

# Downtown Eastside Simulation Game

## Introductions and Setup

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:** This activity is designed to give participants a simulated experience of life as hungry and homeless youths on the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. It is not an accurate recreation of what is an incredibly difficult lifestyle; but it will help to illuminate points and give students insight which will be valuable for exploring this topic.

**AGES AND PARTICIPANTS:** This simulation was written for 13-18 yr olds and designed for a group of 30 youth in mind; plus 7 older facilitators and 1 activity leader.

It could easily work with an older group and, with some increasing of materials, work with larger numbers. Youth could also take on the facilitator roles if necessary.

Although this simulation is designed with Vancouver in mind, it could (and should) be adapted for any city.

## EQUIPMENT NEEDED

### ROOM SETUP

See page 2 for a suggested table / chair setup. This can be adapted for the space; but it is suggested that a large as possible space be used (it can get quite frantic...) and as many chairs as participants are placed on 'The Streets'

Label each agency with the nameplates from pg. 12

### FOR EACH PARTICIPANT

- 1 X 'Hungry and Homeless' rolegcard
- 1 X Participant record sheet
- 1 X Pencil / Pen

### FOR AGENCIES

#### RECYCLING CENTER

- 1 X 'Recycling Center' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 1 X 'Bottle' template printed or stuck onto card
- 1 X 'Milk carton' template printed or stuck onto card
- 1 X Pen or Pencil

#### GROCERY STORE

- 1 X 'Grocery Store' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### WELFARE OFFICE

- 1 X 'Welfare Office' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 50 X 'Applications for Welfare Support'
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### HOUSING OFFICE

- 1 X 'Housing Office' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 12 X Employment references from Housing Office
- 1 X 'Housing Office: Months 3 and 4' rolegcard (*Note: I personally like to give this to the Housing Officer at the appropriate moment during the game*)
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

- 1 X 'Employment Office' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 2 X 'Job' templates printed or stuck onto card
- 1 X 'Work area' (this includes a stack of paper, 2 X job templates printed or stuck onto card and three pairs of scissors set out on a table close to the Employment Office)
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### COVENANT HOUSE

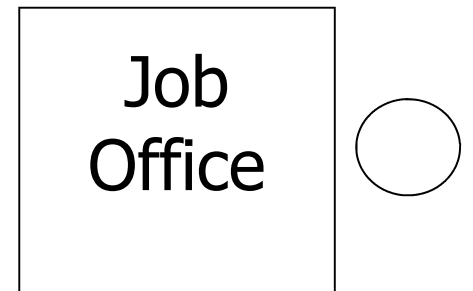
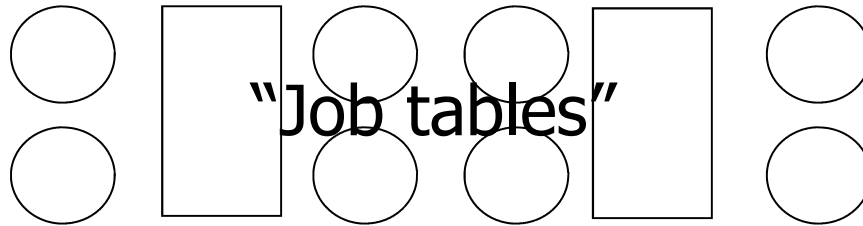
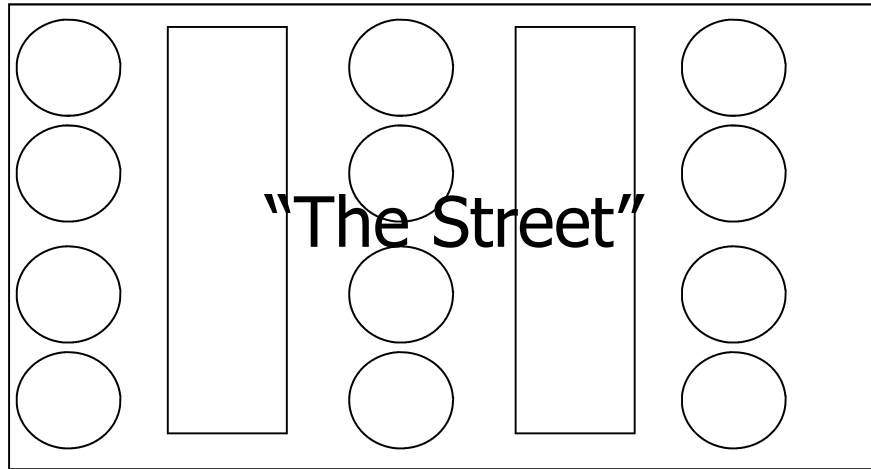
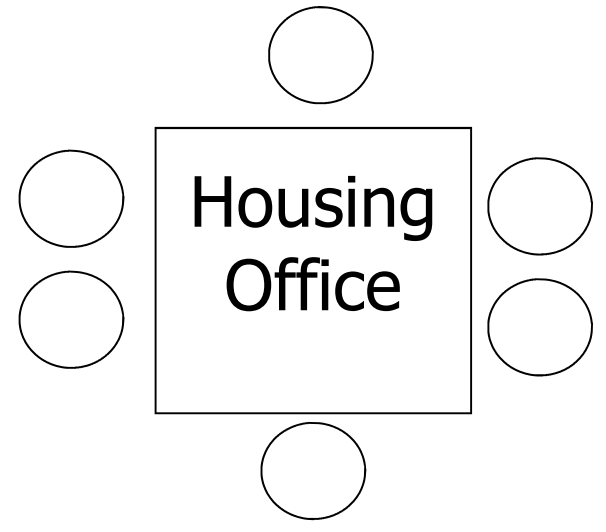
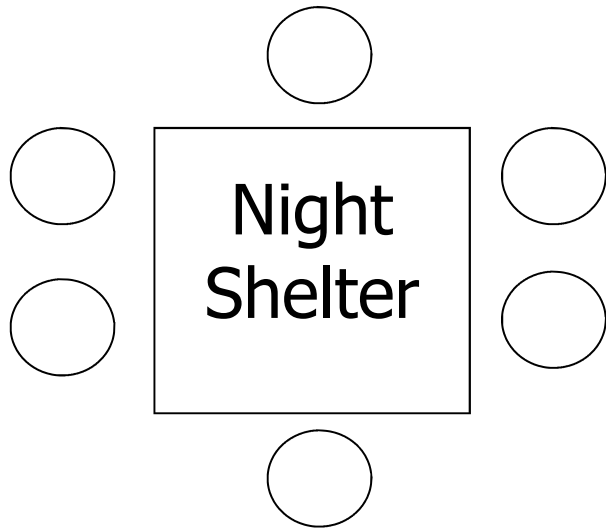
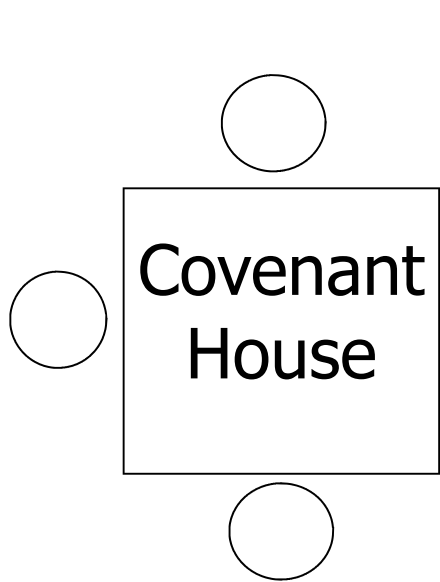
- 1 X 'Covenant House' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 4 X Employment references from Covenant House
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### HOMELESS SHELTER

- 1 X 'Homeless Shelter' rolegcard
- 1 X Roll of numbered tickets
- 1 X 'Homeless Shelter: Months 3 and 4' rolegcard (*Note: I personally like to give this to the Homeless Shelter at the appropriate moment during the game*)
- 1 X Pen or pencil

#### THE STREETS

- 1 X 'Street area' (this includes a stack of paper, 2 X Bottle template printed or stuck onto card, 2 X Milk carton template printed or stuck onto card and four pairs of scissors set out on a table in the center of the simulation space)



# Instructions and Gameplay

## Before the activity

You may want to have some sort of a 'primer' session first. Either a video, presentation or a discussion focused on students' feelings towards the homeless. Ask them some questions: *What do you feel when you see homeless people on the streets? Are there parts of town you don't feel safe walking alone in; and why? What do you think should be done to help homeless people in Vancouver / any other city?*

## Briefing - Facilitators

- The Leader should first brief the facilitators on their role. They are agencies on the Downtown Eastside who are there to serve those who visit them to the best of their abilities, as dictated by their role cards. (For example, at all times each agency can only serve one person and everyone else must be given a ticket and wait to be called)
- Remind all agencies that they need to write whenever money is given to or taken from a participant on their record sheet and sign it to complete the 'transaction.'
- Most of their roles are explained by the cards; encourage them to roleplay during their interactions with participants.
- If a participant is becoming uncooperative, advise facilitators that they can call the leader as 'the police' to come and eject a participant from their agency.
- Give each agency some time to review their role cards, then answer any questions and make sure everyone is happy with the requirements of their role!

## Briefing - Participants

- Gather the participants on 'The Street' and explain the situation to them. For example: *We're going to do an activity which will give you an idea of what life can be like living on the streets. For whatever reason, you all have suddenly landed on the streets of the Downtown Eastside. It is the middle of winter and you are cold, hungry and homeless; your first priorities are to find food and shelter. You will also want to try and find some way to get yourself off the streets by finding a job and some stable housing. But, remember, the more time you spend out*

*here, the harder will be...*

- Introduce the agencies but do NOT tell them what they are. Explain: *There are various different agencies on the Downtown Eastside that may be able to help you with your objectives. You'll have to visit them and make appointments to find out who does what and how they might be able to help you!*
- Give each student a 'Hungry and Homeless' rolecard, a record sheet and a pencil. Let them spend a few moments reviewing their roles and then ask them if they have any questions.
- Remind students that they can only use materials provided for them (although you can replenish materials if they run out; it's at your discretion when you do it!)
- Clarify how the timing of the simulation will work and that there will be four 'months.' Explain what signal will signify the end of a month (it may be helpful to have a whistle or buzzer for this) and that when the month is over; they will have to stop whatever they are doing and follow your instructions.
- When everybody is read– begin!

## Running the simulation

- Decide in advance how long you want the simulation to run. I would suggest 4 X 10 minute 'months' (which, with a five minute briefing and ten minute debriefing will allow the session to run in an hour. Although that doesn't include the setting up and clearing away time!)
- As the simulation is running, wander around and make yourself available to answer questions or replenish materials. Also check that things are running well; you can make adjustments if necessary (for example, it may be too difficult for anyone to complete the 'job' requirements each month resulting in everyone always being fired! You might want to make the task slightly easier if that's the case, asking for only seven or five completed templates.)

**Continued Overleaf**

- At the end of each 'month', make your signal and tell everyone to go to where-ever they'll be spending the night. (Either with an agency, next to the Housing Office or back on the streets) ask them to finish filling in that month's section on their record sheet.
- At the end of month 2, tell everyone that: *Things are changing on the Downtown Eastside. Winter is ending and Spring is here. That makes things warmer, but it also means things will have changed at the agencies...* Make sure the Housing Office and Homeless Shelter have their new role cards, then continue the simulation.
- At the end of the final month, once everyone's role cards are completed, gather everyone on 'the Street' for the debriefing.

### Debriefing

- In all simulation games, the debriefing is as important (if not more so) than the activity itself. It's the opportunity to make sure that the issues have been explored and the lessons of the task learned (or not!)
- Start by asking for a show of hands from those who ended the simulation off the streets (i.e. with a job and housing) then gauge who had one of those things, or held them for a short time. Finally ask for a show of hands for those who were still on the streets at the end of the game.
- Ask one of the participants who successfully found housing and employment for their story. What happened to them month by month? What do they feel was key to their success?
- Similarly, ask somebody still on the streets for their story. Why couldn't they get themselves into a better position? What was the hardest thing about the activity?
- From here you should be able to begin a discussion about aspects of the game. A few of the points which you'll hopefully cover should be:

*The cycle of homelessness:* Participants probably found that they went to the Employment Office looking for a job but were told they needed an address, then went to the Homeless Office for housing and were asked if they had a job to pay the rent! Point out that this is a common quandary for those on the streets and that often those who are actively seeking jobs and housing come up against this cycle.

*The lack of spaces in the shelters / Covenant House:* Many will have visited the shelter or Covenant House and been turned away. Explain that, on the Downtown Eastside, these same agencies exist but that the number of beds they can offer is tiny compared to the total number of people on the streets. Often there is a daily 'scramble' for beds when a shelter opens for the night. You might want to bring the facilitators into this discussion and ask them how they felt. *Was it frustrating wanting to help and not being able to?*

*The seasonal closing of the Homeless Shelter:* Explain that, although the Government does fund some shelters on the Downtown Eastside, they tend to be seasonal. So although they will provide assistance in the coldest months of Winter, most will be closed by the middle of February (which is still, actually, pretty cold!)

*Inability to obtain a job in later months because of not eating enough / sleeping well earlier:* You can, again, bring up the cycle of poverty and explain how it is that the longer somebody stays on the streets, the more difficult it is for them to stay healthy. You might also want to remind participants that this simulation doesn't account for the significant amounts of drugs, alcohol, violence and mental illness which all have an effect on the quality of life of those on the Downtown Eastside.

*The lack of affordable housing;* Explain that, despite being one of the poorest urban areas in Canada, the Downtown Eastside is also one of the most sought after for developers because it's relatively cheap to buy and redevelop luxury condos / stores there. Photos or videos might help to illustrate how crowds of homeless men and women now gather opposite luxury flats; and it is the low cost housing which is being removed to build them.

- Conclude the discussion by summarizing what's happened and asking participants what ideas they would have for helping to stop the 'cycle of poverty' If appropriate, introduce some of the agencies who are working on the Downtown Eastside and the ways in which participants might be able to support them.

### Feedback

If you use this simulation and have any feedback, I'd love to hear it! Please contact me, Phil Colvin, at philcolvin@hotmail.co.uk

# Hungry and homeless...

You are a young person who has found themselves on the streets of the Downtown Eastside. You need to be able to feed yourself and find a warm place to sleep. You'd also like to find a job to help get yourself off the streets.

**AIMS:** There are four months in the game; each lasting around ten minutes.

Each month you need to eat a certain amount and try to find a place to sleep off of the streets. If you don't then you may find that you get too sick to work!

1) There are lots of groups operating in the Downtown Eastside; visit them and see what they can do for you. Be patient, though, you might have to wait in line!

2) If you cannot find work from the employment office, it is possible to work on the street by 'collecting' bottles and cans, and taking them to the *Recycling Centre*.

To 'collect', find a card template on the street and use them to cut out bottles and cans from the paper provided.

You can only use materials from 'the streets' to do this.

3) You have a record sheet on which you will record the money you receive and what you spend, as well as how much food you have eaten and where you spent the night at the end of each month. Each time you receive or spend money from an agency, that agency must sign your form.

**Pay attention:** The game leader will warn you when each month is ending; at the end of the month you'll be told to sit where you will be spending the night each month (either on the streets or in accommodation if you've found it) The leader will then announce the start of the next month.

*Remember* things change in a city as the year goes on and what applies one month may not do for the next!

Keep the record sheet up to date as the agencies you visit will need to see it in order to help you!

## Recycling Center

You are a facility on the Downtown Eastside who recycles bottles and cans. You pay a small amount when collected bottles and cans are brought to you.

**AIMS:** To buy 'collected' bottles and cans from residents of the Downtown Eastside

1) You will buy bottles and cans collected from the Downtown Eastside, but only if they match exactly the templates you have been given. If they're in poor condition, you will refuse them!

2) You will pay \$50 for each group of five collectables brought to you. Your price is not negotiable and you will not buy collectables unless they are in groups of five!

3) When you buy bottles and cans, update the participant's record sheet to show you have 'paid' them. Don't forget to sign the payment!

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

## Grocery Store

You are a grocery store on the Downtown Eastside who sells a variety of necessities.

**AIMS:** To explain the costs of and to sell food and supplies to residents of the Downtown Eastside

1) You sell food and supplies. Food to feed one person for a month costs \$300; supplies (such as toiletries and medical needs) cost \$100 per month.

When you sell food and / or supplies, record the sale on that participant's sheet.

2) If someone does not have enough money for the full amounts; you can

sell a percentage of the necessary groceries and supplies. (So, for example, you can sell half the required food for \$150 etc.)

When you sell a percentage of food and supplies, record that percentage on the participant's sheet.

3) If someone cannot afford food or supplies, you can direct them to Covenant House or the Homeless Shelter.

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

# Welfare Office

You are the Welfare Office on the Downtown Eastside who distribute support cheques to those who are unemployed.

**AIMS:** To supply welfare cheques to residents of the Downtown Eastside

- 1) You distribute welfare to participants. When a participant asks you for welfare support, you give them a 'Welfare Support' form and ask them to go away and fill it in. When they return with a completed form (providing they are unemployed), you can give them welfare.
- 2) Welfare payments are \$600; you can explain to participants that \$350 of this should be used on housing and that the other \$250 is for food and supplies.  
You 'give' welfare payments by recording the amount on a participant's record sheet (don't forget to sign it!)

- 3) Each month, if a participant wishes to claim a welfare cheque, they must repeat this procedure.

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called. Each time somebody moves away from your desk; their turn is concluded. This means that to claim welfare, someone must (a) take a ticket (b) wait to collect a form (c) go away and fill in the form (d) collect a whole new ticket (e) then come see you again to collect the payment.

*(This will probably be an incredibly annoying process for participants; especially at the start of the month when many will be lining up for cheques! This is part of the experience, and you should encourage patience. Inform any rude participants that welfare might be denied to them!)*

## Housing Office

You are a Housing Office on the Downtown Eastside who represent a number of hostel owners and private landlords. You let rooms to those who can afford them; and evict those who cannot!

**AIMS:** To supply housing to participants who can afford it.

1) You have two types of housing available for participants; and you can explain the choices to those who visit you:

**SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY:** These are rooms at hostels which are let to those on low incomes. They're small, cramped and with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. However, they are much better than being outside on the streets. These cost \$400 per month and there are ten available.

**BACHELOR SUITES:** These are privately let apartments which are generally of good quality and are located in safe neighbourhoods. They cost \$600 per month and there are unlimited available (*if anyone can afford them!*)

2) If someone wishes to rent from you, check their sheet and if they have the money available, you can rent to them.

Explain that, at the end of the month, they can sit in the seats around your table rather than on 'the street.'

3) Each month, you collect 'rent' from everyone who rents from you. If a tenant has not paid you when the game leader informs you that the month is over; they are considered evicted and they must return to the streets.

4) You have employment references which you can give to any current tenant who asks for them. If they ask you; give them one of the 'reference' papers.

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

## Housing Office Months 3 and 4

*At the beginning of month 3, a private developer buys up several of the hostels in the Downtown Eastside to build condominiums.*

In months 3 and 4, the number of Single Room Occupancy units is reduced from ten to five.

If more than five people are staying in them at that point; then you must randomly choose tenants to be evicted. There will be no refund of rent for evicted tenants!



# Employment Office

You are an employment office on the Downtown Eastside and you represent a number of employers. You can find work for those with good health and references.

**AIMS:** To 'interview' candidates, to give jobs to those who are successful and to pay employees each month.

- 1) You can give interviews to participants who fulfill the requirements: **(a)** Having a current address either in a Single Occupancy Room, a Batchelor Suite or Covenant House **(b)** Having a reference obtained from either the Housing Office or Covenant House **(c)** Must have eaten the required amount of food every month and not spent more than one month sleeping on the streets (*this is to indicate if a candidate is too ill to work*)

You can inform those without these requirements about how to get them, but cannot give them a job.

- 2) When someone fulfills the requirements you can 'interview' them. You can ask whatever you like and it should only take a minute or so. Make sure to inform candidates that they'll need to work satisfactorily or they'll lose their job. Unless someone does something very

strange; everyone you interview will get a job.

- 3) Direct 'employees' to sit at the *Job table* and to cut out shapes using the various templates provided. When they have cut out ten shapes, and those shapes are identical to the templates on your desk, they can receive their month's 'pay'
- 4) Anyone who completes a month's work or ten cutouts can be paid. Those who worked with a reference from the Housing Allowance are paid minimum wage: \$800 for the month (Record this amount on the participant's record sheet and sign it) Those who worked with a reference from Covenant House earn \$1000 a month (*this signifies the extra training Covenant House can provide*)
- 5) Anyone who does not complete their task or a full month's work will be 'fired' and receive no pay. They cannot get a new job without a reference from Covenant House.

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

# Homeless Shelter

Your homeless shelter is a charity which works with homeless young people on the Downtown Eastside. You can provide food and shelter to a limited number of people each month.

**AIMS:** To assist participants by giving them food and shelter. You are well supported by the Government in terms of food, but the Government doesn't keep shelters open all year round. You also have very limited sleeping facilities.

- 1) Each month you can provide somewhere warm to sleep for **TWO** people.  
This assistance is provided on a first come, first served basis. The first two people to come see you at the start of the month will be the ones who receive it.
- 2) For the first two people who come to your desk each month, fill in their record sheet to reflect that they have will be staying at the Homeless Shelter. Invite them to sit on the

seats beside you.

These two people will also receive half their necessary food and supplies for the month; you should note this on their record sheet and explain they must buy the rest of their necessary food from the Grocery Store.

- 3) For anyone else who approaches your desk during the month; you can provide them with half their necessary food and supplies for the month. Note this on their record sheet.

You can explain the benefits of the Homeless Shelter and that you can only provide assistance to two people each month because you are a small organization. Suggest that they see you early in the next month so you can assist them.

**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

# Homeless Shelter Months 3 and 4

*At the beginning of month 3, the coldest part of the winter ends and the Government stops funding homeless shelters.*

In months 3 and 4, the Homeless Shelter is closed. You should stay at your desk and inform all your visitors that the shelter is no longer receiving funding from the Government and so is closed until next winter.

You cannot provide participants with any further assistance.

**Participant Record Sheet**

<i>Month 1</i>	<i>Money In / Out</i>	<i>Agency Signature</i>
<i>How much food and supplies did you get this month? (All, half etc.)</i>		<i>Where did you sleep this month?</i>

<i>Month 2</i>	<i>Money In / Out</i>	<i>Agency Signature</i>
<i>How much food and supplies did you get this month? (All, half etc.)</i>		<i>Where did you sleep this month?</i>

<i>Month 3</i>	<i>Money In / Out</i>	<i>Agency Signature</i>
<i>How much food and supplies did you get this month? (All, half etc.)</i>		<i>Where did you sleep this month?</i>

<i>Month 4</i>	<i>Money In / Out</i>	<i>Agency Signature</i>
<i>How much food and supplies did you get this month? (All, half etc.)</i>		<i>Where did you sleep this month?</i>

**Employment Office**

**Housing Office**

**Homeless Shelter**

**Covenant House**

**Grocery Store**

**Welfare Office**

**Recycling Center**

**“Job table”**

**“The Streets”**

**“The Streets”**

Application for Welfare Support

**SURNAME:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**FIRST NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**OTHER NAME(S):** \_\_\_\_\_  
**MALE / FEMALE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**DATE OF BIRTH:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**NATIONALITY:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Application for Welfare Support

**SURNAME:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**FIRST NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**OTHER NAME(S):** \_\_\_\_\_  
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Application for Welfare Support

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**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Application for Welfare Support

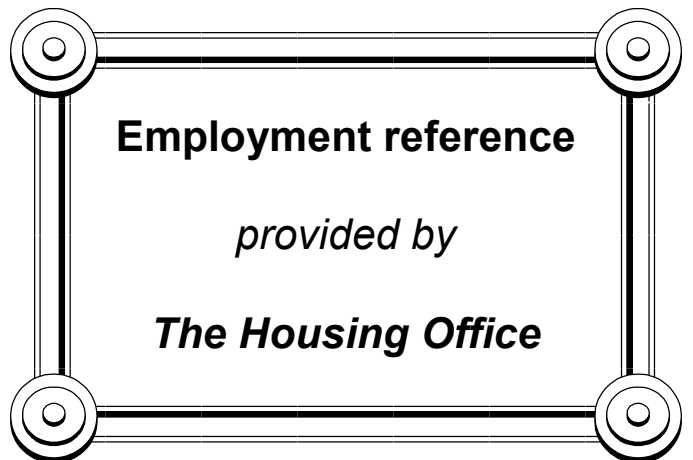
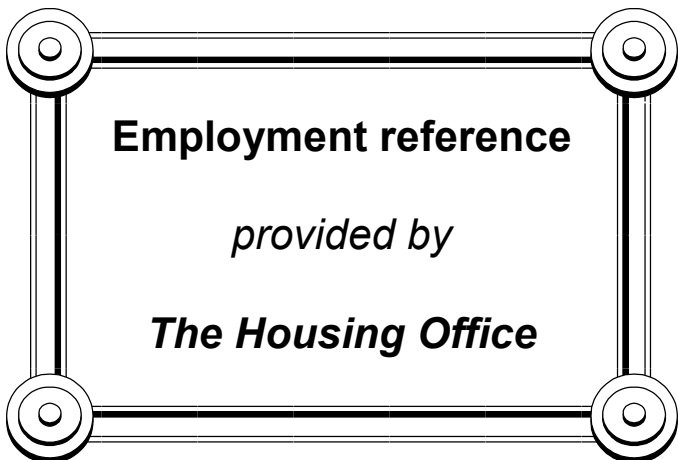
**SURNAME:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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Application for Welfare Support

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Application for Welfare Support

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**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_



# Covenant House

Covenant House is a charity which works with homeless young people on the Downtown Eastside. They provide food, shelter, counseling and the facilities to help find employment.

**AIMS:** To assist participants by giving them food, shelter and work references. However, you're a small organization and so your resources are very limited!

- 1) Each month you can provide a bed, full month's food, necessary supplies and a job reference to **ONE** person.

This assistance is provided on a first come, first served basis. The first person to come see you at the start of the month will be the one who receives it.

- 2) For the first person who comes to your desk each month, fill in their record sheet to reflect that they have received full food and supplies and will be staying at Covenant

House. Invite them to sit on the seat beside you.

At the beginning of the next month, you can give that person an employment reference and direct them to the Housing Office and Employment Office to find housing and work. (*This represents the assistance and vocational training Covenant House provides*)

- 3) For anyone else who approaches your desk during the month; you can explain the benefits of Covenant House and that you can only provide assistance to one person each month because you are a small organization. Suggest that they see you early in the next month so you can assist them.

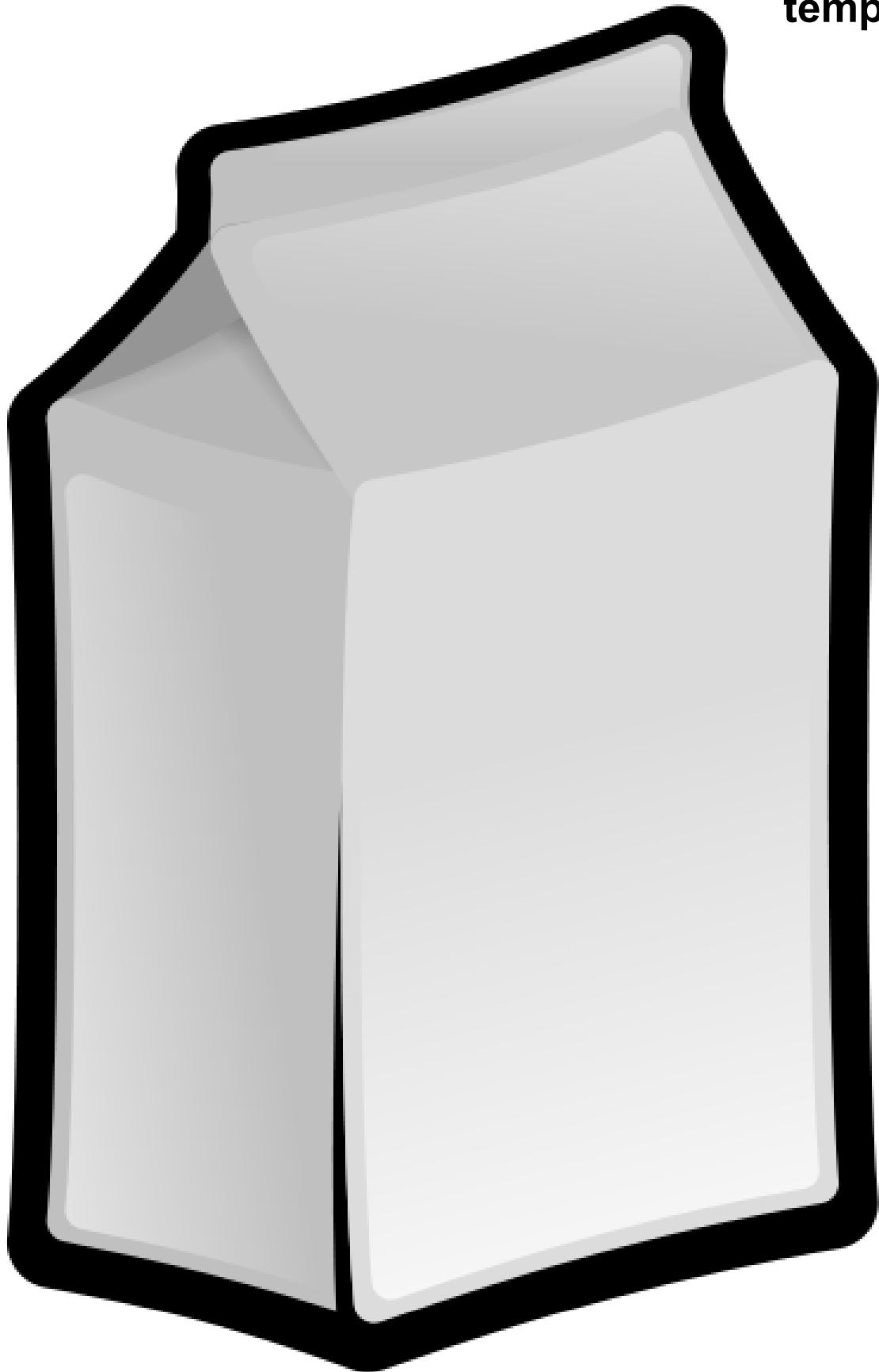
**IMPORTANT:** You can only deal with one person at a time. You have been given numbered tickets; if you're conducting business with a participant and someone else wishes to see you, you should ask them to take a ticket and wait until their number is called.

**'Bottle'  
template**

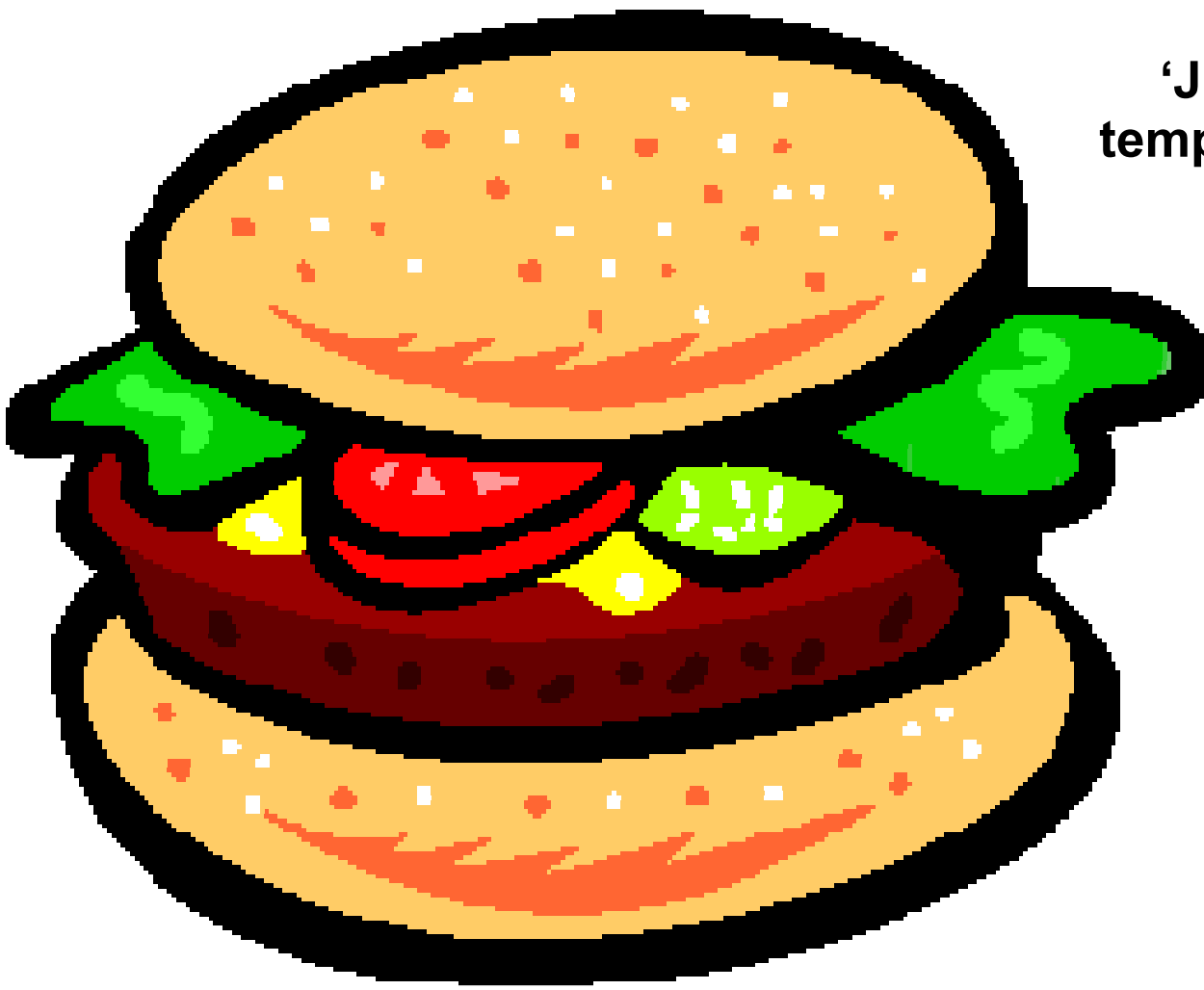




**'Milk Carton'  
template**



## 'Job' templates



**Note:** The burger and the telephone are used as representations of low skilled, minimum wage labor and because they're relatively easy to cut out! Alternatives could be used.