



Bedless Night – the indoor Sleep Out tradition!

The Sleep Out is our community’s warm-hearted cold weather tradition – it’s our way to address poverty and work toward our vision of a community where everyone thrives.

For the past 23 years, thousands of caring kids and community members have joined this movement to sleep outside in boxes, tents and cars to raise awareness and funds to support struggling local families. The Bedless Night is an indoor alternative to sleeping out.

The funds we raise through the Sleep Out campaign help us prevent homelessness, address our neighbors’ immediate crises and deliver individualized services in the areas of family support, food, housing and neighborhoods, education and youth, employment, and transportation. Together, this community helps nearly 2,000 local families each year stabilize, strengthen and thrive. Through its history, the Sleep Out has helped prevent homelessness 33,272 times.

Why

- Of the 1,943 families Interfaith Outreach worked with last year, 1 in 5 were experiencing homelessness.
- Many of the people experiencing homelessness in the west metro are doubling up with friends or family members or sleeping in their cars. A Bedless Night is a way to create awareness of the ways our neighbors experience homelessness and the daily choices they are forced to make.
- This is a great way to push the “pause” button on the holiday frenzy, experience a deep sense of gratitude and empathy, and reflect on how we can share our abundance with our neighbors.

Who

- This activity is perfect for families, friends and neighbors.
- Think of who you might turn to if you were experiencing homelessness and needed to double up – invite them to join you.

When and How

- Choose one night that works for your family between Nov. 1-Dec. 31.
- Share your intention to raise funds and awareness on social media, and inspire others to do the same! One easy way is to create a Facebook fundraiser. [Learn how.](#)
- Use this guide to create your Bedless Night experience.

On your Bedless Night

Choose one or more of the following, or create your own:

- Turn the heat down to 58 degrees and use flashlights instead of lights during Bedless Night to help you not take your heat or lighting for granted. Reducing heat and electricity is one way people experiencing poverty try to lower their utility bills during the cold Minnesota winters. *Raise or donate **\$259** for the Sleep Out so we can offer a utility payment assist that keeps the lights on for a local family.*
- Sleep on a hard floor, a carpet or couch during Bedless Night to learn what it feels like to sleep without a bed. Families can become homeless when they cannot pay their rent – they often temporarily move in with friends or family or have to go to overcrowded shelters. *Raise or donate **\$899** for the Sleep Out, which will keep a family of four in their housing for one month – so much less expensive and traumatic than a shelter stay.*
- Ask each person to write down five things that they would take with them if they needed to leave home. Then have the person to their right cross off two of them. Imagine that the remaining list is what you are able to take with you if you lost your home. *Pick one item on the list and consider donating its value to the Sleep Out. A contribution of **any amount** will make a difference for a struggling family.*

Make the most of your Bedless Night

- Determine sleeping arrangements: Who will sleep on the floor? On the couch? Is there room for everybody, or does someone need to sleep in their car for the night, or pitch a tent in the garage?
- Read and discuss the following three stories and conversation prompts with your family and friends.
- Make the most of the time together to connect and reflect! Consider playing a game, reading a book or telling stories. Sharing relatable personal stories might be especially meaningful.
- The following morning, reflect on your Bedless Night experience and how it may have differed from your typical routine. Go online together (iocp.org/sleepout) to make a one-time gift to the Sleep Out or a monthly/recurring gift to support struggling local families.
- Share your experience on Facebook, and tag [Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners](#).

Opening conversation starters

The stories you are about to read are real. Families who experience homelessness in our community sleep in their cars, double up with other families, move into hotels or camp out when they lack other options. They demonstrate creativity, resourcefulness and courage to get through each day. We have tried to honor their stories and tell them in a way that kids can understand.

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? Perhaps family logistics or social gatherings? Meal plans or grocery shopping lists? Concerns about your children? Health issues?
- 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 at 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.

Molly and Emma

Molly, 22, recently finished school and landed an internship. She's pursuing a career as a dental assistant.

Ever since she found the courage to leave her partner who was unkind to her, Molly and her 4-year-old daughter Emma had been couch hopping while Molly worked odd jobs. But after a while, each friend asked her to move out. Her friends wanted to help, but they could not keep risking their own housing and family lives to help Molly and Emma.

Molly got an internship that would help her reach her career goal, but it was unpaid. She knew it was her best hope for a decent wage down the road, but accepting the internship meant she needed care for Emma.

Because of an argument they had, Molly had not talked to her mother in years. But in desperate need of help, Molly asked her mom if Emma could live with her while she pursued her internship. Her mom, who lives two hours away, agreed to help until her internship was over.

For the first few weeks, Molly drove two hours after work to see her daughter before bedtime. Then she would drive two hours back to town, park her car in a remote corner of a parking lot, lock her car doors and try to sleep. However, she could no longer afford the gas to visit her daughter during the week.

Though Emma was potty trained, she had been wetting the bed every night since moving in with her grandmother. As she adjusted to new rules in a strange home, Emma acted out, which created more tension between Molly and her mother.

With a few weeks left of her internship and no income, Molly was down to her last \$400. Molly knew she needed to pay her cell phone bill – it was the only connection she had to her daughter, her mother, her supervisor and her job search. It was also her alarm clock, and she knew she had to get to her internship on time. Her cell phone took priority over food. Her car, besides being her transportation to her internship, became her apartment.

Every morning, Molly went to McDonald's for a hot breakfast sandwich and waited until the restroom was empty to quickly brush her teeth and wash her face. She changed clothes in her car and then drove to her internship. After a cold and fitful night in her car, she was grateful the breakroom at her internship had free coffee. The caffeine woke her up, but made her feel nervous all the time. She was too afraid and ashamed to tell her supervisor she was living in her car. Molly really needed them to like her so they could help her get a paid job soon.

One December morning, a week before the end of her internship, Molly woke up to discover her car wouldn't start and her phone battery had died in the cold.

Questions for adults:

If you were Molly, what might you be thinking about throughout the day? How do those things compare to the list you wrote down earlier?

What positive attributes does Molly have? How does being courageous make a difference for Molly?

What would your reaction be if you were her internship coordinator and she told you her situation?

If you were Molly, how would you explain to Emma what was happening?

Questions for kids:

How do you feel when you stay away from home without your parents, like at a friend's sleepover or at grandma's house? Are you excited? Maybe a little nervous? Do you miss your parents? How do you feel when you get to go home?

What are some of the rules you have in your own home/from your parents? What are some rules your grandparents have? Are the rules the same, or different?

What happens in your family when your mom or dad comes home from work? How about at bedtime?

What would it be like if you didn't get to see your mom or dad during the week?

What do you think Emma felt in this situation?

The Jones Family

It wasn't until they moved into a homeless shelter that the Jones kids realized they were homeless. Jeff (8) and Jamie (6) had enjoyed their summer vacation. Their parents, Sarah and John, took them on a two-month "camping trip" in a state park. They fished for their dinner, cooked over the campfire and played in the woods.

When it was almost time for school to start, Jeff and Jamie were ready to go home to their own beds and normal routines. Their parents had to tell them the whole story – their family had been evicted from their two-bedroom apartment because they could not afford the rent. They had moved their beds, couch, clothes, photo albums and important things to a storage locker. They had taken the kids camping for the summer because they had nowhere else to go.

John had lost his job two years ago and his mental health issues were getting worse, making it hard to find another job. While Jeff and Jamie were in school, Sarah worked part time as a housekeeper in a motel. Her income was barely enough to buy groceries, she didn't earn medical benefits, and they had fallen behind on rent and utilities.

Sarah told the kids that the family would be moving into a shelter, and that they needed to pack a few days' worth of clothes in their backpacks. The rest of the belongings they had taken camping would have to go into the storage locker until they could figure out what to do next.

School was starting in a week. Mom needed to find work. Dad was now sad all the time and felt embarrassed that he could not work to support his family. He needed professional help, which they could not afford.

Questions for adults:

If you were facing eviction, how would you explain that to your kids?

If you opted to camp or stay in a hotel while you regrouped – as many do – when, where and how would you discuss next steps with your partner?

If you could afford a storage locker, what would you store? What would you get rid of, and how?

Questions for kids:

What did you do to get ready for school this year? What were you thinking about?

What are Jeff and Jamie doing to get ready for school? What do you think they are thinking about?

Would you want your friends at school to know you were homeless?

The D'Agostino Family

Maria, Peter and their three kids (Alex, 16, Isabel, 14, and Rosa, 8) lived in one apartment with Maria's father (Grandpa Max). Everyone helped out, but Maria and Peter worked a variety of part-time jobs to make ends meet.

When Grandpa's diabetes took a turn for the worse, he wasn't able to help take care of the kids after school. Maria stopped working to take care of both the kids and Grandpa, but his medical bills grew to the point that they had to choose between paying for Grandpa Max's care or paying rent.

They gave up their apartment and they all moved in with Maria's sister, Margaret, in her family's two-bedroom, one-bath townhome. Aunt Margaret and Uncle Jake have 3-year-old twins and a newborn who share one bedroom, while they share the other. Grandpa sleeps on the couch, while Maria and the kids sleep on the living room floor. Peter (dad) sleeps on a camp cot in the garage.

The baby doesn't sleep well, and Aunt Margaret is up with him several times during the night. Uncle Jake gets up very early for work.

Questions for adults:

Are you in the "sandwich generation" that is taking care of both children and parents? If so, what resources do your parents have, and what do you supply?

If something changed in your parents' situation or yours, how would that impact your reality?

Questions for kids:

Where do you sleep in your home? Do you share a room? Do you sleep in your own room?

How do you think it would feel to sleep on the floor of a relative's house? Would it feel different if you didn't know you were going back to your own home?

Do you get along with your siblings and cousins? All the time?

What is your bedtime routine? How would it be different if you were Alex, Isabel or Rosa?

How do these stories end?

Interfaith Outreach ignites the power of community to address the emergency and long-term needs of nearly 2,000 struggling local families like the ones you just read about each year.

We currently help 90 families each month avoid homelessness through rent assistance. Most of these families need our help one or two times to get over a rough time and back to stable footing. Those needing additional assistance work with a case manager to address more systemic issues and develop longer-term plans.

With your contributions to the Sleep Out, this is how stories like these can end:

Molly and Emma

An Interfaith Outreach case manager worked with Molly to identify solutions for food, housing, child care and connections to other resources in the community. She also provided a safe sounding board and helped Molly develop coping skills and a plan to get through just one day, then a week, then a month while she made progress toward longer-term goals. The food shelf provided some budget relief while Molly worked with Employment Services to update her resume and land a dental assistant job. While Molly worked, Emma received a scholarship to attend a quality early childhood care center. One year later, Molly was thriving in her career and proud to be able to support herself and her daughter on her income, and Emma was ready for kindergarten.

The Jones Family

Sarah got connected to Interfaith Outreach, where she found solutions for housing and links to mental health providers in the community for John. Working with her case manager, Sarah developed coping skills and a plan to pursue an education that would lead to a better paying job that could support her family. The family moved into a supportive housing neighborhood where Jeff and Jamie can ride the bus to and from school and caring volunteer mentors help them with their homework. One year later, John is receiving medical care for his depression and found a support network through a faith community affiliated with Interfaith Outreach.

The D'Agostino Family

Maria and Peter first came to Interfaith Outreach for food shelf support, which relieved some of the strain of being doubled up with family. They connected Grandpa Max with a medical advocate, and a year later, his diabetes was under control. With continued support from the food shelf, he could meet his own needs on his fixed income. Maria and Peter worked with Employment Services to improve their job skills with training, and both landed better paying jobs that allowed them to move into an apartment within the kids' school district.

Challenge: Ignite your power to make a difference!

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners is our community's safety net for families like Molly and Emma, the Joneses and the D'Agostinos. \$2,908 per year would help stabilize a family, connect them to the resources that strengthen them, and provide them support to create a brighter future.

Critical Uses of Sleep Out funds

- \$1,964 provides employment services for a parent to land a "career job"
- \$1,530 allows one child one month of quality early childhood care
- \$899 keeps a family in their housing for a month
- \$400 puts tires on a car so a family can get to work and school
- \$259 offers a utility assist payment that keeps the lights on
- A gift of any amount will create hope for a struggling family

**Please consider making a one-time or recurring donation
to help families with one or more of these needs.**

iocp.org/sleepout

A **recurring monthly donation** is an ongoing way
to remember and support our struggling neighbors.

Remember to ask your employer if they will **match your gift**.