

Good News Department

Finding Solutions For America's Homeless Youth

(NAPSA)—For over 1 million young people, there is no place to call home. Fortunately, several organizations are working to increase awareness of the situation for this forgotten population.

Recently, Congress passed a bipartisan resolution to focus awareness on the problem, designating November as “National Homeless Youth Awareness Month.” Singer/songwriter Jewel presented testimony before a congressional committee about her experiences living on the streets as a teenager.

Youth homelessness in this country is a complicated, often overlooked issue, with a growing number of teenagers and children living alone on the streets. Fending for themselves, children as young as 11 years old confront such nightmares as human trafficking and drug use, with little sympathy from the general public.

“While young people often become homeless due to a family breakdown or abuse, there is no one cause,” said Rick Koca, founder of StandUp For Kids, an organization involved in direct outreach to homeless children and teens for 18 years. “Poverty; lack of affordable housing, access to education and other resources; unemployment among family members; abuse; and mental health issues can all contribute to kids becoming homeless.”

Koca says many people who see homeless teens jump to the wrong conclusions, assuming they're either drug addicts or suburban runaways who could head home anytime they choose. “This is not



Left to fend for themselves, many of America's homeless youth have no one who cares. There are ways you can help.

the case for most kids we encounter,” Koca added.

Carissa Phelps, a former homeless teen who recently earned a joint law degree and MBA from UCLA, hopes greater understanding will bring more support. “When you ask homeless youth what message the public should hear, they overwhelmingly say, ‘Tell them we are just like them.’ These kids can achieve anything, if just given the chance.”

Phelps is filming a documentary about her life on the streets.

The awareness campaign is being driven by The RE*Generation, an initiative by no-annual-contract wireless provider Virgin Mobile USA and its charitable partners, StandUp For Kids, YouthNoise and Children's Health Fund.

Information on how to get involved and connect with charitable efforts and events in November around the country can be found at www.virginmobileusa.com/regeneration.