

LOST IN AMERICA

A NIGHT TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT

www.anightforyouth.org

Toolkit provided by:



www.nspnetwork.org
www.nationalsafeplace.org



INTRODUCTION

Lost in America, a documentary film directed by Rotimi Rainwater, explores the issue of youth homelessness. Rainwater, a former homeless youth himself, interviews youth who are currently living or have previously lived on the street about the circumstances that led them there. There are also interviews with politicians, public figures, and youth service agencies who are all either striving to help these youth or directly influential to their situation.



In an effort to raise awareness about the issue of youth homelessness, *Lost in America* producers and partners are hosting "A Night To End Youth Homelessness". Youth service providers and community members are encouraged to hold a sleep-out or group gathering on the night of November 16, 2019. Participants are asked to register their group so an accurate count of participating entities may be collected. After registering your sleep-out or group gathering, you will receive a link to screen *Lost in America* at your event. Register today at www.anightforyouth.org/subscribe.



To help support this initiative and your organization's commitment to help end youth homelessness, National Safe Place Network (NSPN) has provided tips on how to hold a sleep-out, fundraising opportunities, and raising awareness. As a proud partner of *Lost in America*, NSPN is dedicated to raising awareness and taking action to end youth homelessness by working with influencers across the nation to achieve the vision of a world where all youth are safe.

This toolkit is provided courtesy of National Safe Place Network (NSPN), a partner in Lost in America. National Safe Place Network (NSPN) provides quality training and technical support for youth and family service organizations across the country. In addition to being a leading membership organization offering tailored organizational development, training, and professional development packages, NSPN operates the nationally recognized programs Safe Place, HTR3, and the Family and Youth Services Bureau's Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center (RHYTTAC). To learn more, please visit www.nspnetwork.org.

HOSTING A SLEEP-OUT OR GATHERING

A sleep-out is intended to raise awareness of youth homelessness by encouraging participants to give up the comforts they are used to and experience what it is like to sleep in the elements. Holding a sleep-out in conjunction with the release of *Lost in America* will help raise awareness of youth homelessness, your organization, and the documentary. It also provides the opportunity to incorporate fundraising into your event. Below are some tips on how to host a sleep-out.

- **Fundraise during this event.** Consider a registration fee that is non-refundable. This will help get an accurate count of the amount of supplies needed to make your sleep-out successful. Pledge campaigns can also be a fun way to raise money and increase community awareness and engagement. [Here are some helpful pledge campaign tips.](#)
- **Gather volunteers.** Designate volunteers to be available to assist attendees in setting up tents, sleeping bags, etc. as needed during the event. Volunteers may also be utilized for on-site registrations, payments, etc. Consider partnering with a fraternity, sorority, or any fraternal public service organization such as Kiwanis or Rotary International.
- **Think about security.** Whether the event is held inside or out, it's important to have a security presence. Consider your options. You may want to train volunteers to work shifts and act as security for the night, hire a security company for the event, or see if someone from the police department is willing to work the event.
- **Contact the media.** Begin sending out flyers and press releases to local media outlets to help spread the word about your sleep-out and *Lost in America* film screening. (A sample press release is provided in this toolkit.)
- **Have a back-up plan.** While this sleep-out is intended to allow participants to experience what homeless youth encounter, the safety of your attendees should be your number one priority. This event is set to take place on November 16th. Depending on what part of the United States you live in, it can be cold and snowy in November. Scout out a school gymnasium or church basement as an alternative for inclement weather.
- **Be prepared.** If you are inclined to hold your sleep-out outside no matter the elements, there are important tent setup and dressing tips that can be found in [this document](#) provided by Westside Communities in Action. You may also want to consider having attendees fill out emergency contact cards in case of medical issues that may arise during the event. Some attendees may also have trauma surrounding sleep-outs. Be mindful and considerate of this possibility before and during your sleep-out.

Don't forget to register your group, organization, or agency on the [A Night for Youth website](#) to receive your copy of *Lost in America*, as well as updates about the 2019 Night to End Youth Homelessness. [The registration page may be accessed here.](#)

REGISTER NOW TO JOIN THE MOVEMENT

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Social media is a great tool for raising awareness. In order to promote your sleep-out and connect with other organizations participating in the November 16th event, you are encouraged to use the hashtag #ANightforYouth. NSPN has provided some sample social media posts for Facebook and Twitter that you may want to personalize and use during, and up to, your sleep-out event.

To maximize engagement, review analytics on your organization's social media accounts for the best time to publish content. Look for the days of the week and times your audience is most actively engaged with your page(s). If this information is not available, Sprout Social has published [this article](#) which goes in depth on each social media network and the best and worst times when it comes to publishing. When thinking about posting on social media as a way to raise awareness and publicity, it is important to take engagement and analytics into consideration as you develop a social media plan.

Facebook and Twitter:

An estimated 4.2 million youth experience homelessness annually. Join [\[insert organization name here\]](#) on 11/16 for #ANightforYouth. We will be hosting a sleep-out and screening the documentary @LostNAmericaDoc. Learn more at: [\[insert website link here\]](#).

[\[Insert organization name here\]](#) is taking part in #ANightforYouth on 11/16 to raise awareness about youth homelessness. You're invited to participate in this nationally recognized event where you'll experience a sleep-out and screening of @LostNAmericaDoc.

We are grateful to partner with [\[insert community partner here\]](#) for #ANightforYouth! Sleep-outs across the nation are planned on 11/16 to raise awareness about youth homelessness. Learn more or join our community's event at: [\[insert website link here\]](#).

Youth who do not have stable housing can sometimes be forced to sleep on the streets. Join us on 11/16 for #ANightforYouth, a national sleep-out and @LostNAmericaDoc screening event hosted to raise awareness of youth homelessness. Learn more and sign up at: [\[insert website link here\]](#).

On 11/16 [\[Insert organization name here\]](#) will be taking part in #ANightforYouth. This national sleep-out and @LostNAmericaDoc screening event will help raise awareness about youth homelessness. For more information on participating, please visit [\[insert website link here\]](#).

On 11/16 [\[Insert organization name here\]](#) will be taking part in #ANightforYouth. This national sleep-out and @LostNAmericaDoc screening event will help raise awareness about youth homelessness. For more information on participating, please visit [\[insert website link here\]](#).

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES



Social Media Post Image I



Social Media Post Image II



Social Media Post Image III



Social Media Post Image IV



Facebook Cover Photo

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Insert Media Contact Information Here]

[Organization] Holds a Night for Youth to Raise Awareness of Youth Homelessness

(City, State) Date – [Organization name] is participating in A Night To End Youth Homelessness, a national event focused on raising awareness of youth homelessness, on November 16, 2019. This event coincides with the release of *Lost in America*, a documentary film about homeless youth.

For their part, [Organization name] will hold a sleep-out and screening of the *Lost in America* documentary. *Lost in America* follows director Rotimi Rainwater over a six year journey around the United States. The documentary includes interviews with homeless youth, youth service agencies, celebrities, and politicians and seeks to explore what is (and isn't) being done to serve homeless youth in the United States.

[Quote from organization representative about *Lost in America* and youth homelessness]

[Organization name] will be holding a sleep-out during A Night To End Youth Homelessness. Sleep-outs seek to explore what it is like for homeless individuals who have to sleep in the elements every night. The event starts at [insert starting time] and will end at [insert ending time here]. The sleep-out will take place at [insert location here]. There is a registration fee of [insert fee here] per individual in order to help fund the event.

Donations are being sought for the sleep-out as well. [Organization name] is looking for: tents, lanterns, sleeping bags, etc. Any material that can be reused after the event will be given to those in need within the community. Monetary donations are always accepted. If you are interested in volunteering during the event, please contact [insert contact name here] at [insert email address or phone number] for more information.

About [Organization name]

[Insert organization boilerplate]

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ADVOCACY RESOURCES

After viewing *Lost in America* and participating in the sleep-out, attendees and volunteers may be energized and ready to help make change. If you are a youth service organization, this is an excellent time to stay connected with these people. They can become future donors, volunteers, and/or staff members. This is also an opportunity to make connections that last and give people the tools to continue supporting young people in your community and across the nation. Below are a list of resources that can help jump start advocacy and add new voices to the fight against youth homelessness.

Advocacy organizations for homeless youth:

<https://www.nspnetwork.org/position-statements>

<https://www.nspnetwork.org/subscribe>

<https://www.nationalsafeplace.org/find-a-safe-place>

<https://www.nationalsafeplace.org/txt-4-help>

<https://www.nn4youth.org/policy-advocacy/be-an-effective-youth-advocate/>

<https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/policy-advocacy/policy-updates/>

<https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/policy-advocacy/state-policy/>

Legislation and appropriations directly affecting programs and services for homeless youth:

McKinney Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program

Department of Education (ED)

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html>

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) | Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/runaway-homeless-youth>

Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA)

<https://www.nn4youth.org/policy-advocacy/hcya/>

Research and data:

<https://voicesofyouthcount.org/>

<https://www.nn4youth.org/policy-advocacy/fact-sheets-and-issue-briefs/>

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>

<https://www.1800runaway.org/runaway-statistics/crisis-hotline-online-services-statistics/>

<https://www.childtrends.org/>

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

Find and contact your local, state and federal elected officials:

<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>

Monitor legislation for issues affecting homeless youth:

<https://www.countable.us/issues/human-trafficking>

<https://www.countable.us/issues/homelessness>

<https://www.countable.us/issues/youth>

Citizen Resource Center:

<http://congressfoundation.org/citizen-engagement>



Connect with NSPN

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(e) info@nspnetwork.org
(p) 502.635.3660
(fb) /nspnetwork
(tw) /nspntweets
