



## The Homestretch Discussion Guide

Directors: Anne de Mare, Kirsten Kelly  
 Year: 2014  
 Time: 90 min

**You might know these directors from:**  
 Asparagus! Stalking the American Life (2008)

### FILM SUMMARY

Homelessness is rampant in the U.S.A., and the sight of overstuffed shopping carts and cardboard sleeping mats is a common sight in contemporary U.S. cities. But what about the orphans and the outcast youth calling the open streets home? What becomes of them in those formative of years?

THE HOMESTRETCH gives these children an unobstructed identity, turning the anonymous into human beings, not just nameless statistics. These are not drug-addled rebels with no perspective on themselves or the possibility of what life could otherwise offer. Through the stories of Roque, Kasey, and Anthony, three Chicago-area youth who arrived on the streets by different avenues, the film reveals the struggle to topple the overwhelming odds against them and gain an education, a job, and establish a stable future for themselves.

“I’ve been trying really hard for a long time to eradicate youth homelessness. It’s not working,” states Jake Bradley of The Crib, which offers accommodation to homeless LGBT youth. Over the course of four years, co-directors De Mare and Kelly interviewed Bradley and others offering shelter to the most vulnerable, the teachers and school officials who look deeper and notice the tell-tale signs of homelessness, and the youth themselves as they bounce between shelters, revealing an alarming situation for the children of the streets.

By presenting the real picture of youth homelessness and letting those living it speak their truth, THE HOMESTRETCH demands that contemporary America defend the system that allows its youth to be left bare and unprotected. With the evidence offered and the progress these three achieve through their own strength and determination, Kelly and De Mare switch on a light by illuminating the hope and network of love in place, the community that provides where the system fails.

## FILM THEMES

Homeless youth are brought out of the shadows and given space to tell their truth, revealing a world of children wise beyond their years and a system breaking at the seams where official solutions are few and far between.

### THE TRUE FACE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The stereotypical notion of drug-addicted, rebellious youth haunting city streets is overturned in *THE HOMESTRETCH*. Roque, Anthony, and Kasey present a picture of the situation on the streets of America, children pushed away from their dreams. They are not troubled kids out to create havoc but instead are fighting tooth and nail to have what others their age take for granted: an education, a bed to sleep in, and the security of a family to fall back on. Wise beyond their years, the youth often branded as troublemakers and do-no-gooders are in actuality those who have been beaten, abused, and left to fend for themselves, rejected by their families and society alike.

### ADULT PROBLEMS, CHILD LIVES

"I have a ceiling to stare at that's mine. Yeah!" announces Kasey, as she acquaints herself to a room that's been granted to her by the state. Like her homeless peers, Kasey was instructed on the ins and outs of the real world long before her body and brain had caught up. Thrown out onto the harsh, cold streets in their tender, formative years, the children calling nowhere home have no choice but to put on adult faces from an early age. They are forced to grow up coarsened by the fact that their lives are lived in the apathetic outdoors, doing their best to be the big people the world has forced them to be. The truth is, inside every homeless youth cries a child aching to be heard.

### OUTCAST BENEATH THE INVISIBLE LINE

An undocumented immigrant. An orphan abused in the home of foster parents. A lesbian rejected by her family. Many of the kids inhabiting the streets are outcasts in some capacity, and rather than being embraced and protected by the adults around them, they are cast aside. And what has the world taught them of survival? Invisibility is key. Do not get noticed because you risk being beaten, finding yourself in jail, or enduring a barrage of insults or even a sexual attack. These children become exiles, left questioning what home is if not an elusive carrot dangled out of reach.

### THE REAL HELP AT HAND

The system to support homeless youth appears to be broken. Little funding is available, the government appears apathetic at best, and the only real help is happening on a grass-roots level: the teacher who was once homeless offers a room to her student; the school official notices the kid in the same clothes day after day and reaches out with bus tickets and school supplies, the volunteers set up make-shift shelters and provide a light in the darkness. Community offers real solutions, and individuals learn through the grace of others that by empowering themselves the future is all theirs.

**"It's not fair to just let somebody wither."**

Maria Rivera

**"I would rather sleep outside than stay with my family because they break me down so bad."**

Angeline "Kasey" White

**"I have to be my own parent. I don't need anybody to tell me to take things seriously."**

Roque Sanchez

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Before watching THE HOMESTRETCH, how would you describe your preconception of a homeless youth? Having seen the film, in which ways (if any) have your views on homelessness been altered?
2. Is homelessness prevalent in your community? Are you aware of how your community tackles homelessness?
3. Have you ever felt threatened with homelessness, or been close to anyone who has had to live on the street?
4. Is it the responsibility of the federal government to take care of the homeless, or do you feel it is the responsibility of the individual to fend for him/herself?
5. What are your thoughts on your country's immigration policy? Should undocumented immigrants and their offspring be granted citizenship?
6. Is the LGBT community treated fairly in your community? Do you feel gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are granted equal rights in society?
7. Have you given to the homeless in any capacity? Do you believe it makes a positive impact to give a homeless person loose change? Can an individual make a lasting positive impact on a homeless individual's life?
8. Did you ever run away from home in your youth? Was there much youth homelessness amongst your peers when you were in high school?
9. How long do you feel you would survive on the streets if you became homeless?
10. Is there a key to ending youth homelessness? What role does education play in ending homelessness?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- With a shared interest in the transformative powers of the human spirit and practical backgrounds in theater, Directors Kirsten Kelly and Anne de Mare founded Spargel Productions in 2002, a New York City-based film and documentary production company. Their first co-production - the award-winning "Asparagus! Stalking the American Life" - takes a look at life in Kelly's Michigan hometown.
- Director Kelly was involved in a theater project in 2009, when one of the youth working with her revealed that he was homeless. Shocked by the revelation that a normal, bright, talented, and funny kid had no idea where he was sleeping from night to night, she began researching homeless youth in the Chicago area along with De Mare. The two met with teachers, uncovered countless statistics on youth homelessness, and met with numerous kids living on the streets. That youth Kelly met in theater rehearsals was to be the inspiration behind THE HOMESTRETCH.
- One in every 30 children in the United States - equivalent to 2.5 million youngsters - experienced homelessness in 2013. Over one million of those were enrolled in public schools.
- The National Center on Family Homelessness cites the high poverty rate, a lack of affordable housing, racial disparities, and single parenting as reasons for child homelessness.
- 40% of U.S. homeless youth identify as LGBT.
- 58% of the illegal immigration population in the U.S. is from Mexico. Roque Sanchez, one of the three youth featured in THE HOMESTRETCH, came to the U.S. from Mexico at the age of 5 with his family. Until Maria Rivera encouraged him to obtain documentation at the age of 18, Roque was living in the U.S. as an undocumented youth.
- The U.S. 2012 federal homeless budget was \$4.4 billion, to be spread across all U.S. states and to aid all homeless - from veterans to children. As a frame of reference, the 2012 military budget was \$682 billion.
- The 2010 U.S. population was 309 million. That same year, 2.5 million Americans were homeless. The 2010 population of the entire European continent was 711 million, when an estimated 3 million Europeans were reported homeless.
- On any given night in the U.S., around 640,000 people are without shelter. California has the highest rate of homelessness in the nation, with over 136,000 in 2014. New York, Florida, and Massachusetts came in second, third, and fourth.
- Around half of the homeless youth in the U.S. are kicked out of the house by a legal guardian, and around 60% have been sexually or physically abused. 25% of the 30,000 youths who age out of the foster care system annually become homeless within two years. Overall youth homelessness is on the rise, up 8% in 2013.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to learn from its story.
2. **Find** out if there is a community network for homeless youth in the area where you live and find out how you can best offer your support.
3. **Consider** giving to the cause of [the National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) is a leading voice on federal homelessness policy and educates opinion leaders on the real facts affecting the homeless.
4. **Donate** directly to the future of Roque, Kasey, and Anthony, by going to [Rally](#) - All donations will go towards education and job training.
5. **Find** out more about [DePaul International](#) - a coalition of agencies around the world working to address the issues surrounding homelessness.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**