

# AMERICAN STREET KID

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

**National  
Runaway  
SafeLine**

 **Black Hills  
Regional  
Homeless  
Coalition**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Documentary Film Summary ..... 3
- II. Description of the Problem ..... 3
- III. Group Screening Considerations ..... 4
- IV. Discussion Questions Prior to Viewing ..... 5
- V. Discussion Questions After Viewing ..... 6
- VI. Self-Reflection Questions ..... 7
- VII. Resources for Young People ..... 8
- VIII. Resources for Additional Information ..... 11

This brief document, built through a collaboration between the National Runaway Safeline and the Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition, is intended to guide a discussion with youth of all ages who have the opportunity to watch the documentary, *American Street Kid*. Included below are recommended discussion topics and questions, intended to help focus conversation on key takeaways from the film and steps that youth participants can take to make a difference in their local communities. In addition, the document offers contact information for several national organizations that support those facing challenges often associated with youth homelessness, along with a list of references to consider for additional reading and statistics on the subject.

# I. DOCUMENTARY FILM SUMMARY

The plan was simple: create a two-minute public service announcement about homeless youth in America. However, once he met youth living on the street, filmmaker Michael Leoni realized he needed to do more. The result is a full-length, award-winning documentary that leads us into a world most people don't know exists; a world where, in order to survive, homeless youth are forced to sell drugs, beg for money, or sell their bodies. They live under bridges, in abandoned houses, or anywhere else they can hide to remain safe from the daily dangers they face on the streets.

Leoni takes viewers on his journey with homeless teens as they expose the truth and illuminate the hardcore reality of this American crisis. Those he meets have traveled from across the country to converge in Los Angeles with the dream of finding something better. What they find is anything but. Their powerful stories are heartbreaking, yet their unrelenting hope and determination to create a better life shines through in this true tale of love, friendship, and the triumph of the human spirit. *American Street Kid* reveals the answers to the crucial questions: How did these homeless youth get to where they are? And why can't they get off the streets?

# II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

It is estimated that 4.2 million young people, ages 13 to 25, experience some form of homelessness each year in the United States. Think about it this way: in a classroom of 30 students, at least one of them will experience homelessness this year, without a safe living environment to call home. They may be forced to couch surf, bounce among relatives and friends, live in shelters, or stay on the streets.

Youth who run away or are homeless come from every kind of neighborhood, rich and poor, rural and urban. However, studies show that certain populations are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness in the U.S., including LGBTQIA2S youth, youth of color (especially African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth), pregnant and parenting youth, and youth involved in multiple public systems (i.e., juvenile justice, child welfare).

While youth who run away may be perceived as "bad kids," they are typically dealing with situations that feel overwhelming, be it family conflict, bullying or abuse/neglect, where the unknowns of leaving home are perceived as preferable to the experiences they currently face. While leaving home may solve one problem, living on the streets or in an unstable living situation creates a new set of challenges. Homelessness can lead to struggles to find consistent food and shelter, to care for one's mental and physical health, to attend and complete high school, and to avoid potentially dangerous and violent situations.

### III. GROUP SCREENING CONSIDERATIONS

**WARNING:** This film contains violence, sexual situations, drug use and strong language. It is essential that people review these considerations prior to any screening (family, individual or group) and offer appropriate support to those in need. The difficult situations presented in the documentary may be triggering and bring many emotions to the forefront.

#### **Screening Facilitator Considerations:**

1. If watching in a group setting, please be aware of your community culture and available support systems. Invite individuals who provide support to youth, such as counselors, mentors, foster parents, HIV/relationship support, victim services, LGBTQIA2S service providers, minority advocacy providers, teachers, or other trusted adults to participate in the screening.
2. Who are your screening participants (i.e. children, teenagers, adults)? It is important to adapt discussions and support needs to the viewing audience.
3. What releases or waivers might be needed if viewers are under 18? What school/organization screening processes would be required for viewing the film?
4. If screening with young people, do you have a space for them to decompress if they need to step away during the movie?
5. What additional supports are needed for young people viewing the film? What if a situation triggers a viewer? Who will offer support, and how will they do so?
6. How will you introduce the film to young people?
7. Young people have suggested implementing a discussion on the film where facilitators ask open-ended questions in the following manner: have participants sit in two concentric circles. Youth in the inner circle engage in an active discussion, articulating their thoughts and insights. Concurrently, youth in the outer circle observe the discussion, listen closely to the comments of others, and think critically. After an allotted period of time, the two groups switch roles.

## IV. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PRIOR TO VIEWING

*Included below are several recommended questions to consider posing prior to screening American Street Kid, along with notes to assist the facilitator with guiding the conversation.*

1. How would you define homelessness?
2. What is the formal definition of homelessness?

**Under Federal law, there are two definitions:**

**McKinney-Vento: anyone lacking a fixed, regular or adequate nighttime residence. This includes living in a hotel or motel due to economic difficulty, living with friends or relatives, living in a shelter, transitional housing, living in cars or bus stations, living anywhere not meant for human habitation.**

**Housing and Urban Development (HUD): lacking a fixed, regular or adequate nighttime residence but limited to a public or private place not meant for human habitation or shelter.**

3. When you think of homelessness, what comes to mind? Why do you think young people experience homelessness?
4. What is your community's perception of young people without homes?
5. What are some of the reasons youth experience homelessness?

**Some possible reasons:**

- a. Family problems/relationships break down
- b. Economic problems (poverty)
- c. Housing instability (some shelters don't take over age 12)
- d. Parent or guardian addiction
- e. Parental neglect
- f. LBGTQIA2S coming out to family and the family not understanding or discriminating.  
NOTE: IA2S incorporates Intersex, Asexual, and 2 Spirit people within indigenous populations.
- g. Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse in the home
- h. Mental health issues (parent or child)
- i. Involvement with child welfare/foster care
- j. Aging out of foster care
- k. Disruptive family event, death of parent, divorce
- l. BIPOC youth (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) being placed into a white family that does not acknowledge the youth's cultural identity. Some youth may feel lost, do not understand who they are, feel out of place, and have no sense of belonging to that family system. In addition, BIPOC youth are more likely to suffer from intergenerational trauma.

6. What are the dangers that young people experience living on the streets?

7. What do you know about people experiencing homelessness in your community?

**Gather national statistics (note resources provided at the end of this guide)**

**Gather local statistics from service providers and state agencies**

- **Be prepared to share data about youth experiencing homelessness in your area**
- **Minority representation of youth experiencing homelessness**
- **Per capita - what region or area has the highest rate of homelessness**
- **Statistics on physical, mental, sexual health (i.e. assault, HIV, pregnancy, addiction, suicide) related to homelessness**

8. What services are available in the local community to help families and youth who are without a home or are in danger of losing their homes? Are these services accessible in your community? Where would you reach out if you or someone you knew needed help?

- **Create a list of service providers and their offerings. Places to consider may include local shelters, housing programs, mental health providers, health clinics, schools, food and clothing banks, drop-in centers, and warming and cooling stations.**
- **Gain a better understanding of what is available and the differences among the services provided.**
- **What programming is available in the area to help youth who are without or do not feel safe at home?**
- **What services are available for young parents?**

## V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING

*Included below are recommended questions to consider posing after screening American Street Kid, along with notes to assist the facilitator with guiding the conversation.*

1) After watching the documentary, what is your understanding of the foster care system? Did your impressions of it change at all based on the film? What do you know about the foster care system in your community/county/state?

2) What personal strengths do you see in Bublez, Nick, Nessa, Ryan, Greenz, Crystal, Kiki, and Ishmael? Do you see similarities in their strengths to young people who have not experienced housing challenges?

**Compassion, strength, courage, determination, resilience, loving, caring, considerate, dedicated**

3) What supports helped get Nick, Greenz, and Crystal off the street? Do you think the barriers that Michael (the director) encountered are unique?

4) Why did some of the young people stay on the streets?

5) What are some of the similarities and differences you see between Los Angeles and your community?

6) What were some of the wants/goals of the young people in *American Street Kid*? How similar are these goals to your own?

**Own a restaurant, get an apartment, find a job, have a family**

7) What are some of the challenges that young people faced in the documentary? Did any of these challenges surprise you?

8) What are some of the reasons the young people in the documentary experienced homelessness?

**Domestic violence, bad parenting, HIV, pregnancy, sexual assault, food insecurity**

9) What happened when the young people in *American Street Kid* were connected to the support they needed? What happened when they achieved success?

10) What happened to individuals in the film (Greenz, Bublez, Kiki, Nick)?

11) If you could ask a question of any of the youth in the documentary, who and what would it be? Why?

12) Why do you think the “street kids” did not want to go to the police for help?

## VI. SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Included below are recommended questions for participants to reflect upon either as part of a group conversation or in their own time and space.*

1) After watching *American Street Kid* has your perception changed about people who are experiencing homelessness? Why or why not?

2) What are some of the myths surrounding youth who experience homelessness?

3) What services are needed to prevent youth homelessness in the future?

4) What can individuals, service providers, and organizations do to promote collaboration and solutions with the homeless youth community?

5) What was something new that you learned while watching the film?

6) What would you do if you found yourself suddenly living on the streets, without your family or support network to rely on?

7) How can we build upon current systems to better support children and guard them from abuse?

8) How can you help create solutions in your local community? What would be your first step to do so?

9) What types of issues might a youth face if placed into a foster home non-representative of their own culture?

## VII. RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline | [childhelp.org](http://childhelp.org) | 800-4-A-CHILD**

The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse. Serving the U.S. and Canada, the hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with professional crisis counselors who—through interpreters—provide assistance in over 170 languages. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service and support resources. All calls are confidential.

### **Covenant House | [covenanthouse.org](http://covenanthouse.org)**

Offers housing and support services to homeless, runaway and trafficked young people in need through street outreach, safe short-term housing, and longer-term transitional housing, with the goal of helping those they serve achieve independent living, free from the fear of future homelessness.

### **Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) | [acf.hhs.gov/fysb](http://acf.hhs.gov/fysb)**

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families and the Department of Health and Human Services, FYSB supports the organizations and communities that work to reduce the risk of youth homelessness, adolescent pregnancy and domestic violence. FYSB offers [an interactive map](#) listing runaway and homeless youth, family violence prevention and services, and adolescent pregnancy prevention providers in each state.

### **loveisrespect | [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org) | 866-331-9474**

A project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, loveisrespect offers 24/7 information, support and advocacy to young people between the ages of 13 and 26 who have questions or concerns about their romantic relationships. The organization also provides support to concerned friends and family members, teachers, counselors and service providers through the same free and confidential services via phone, text and live chat.

### **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) | [naehcy.org](http://naehcy.org)**

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth is a national membership association that works to ensure that every child and youth experiencing homelessness is successful in school, from early childhood through higher education. Their website offers the ability to search for local McKinney-Vento liaisons.

### **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) | [missingkids.org](https://missingkids.org)**

As the nation's clearinghouse and comprehensive reporting center for all issues related to the prevention of and recovery from child victimization, NCMEC leads the fight against abduction, abuse, and exploitation - because every child deserves a safe childhood. NCMEC offers a CyberTipline ([CyberTipline.org](https://CyberTipline.org) | 800-THE-LOST) to report online child sexual exploitation, resources for survivors of sexual abuse, along with information to search for missing children.

### **National Human Trafficking Hotline | [humantraffickinghotline.org](https://humantraffickinghotline.org) | 888-373-7888**

The National Human Trafficking Hotline connects victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking with services and supports to get help and stay safe. The Hotline also receives tips about potential situations of sex and labor trafficking and facilitates reporting that information to the appropriate authorities in certain cases. The toll-free phone and SMS text lines and live online chat function are available 24/7. Help is available in English or Spanish, or in more than 200 additional languages through an on-call interpreter.

### **National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) | [niwrc.org](https://niwrc.org)**

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, Inc. (NIWRC) is a Native-led nonprofit organization dedicated to ending violence against American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian women and children by supporting culturally grounded, grassroots advocacy. NIWRC offers resources, technical assistance and training, and policy development to strengthen tribal sovereignty. Through their work, NIWRC advocates nationwide to show that offenders can and will be held accountable and that Native women and their children are entitled to safety from violence within their homes and in their community; justice both on and off tribal lands; and access to culturally grounded services designed by and for Native women.

### **National Runaway Safeline (NRS) | [1800RUNAWAY.org](https://1800RUNAWAY.org) | 1-800-RUNAWAY**

Through its 24/7 crisis services, an extensive database of over 6,500 local resources across the country, and valuable prevention and education tools, the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) works to keep America's youth safe and off the streets. Serving as the national crisis and communication system for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth, NRS responds to youth and families in crisis through its hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY) and online services ([1800RUNAWAY.org](https://1800RUNAWAY.org)), including chat, email and forum services. Each year, NRS connects over 100,000 people to help and hope through its free, confidential services.

### **National Safe Place | [nationalsafeplace.org](https://nationalsafeplace.org)**

Our nation's young people deserve safety and shelter, and many youth feel they don't have either. National Safe Place provides access to immediate help and supportive resources for youth in need. As a community initiative, the program designates schools, fire stations, libraries and other youth-friendly organizations as Safe Place locations, which display the yellow and black sign. Safe Place locations extend the doors of the local youth service agency or shelter to support teens in crisis situations, creating a safety net for youth.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org) | 800-273-8255**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support and crisis counseling to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 170 local crisis centers, uniting local resources with national standards and best practices. In addition to telephone based services, the Lifeline's Crisis Chat service routes chat visitors to a subnetwork of crisis centers accredited in providing online emotional support. Funded by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a leader in suicide prevention and mental health crisis care.

**Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) | [rainn.org](https://rainn.org) | 800-656-HOPE**

RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, operating the National Sexual Assault Hotline in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and the Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

**StandUp for Kids | [standupforkids.org](https://standupforkids.org)**

StandUp for Kids is a national non-profit organization dedicated to ending the cycle of youth homelessness in local communities. Since 1990, they have cared for homeless and at-risk youth (through age 25) by transitioning them from crisis to connection, offering youth a sense of safety, hope, and belonging through housing support, mentoring, drop-in centers, and street outreach.

**StrongHearts Native Helpline | [strongheartshelpline.org](https://strongheartshelpline.org) | 844-7NATIVE**

StrongHearts Native Helpline is a free, confidential, and anonymous culturally specific helpline for Native Americans impacted by domestic and dating violence. Operated Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. CST, callers can connect one-on-one with knowledgeable StrongHearts advocates who can provide peer support, lifesaving tools, and connection with direct service providers to enable survivors to find safety and healing. StrongHearts is a collaborative project of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and the National Domestic Violence Hotline, existing to restore power to Native Americans impacted by domestic violence and dating violence by weaving together a braid of safety, sovereignty and support.

**Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Admin. (SAMHSA) | [samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov) | 800-487-4889**

A branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA aims to improve the quality and availability of treatment and rehabilitative services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and the cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses. Their website offers resources to treatment locations, along with a helpline that provides 24-hour free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English and Spanish.

**The Trevor Project | [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org) | 866-488-7386**

Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film TREVOR, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) young people under age 25.

## VII. RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago | [chapinhall.org](http://chapinhall.org)**

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is an independent, non-partisan research center that engages in direct, purposeful collaboration with all levels of government, non-profit organizations, philanthropists, fellow researchers, and others who work tirelessly to address challenges facing children, youth, and families in the United States and beyond. The organization's [\*Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America\*](#) offers briefs to better understand and address youth homeless in the U.S.

**National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth & Families (NCHYF) | [rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov](http://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov)**

The National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families (NCHYF) is a national resource for organizations that support runaway and homeless youth and their families with programs and services. NCHYF provides information and resources to runaway and homeless youth-serving organizations that are developing and implementing prevention and intervention services for runaway and homeless youth and their families. NCHYF also serves the general public interested in learning about the issues facing runaway and homeless youth and the circumstances that contribute to their running away or becoming homeless.

**National Network for Youth (NN4Y) | [nn4youth.org](http://nn4youth.org)**

The National Network for Youth is the nation's leading network of youth, advocates, and community-based service providers dedicated to preventing and ending youth and young adult homelessness. NN4Y is a national membership organization of more than 100 community-based youth service providers, local education agencies, state agencies, coalitions, and advocates. Collaboratively, these providers work with members and young leaders who have experienced homelessness to identify and change policies to prevent youth and young adult homelessness and ensure youth in crisis can access what they need to survive, stabilize, and thrive. Through members, young leaders, and their networks, NN4Y promotes programs and policies that provide young people with multiple opportunities to become successful adults, no matter their previous life experiences.

**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) | [ojjdp.ojp.gov](http://ojjdp.ojp.gov)**

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) offers its [\*National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children \(NISMAART\)\*](#) bulletins, consisting of several studies aimed at estimating the size and nature of the U.S. missing children problem.



The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) is a national non-profit organization committed to ensuring that runaway, homeless and at-risk youth are safe and off the streets.

Founded in 1971, NRS serves as the national communication system line for youth and families, providing critical crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Each year, NRS makes over 100,000 connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online (1800RUNAWAY.org) and prevention services.

For additional information, visit [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org) or follow us @1800RUNAWAY on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition consists of a multitude of community partners across the entire 15 counties in South Dakota, working together for the benefit of serving people in the Black Hills area experiencing homelessness and poverty. While families and individuals experiencing homelessness often feel invisible, the coalition works to raise awareness about the impact of homelessness in the region, address needs, and advocate for policy changes to support those who are homeless in the community.