- How did Melissa's friend's father make a difference?



KARA'S STORY

After being diagnosed with a disabling brain disease, Kara's* entire world began to crumble. Barely able to count to five, she had to quit her job. She struggled to accept the reality that she may never be able to work again. As medical bills loomed large, she had to quit her job and nearly lost her home because of her illness and the lack of affordable housing. Kara's three children ages 4, 7 and 16 needed a sense of normalcy. Keeping them in the Wayzata school system was important. But that meant asking for help. With the help of her case manager, Kara submitted applications for 120 different housing waitlists. It was a nearly impossible task with her cognitive struggles. But she persisted – for her kids' sake. "I had to because you know with my disease, I have to keep everything organized, or I would forget everything I did." She gained support and strength from her case manager for staying positive, taking one day at a time, and connecting the dots. Finally, after hundreds of emails, phone calls and tears, one of the housing applications was accepted. Funds from the Sleep Out helped Kara pay housing application fees and a few months' rent, among other things, preventing homelessness during her search for a new home.

Kara remembers moving into their three-bedroom townhome and placing a plastic play kitchen set in the living room for her daughter Jazmyne. Her case manager Aparna says, "Kara is such a great mom. All decisions about her life are based on what's good for her kids." Kara's story of strength and struggle is still unfolding. But for now, her housing works – so child care, transportation, food are stabilized, and her children did not have to switch schools. For Kara and her three kids, everything starts with a home where they can live, dance, laugh and thrive.

*Names and have been changed at client's request to protect their privacy.



Conversation Prompts:

- What positive attributes does Kara demonstrate in this story?
- Why do you think Kara had to work so hard to find a place to rent near her kids' schools?
- What do you think it was like for Kara's children to have a mom struggling with a disability?
- Is it hard or easy for you to ask for help? Why do you think that is?
- What does this story tell you about the relationship of Kara and Aparna?
- Why do you think it was so hard for Kara to find a place to live in our community?



YOUR TURN

You can spark the transformative power of collective compassion. One by one, discuss what you think of when you hear these phrases:

- EVERYONE in our community belongs.
- We are on this human journey TOGETHER.
- There is TRANSFORMATIVE POWER in giving and receiving.

This year, more committed than ever, we come together to transform the risk of eviction into housing security. To transform hunger into hope. To transform isolation into connection. And to brighten the night for each other.

- How can you be a source of light for someone in need?
- What is one thing can you do to transform isolation into connection?
- How can you brighten the day (or night) for someone you know?
- How can you spark compassion for someone you may not know in our community?

BE LIKE BOB CHALLENGE

The Sleep Out started 25 years ago with one man in a tent. Celebrate Bob Fisher's legacy by accepting the "Be Like Bob" Challenge! Take action yourself and challenge others to do the same when you support the Sleep Out in one or many of these four ways.

Learn more at sleepout.iocp.org.

1. make a donation
2. create a fundraiser
3. sleep out (or in)
4. plant a "You Belong" yard sign

What will you do to shine your light of compassion? Let us know and we'll add a star to our Sleep Out night sky in your honor.



MORE ABOUT THE SLEEP OUT

THE NEED

Too many families and individuals in our community are struggling with housing insecurity and poverty, or are experiencing the crisis of homelessness.

Poverty is increasing everywhere, and it's growing fastest in the suburbs. Fourteen percent (14%) of people in our service area live in poverty, earning scarcely enough to cover housing and other basic needs. The poverty level for a family of four is an annual income of \$26,200 or less. (Wilder Research)

Last year, 1,951 families turned to Interfaith Outreach for help. One out of every seven of those families was experiencing homelessness. Almost half had children; almost half were staying temporarily with family and friends. Nineteen percent (19%) were living in domestic abuse shelters, while others were sleeping in motels, their cars or outdoors. All 1,951 families were housing "cost-burdened," meaning they spent 30% or more of their household income on housing; for many, that percentage was as high as 65%.

The housing instability and economic uncertainty that our neighbors experience has only intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While additional emergency sources of support—such as unemployment insurance and a federal eviction moratorium—have been made available, no one knows how long the support will last, adding to the already high levels of emotional stress that come with poverty and housing insecurity

Communities of color and people living in poverty have been disproportionately impacted by increased economic hardship and the resulting food and housing insecurity. (National Bureau of Economic Research)

In the midst of the pandemic, Minnesota is experiencing an ongoing affordable housing crisis, with an ever-widening gap between rising rents (+13%) and falling incomes (-5%). (Minnesota Housing Partnership)

When our neighbors struggle with homelessness or housing insecurity, it impacts all of us.

Affordable and adequate housing is essential to positive health outcomes. It is key to family stability and essential to kids' success in school. It is critical for local jobs and strong economies.



MORE ABOUT THE SLEEP OUT

OUR COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The Sleep Out is how our community celebrates and taps into the transformative power of collective compassion. It is our community's annual eight-week series of events and experiences to raise awareness and \$2.6 million to prevent homelessness and create opportunities for everyone in our community to thrive.

The Sleep Out is celebrating its 25th year—and has prevented homelessness 34,281 times via direct rental assistance.

The money raised helps Interfaith Outreach deliver individualized services in six critical impact areas: family support, food, housing and neighborhoods, education and youth, employment, and transportation. Each year, money raised by the Sleep Out helps nearly 2,000 local families (that's more than 6,000 individuals) stabilize, strengthen and thrive.

**Thank you for being a part of our
community's story and its collective
compassion!**

sleepout.iocp.org