



Student Sleep Out Organizer Toolkit 2026

The Sleep Out is an annual one-night event in which people of all ages, across Chittenden and Franklin Counties, sleep outside in solidarity with youth facing homelessness. **Thank you for being a part of the Sleep Out**—you are helping to change the lives of Vermont youth.

This Toolkit is designed to give you all the ideas, tips, and resources you'll need for a successful Sleep Out.

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Questions?

We're here to help! Please contact Charlotte Steverson at events@spectrumvt.org or (802) 864-7423 x330.



Thank you for sleeping out in solidarity with youth who are facing homelessness!

Getting Started

Pick a Date

- Work with your team to determine the best day that works for you. Most Student Sleep Outs take place between mid-March and mid-April.
- Consider if you want to do the Sleep Out on a school night to experience how hard it is to go to school without a warm bed, safe shelter, and hot shower (it's just a taste of the real challenges so many youth face each and every day).
- Let Charlotte know once you select your date!

Create Your Team

- Register yourself and your team by visiting www.spectrumsleepout.org
- Customize your team page and invite others to join your team.
- Each participant will need to sign up on the Sleep Out website.

When to Start Planning

As soon as possible! We recommend selecting a date and location by the end of January so you can start publicizing in February. The most successful Sleep Outs actively recruit participants and donations as early as possible.

Event Checklist

- ☐ Choose a safe location to host your event and make an extreme weather plan. This could include an alternate, indoor location or a snow date. Youth should have an adult leader to help coordinate and make sure there is proper supervision, parental permissions, and emergency contacts in place.
- ☐ Decide on your fundraising minimum, if applicable. We suggest a \$25 minimum donation per person, which entitles them to a hat (provided by Spectrum)!
- ☐ Coordinate all site details, such as:
 - Set up (tables, chairs, a/v set-up etc.) and clean up, trash removal, etc.
 - Access to restrooms
 - Whether you will be serve any food or drinks
- ☐ Recruit other volunteers from your organization or family and friends to attend your Sleep Out and to help you plan it.
- ☐ Plan activities and obtain any materials ahead of time for games, crafts, or other things you schedule for the night.
- ☐ Publicize your efforts using social media, posters, and school announcements, assemblies, or newsletters.
- ☐ After your Sleep Out, be sure to share your experience with others, including us! Share photos and reflections on the night by emailing them to Charlotte at events@spectrumvt.org.

Fundraising Tips

- ☐ People want to know WHY you are sleeping out—be ready to give an answer! Something simple but meaningful can be very effective, such as “I’m sleeping out so that others don’t have to.”
- ☐ Send an email out to friends and relatives, and ask your parents if they’re willing to send one, too. You can send this kind of message out on your own, or through the Sleep Out website while logged in.
- ☐ Hint: starting by asking for a donation of \$5 or \$10 from family and friends can make it easier to fundraise and adds up quickly!
- ☐ Send out a link to your personal or team page on social media, and/or ask your parents to post for you. Post more frequently as the event approaches.
- ☐ Most importantly, **thank everyone** who gives and tell them they are helping young adults in Vermont turn their lives around! *Note: All donations are tax-deductible. Spectrum will send receipts to everyone for whom we have email or postal addresses.*

FAQs

Why sleep out?

The Sleep Out provides a unique opportunity to understand the serious problem of youth homelessness. By asking friends and family to support their efforts with monetary donations, participants make a difference in the lives of the 1,400+ homeless and at-risk youth served by Spectrum each year.

We want participants to leave with a better understanding of what homelessness is like, the impact of homelessness on our communities, and some of the programs and services that Spectrum provides to youth in need.

Who sleeps out?

Anyone can sleep out! Companies, schools, sports teams, youth groups, college clubs, or groups of friends or families. Individuals are welcome, too!

When do we sleep out?

Pick a night that works for you in March or early April and contact Charlotte at events@spectrumvt.org with the details. The Burlington Sleep Out for adults will be held on Thursday, March 21 and the St. Albans Sleep Out for adults will be held on Thursday, March 28 if you would like to sleep out on the same night as these teams.

Where do we sleep out?

A backyard, a school yard or wherever you can sleep out safely. If you don't have access to an outdoor area, consider finding the coldest or least comfortable spot in your house.

Will we freeze?

This event is likely to be cold and/or wet, but safety comes first! If the weather is predicted to be especially cold, please use your discretion in cancelling, rescheduling, or moving your Sleep Out indoors.

Resources

Our hope is that your participants go home with a better understanding of what we do at Spectrum. The following links are great resources; please contact Charlotte if you need more information on Spectrum's services.

- Our [playlist of youth speaker videos](#) gives real insight to how we help youth turn their lives around.
- The "[Spectrum Voices](#)" video was created by a group of students at Champlain College, and tells the story of some of our youth—in their own words.
- This [overview](#) is a quick rundown about Spectrum
- Visit www.spectrumvt.org
- The following links are great references and may provide great discussion points for your group:
 - [Homeless and Runaway Youth](#)
 - [Covenant House](#)
 - [Article on youth homelessness](#)

Downloads

- ["I'm Sleeping Out Because..." Poster](#)
- [2026 Sleep Out Logo](#)
- [2026 Student Sleep Out Logo](#)
- [2026 Burlington Sleep Out Logo](#)
- [2026 St. Albans Sleep Out Logo](#)

Activity Ideas

It can be helpful to have a few activities planned; it can help to reinforce the message of why the Sleep Out is important. Keep the age of your participants in mind as some of these activities are not good for all ages.

Presentations & Speakers (virtual or in-person visitors)

- Community members: police officer, teacher or professor
- Spectrum staff or clients. We can sometimes arrange a speaker for you. Let Charlotte know if you are interested!)
- Read aloud stories and letters from Spectrum's youth (provided by Spectrum)
- Poetry or short story reading about a relevant topic
- Dance or music performance

Video

- Show excerpts from movies, documentaries
- Show "[Voices of Spectrum](#)" video, or any of the videos suggested earlier

Hands-on

- Create posters or flyers for display after the event, with messages about helping youth facing homeless, or notes about participants' individual experiences
- Create a mural, quilt, or other group-creation that can be a commemoration of the Sleep Out
- Build a shelter out of cardboard
- Drawing what "home" means to you

Group Participation

- Facts & Figures Quiz or Q&A on homelessness
- [SPENT: A Game with Purpose](#)
- Candlelight vigil and/or walk
- Organize small group discussions about homelessness
- Brainstorm about all the challenges homeless youth face
- Brainstorm ways we can help homeless youth in the community

Volunteerism & Service

- Put together care packages for homeless youth
- Do a food donation collection at the event
- Make cards for Spectrum youth

Suggested Posts and Email Wording

- I'm sleeping out in solidarity with homeless youth on [date]. Help me ensure our young people never have to sleep in the cold by supporting me

- No young person should go without a safe place to sleep. You can ensure youth in our community have a safe, warm place to go at night by supporting me.
- Donate here: [personal page link] to ensure youth have a warm, safe place to sleep every night. #SpectrumSleepOut
- I'm sleeping outside in the cold on [date] in solidarity with homeless youth. Give at [personal page link]. #SpectrumSleepOut
- Together we can give homeless youth a safe, warm place to sleep. Make a difference. Donate: [personal page link]. #SpectrumSleepOut
- *Selfie/photo of you with your "I'm sleeping out because..." poster.*
I'm sleeping out because [fill in your reason]. Donate using the link in my profile to ensure every youth has a warm, safe place to sleep.
#SpectrumSleepOut
- *Photo of the wintery landscape.*
Days like today make me think of all the young people without a warm and safe place to sleep. Together we can ensure they have a warm bed waiting for them. Donate at the link in my profile. #SpectrumSleepOut
- *Selfie/picture of you cuddled up on the couch or in your winter gear.*
I'm grateful every winter night for my cozy bed. Let's make sure all youth have a safe, warm place to sleep this year. You can help by donating to the #SpectrumSleepOut at the link in my profile.

Sample Fundraising Email:

Dear Friends and Family,

On [date] I'm sleeping outside overnight in solidarity with at-risk and homeless teenagers and young adults as part of Spectrum's Sleep Out.

The Sleep Out raises funds for homeless youth in Vermont. The money we raise funds the services struggling youth need to turn their lives around.

I'm sleeping out because I want all youth to know that someone's here to help. I'm sleeping out because I believe all teenagers and young adults deserve to have someone to lend a hand when the going gets tough.

You can help! Please donate to my sleep out by visiting my personal page at [insert link to your personal page]. The money you give goes directly to helping youth in Vermont.

Together, we can make sure every young person has a safe place to call home.

Thank you!

[your name]