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## MacSOC draws overflow crowd to raise awareness of poverty and homelessness

By Suzanne Morrison

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Imagine writing a math test when your stomach is growling from hunger. Think about arriving in Hamilton as a refugee and wondering where you will find a roof over your head. Figure out how you would support your family if you lost your job.

Poignant insights into the lives of students without enough food and homeless families lacking adequate housing were brought to campus when **MacSOC** ([McMaster Student Outreach Collaborative](#)) and the [McMaster Community Poverty Initiative](#) presented the documentary Home Safe Hamilton last week.

An overflow crowd of more than 175 students, city officials and members of the broader community watched in awe as teenagers, refugees and workers told their stories in [Home Safe Hamilton](#), one of three documentaries on Canadian families in Calgary, Toronto and Hamilton living with the threat and reality of homelessness.

The film highlights obstacles faced by laid-off steelworkers, the discrimination and vulnerability encountered by newly-arrived refugees and the resilience required by students living below the poverty line.

**Tuyet and Ynhi**, students at Sir John A. MacDonald Secondary School, which has the largest number of students below the poverty line in Ontario, spoke about their needs for support while encouraging students and teachers to break the silence that grows from the shame of poverty; **Shamso Elmi**, a community activist originally from Somalia, described the cockroach/bed bug infested apartments refugees must accept in downtown Hamilton; two Latin American refugee families at The Good Shepherd Family Centre spoke fondly of the warm, continuing support they receive there. (A segment dealing with poverty and homelessness in the local Aboriginal community is to be shown at a later date.)

The event was planned as an evening for conversation and dialogue, said **Dyanne Semogas**, assistant professor in the [School of Nursing](#) who moderated a panel which included **Cathy Crowe**, street nurse pioneer and part-time faculty member in the School of Nursing; **Jeff Wingard**, development co-ordinator for the McMaster Poverty Community Initiative; and **David Adkin** of [Skyworks Charitable Foundation](#) who produced the film with **Laura Sky**.

**Samantha Scime**, MacSOC president and fourth year nursing student, said change will only happen with public awareness, and that was the intent of showing the film.

Crowe urged everyone to adopt what she calls the one-third formula in which they give one-third of their intended donations for immediate help; one-third towards housing help; and one-third towards advocacy work.

MacSoc has more than 200 volunteers who weekly provide food, clothing and health and social services information and support to the marginally housed, homeless and those at risk of homelessness. It is a unique service where the university is actively involved in a "hands on" approach in meeting needs. After more than a decade, MacSOC continues to draw volunteers from the departments of medicine, midwifery, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, engineering, health sciences, arts and science, life sciences and kinesiology.

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