

# YOU ARE THE EXPERT:

## Sharing Your Knowledge as an Outreach Strategy

*“Every homeless person has a PhD in POVERTY.”  
—Alex Hedgepath, Picture the Homeless Member*

### INTRO: BEING A LEADER

New York City's homeless system is big and complex and scary. Whether you're on the streets or in the shelters, there are a million things you need to know. What is my case worker supposed to be doing for me? Where can I go to the bathroom? Where can I get a haircut? What do I do when the cops try to run me out of here?

As an organization founded and led by homeless people, this is one of our biggest strengths: all of our members have a wealth of information to share. Some of them are lessons we learned the hard way, and some of them are things we learned because someone else took us aside and taught us what we need to know. When we do outreach, and when we meet homeless folks, this is a resource that we have. We're not service providers, but we know a lot of helpful information. When you help someone out, you build the foundation for a solid relationship—and relationships is what organizing is all about. Not only do we need to share our knowledge—we need to get people to see that *their* knowledge is valuable, and makes them an expert!

### IN PAIRS

Break up into groups of two. Take five minutes; each person should tell the other about one specific thing that they learned from someone else in the system, and give a concrete example of how it helped them. A handful of people should report back to the group, and explain what their partner said.

A leader is someone who provides leadership. But that can mean a lot of different things. Sometimes a leader is the person who speaks loud enough for everyone to hear. Sometimes a leader is the person who says nothing, and lets others speak. Sometimes a leader is the person who has all the answers, and sometimes a leader is the person who asks the right questions...

### GROUP REFLECTION

What are some of the qualities of an effective peer leader? What are some *not-so-good* qualities for a leader? We'll write down everyone's thoughts on butcher paper, and then review what we've got. Does anything surprise you? Do you disagree with anything?

### ANGER INTO ACTION

For Picture the Homeless, an effective leader is a person who can turn someone's anger into action. It's one thing to acknowledge an injustice—the challenge to a good leader is to get homeless folks to see that if they get together with other people in the same situation, they can actually *do* something about the injustice! This is a skill that comes with practice. Here are some examples. **How would you respond to the following concerns?**

*I've been in this shelter for two years, and my housing specialist hasn't done anything for me. I feel so frustrated I just want to leave the shelter—but if I'm on the street, ACS will take my kids. What do I do?*

*This one cop keeps coming through here and telling me that if I don't get the hell off his block, he'll arrest me for disorderly conduct. If I get up and go somewhere else—there's another cop, saying the same thing. Can you get me a lawyer?*

*Can you get me housing? Because if you can't, you need to keep it moving.*

*Sure, it'd be nice if everyone had housing. But there's a lot of guys in here who are just lazy, and you can't do anything for them. So I understand why the city doesn't want to give people housing.*