The Florida Project

ACTION GUIDE
INTRODUCTION

Warm, winning and gloriously alive, Sean Baker’s THE FLORIDA PROJECT is a deeply moving and unforgettably poignant look at childhood. Set on a stretch of highway just outside the imagined utopia of Disney World, THE FLORIDA PROJECT follows six-year-old Moonee and her rag-tag gang of friends. Moonee and her rebellious mother Halley live week to week at “The Magic Castle,” a budget motel managed by Bobby, whose stern exterior hides a deep reservoir of kindness and compassion.

Despite her harsh surroundings, the precocious and ebullient Moonee has no trouble making each day a celebration of life, her endless afternoons overflowing with mischief and grand adventure as she and her playmates fearlessly explore the utterly unique world into which they’ve been thrown. Unbeknownst to Moonee, however, her delicate fantasy is supported by the struggle and sacrifice of Halley, who is forced to explore increasingly dangerous possibilities in order to provide for her daughter. With THE FLORIDA PROJECT, Sean Baker gives life and a voice to a community rarely seen on screen. Through the eyes of Moonee, Halley, and Bobby, Baker has created a spellbinding and transformative portrait of contemporary lives lived in the margins that are otherwise too easily forgotten. THE FLORIDA PROJECT declares, boldly and proudly, that anywhere can be a Magic Kingdom - it just depends on how you see it.

To watch THE FLORIDA PROJECT is to be deeply affected by it. The film raises really important questions. What can I do to help kids like Moonee? What causes this situation? What are the solutions? This action guide is meant as a jumping off point to answering these questions and hopefully encouraging new ones. Here you’ll find some helpful resources as well.
WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP KIDS LIKE MOONEE

THE SITUATION ALL ACROSS AMERICA

In *THE FLORIDA PROJECT*, six-year-old Moonee and her friends live in cut-rate motels near Disney World in Florida, and their parents struggle to keep a roof over their heads. It’s not just Florida; you can find families like Moonee and Halley all across the country.

- An estimated 15 million children in America live in poverty in our nation of plenty.
- More than 1.3 million school-aged children (preK-12) experienced homelessness in 2015-16, according to the National Center for Homeless Education.
- Adults and children in families make up 35 percent of the homeless population in America – the “hidden homeless.”

Find out more about poverty in your community on this [National Kids Count](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/locations) interactive map:

http://datacenter.kidscount.org/locations
The film doesn’t explain why Moonee and Halley are in this situation. However, most families who are homeless are like them – headed by a single mom who is young and has limited education, with one or two children under the age of six. Here are some of the reasons why families experience poverty and homelessness.

- A nationwide shortage of affordable housing and underfunding of federal affordable housing programs even though the need continues to grow.
- Ecological disasters – hurricanes, wildfires, floods and more.
- Healthcare crises.
- Job loss; the difficulty of finding living-wage jobs, especially without a high-school diploma; under-employment and the need to work two or three jobs to survive.
- A shortage of quality childcare for working parents.
- Barriers to renting and owning a home, such as an eviction, bankruptcy, or even a late rent payment.
- Inability to save up for the move-in costs – first- and last-month’s rent, deposit and tenant screening fees.
- Institutional racism that has prevented many families of color from owning property and puts up barriers to renting.
- Homelessness as a child, or involvement with the foster-care system, like Moonee is facing.
- Domestic violence.
- Mental health or substance abuse issues.
- Widespread, ongoing poverty, which can be passed along from generation to generation.
SOME HIGH-LEVEL SOLUTIONS TO FAMILY HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

Here are some of the ways that our government, philanthropy, nonprofits, schools, faith communities and others are making progress on ending homelessness for families.

• Providing financial support to families for their rent, through programs like housing vouchers and “rapid re-housing” programs.

• Allocating state and federal funding for affordable housing through Housing Trust Funds and other programs.

• Supporting and partnering with schools and school districts – who are often the first to recognize the signs of homelessness – so they can provide resources for students who are homeless.

• Involving the local community in giving, volunteering and advocacy.

• Exploring innovative educational approaches like trauma-informed education, restorative justice and more.

• Connecting parents to job training programs that enable them to build their skills and earn higher wages.

After seeing the film, you may feel that you want to do something to help families like Moonee and Halley. We hope you will:

1. Reflect on it and talk about it with family, friends and colleagues. What would do if you had no resources?

2. Try to understand the issue in your own community, including what families who are homeless are going through.

3. Do something to help. If it seems overwhelming, don’t let it stop you. Start small. Everyone can do something.
HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO START:

**Talk about the film.** Explore your feelings with others who care. Share your thoughts on social media using @TheFloridaProject on Facebook; @floridaproject on Twitter; and @thefloridaproject and #TheFloridaProject on Instagram. Use our Discussion Guide to help shape your conversation.

**Ask, listen, and give.** “Just say hello” to people in need, talk to them, ask them what they need, and listen to them. Or, check out the websites of local nonprofit organizations who help families who are homeless; many of these groups have wish lists, including with online retailers.

To directly help the families who live in the Kissimmee area, you can donate to Hope 192 and Project Hope Alliance, who gave their valuable insights to the creation of this film.

**Give freely** without judgment.

**Collect items that families need.** Work with your school, faith community, club or others to collect socks, underwear, school supplies, toys, children’s books, gas or grocery cards, or personal-care items like deodorant, razors, sunscreen, toothbrushes and women’s hygiene items. Or, “adopt” a family moving from homelessness into housing; collect household items like sheets, kitchen gadgets and small appliances.

**Give your time.** Volunteer for a school tutoring program, a food bank, a shelter, or a childcare or after-school program. Consider how your professional skills could benefit a nonprofit organization that helps families.

**Help hungry kids,** especially in summer, when they’re cut off from school food programs. Donate to your local food bank, or host a food drive for healthy snacks. Find out if your local school has a program to stop “lunch shaming” or if there’s a local “breakfast before/after the bell” program. Check out this interactive map of food insecurity in the United States.

**Be a caring adult.** Like Bobby, we can all make the difference in the life of a child living in poverty – teachers, “lunch ladies,” bus drivers, coaches, faith community leaders, neighbors, classroom volunteers, Boy Scout and Girl Scout leaders, and more.
Learn about the rights of school-age children who are homeless. There’s a federal law designed to enable students experiencing homelessness to enroll in school and keep them in school, referred to as McKinney-Vento. These same rights apply to children who are homeless with their parents and teens who are homeless without their parents. Learn who’s responsible for homeless education in your state.

Seek out the stories of people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Read books like the Pulitzer Prize-winning “Evicted” by Matthew Desmond. Watch documentaries like the HBO films “American Winter” and “Homeless: The Motel Kids of Orange County” and the Academy Award-winning “Inocente.” Listen to audio stories on StoryCorps and The Moth.

Rent an apartment or room to people in need. If you’re a landlord, consider renting to people who are using housing vouchers. If you have a spare room, think about renting it to a mom and child; or, look into a co-housing setup.

Support who’s doing the work to fight child poverty in your community. Try an online search for phrases like “help homeless families” or “prevent child homelessness.”

Join the movement to push for more affordable housing. Check out this interactive map of what you need to earn to afford a modest apartment in your state.

Use your voice. Vote for candidates who support our social safety net. Keep your lawmakers accountable, and contact them when funding, services, or programs are at stake; write letters, send emails, or most importantly, call them. Write letters to the editor. Find the low-income housing organization in your state.

Change your laws. Become a housing advocate and urge lawmakers to pass policy that helps children who are homeless and living in poverty. Here are some organizations that do this work nationally. They can often connect you to local organizations. Sign up for their mailing lists, and get involved!

- Feeding America
- Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness
- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- National Center for Children in Poverty
- National Center on Family Homelessness
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- No Kid Hungry/Share Our Strength
- SchoolHouse Connection
- United Way
- YWCA USA
### SOME HIGH-LEVEL SOLUTIONS TO FAMILY HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

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