

XM Radio: The Bob Edwards Show
The Invisible: Children Without Homes

Female Child: [Singing]. Oh when the Saints, go marching in, oh when the Saints go marching in. [End of singing].

Bob Edwards: Every year, 1.3 million children are homeless in America. Today on the Bob Edwards Show we'll hear from the social workers, who try to help those young people.

FeBob Edwards: We have young people who have been homeless most of their lives and will tell you that when I was 2 and 3 years old, or about that age, that my family was homeless, and when I was a teenager my family was homeless, and that before I went into foster care my family was homeless, and I went into foster care and I've aged out of foster care and now I'm homeless.

Bob Edwards: We'll hear from parents.

FeBob Edwards: I'm homeless. My biggest worry right now is my 16-year old daughter who is pregnant and she is bouncing from foster home to foster home.

Bob Edwards: And we'll hear from the kids who have been cast aside.

FeBob Edwards: At school they have free breakfast, so, of course I'd get breakfast, and, you know, I can nibble off somebody's plate for lunch. Dinner, like, even now, I don't eat dinner. I think I've gotten used to not eating dinner.

Bob Edwards: Today's feature documentary, "The Invisible: Children Without Homes."

In October, the Mayor of Washington, D.C. held a press conference to celebrate the closing of its only emergency shelter for homeless families.

Mayor Adrian Fenty: This is the last week that DC Village will be in operation, and that all of our families who were there, or the few that are still here, will be moved into scattered site apartments throughout the city. [Applause].

Bob Edwards: Mayor Adrian Fenty hoped the announcement would symbolize a change in how the city treats its homeless families by moving them from communal-style housing to apartment-style. His Director of Human Services, Clarence Carter, was on-hand for the ceremony.

Clarence Carter: And, so, we are here today, on this beautiful day, to celebrate a beautiful accomplishment, government working in the best interest of people.

Bob Edwards: Closing down a city's only family shelter going into the winter season is a strange event to celebrate, especially since homeless families, even though you might not notice, make up the fastest growing segment of the country's homeless. In New York City, there are more homeless moms, dads and kids than ever, 9,500, in fact, just in the city. Even more troubling, the nation's capital is the worst place for

children, having the highest percentage living in poverty than any state in the country.

Thomas Healey [phonetic] became one of the so-called invisible homeless kids when he was just 12-years old. Healey started his life in Austin, Texas, where he lived with his mother. Now, 22, we met him in New York City. His cross-country journey began when his mother developed signs of schizophrenia.

Thomas Healey: And then all of a sudden she, we lost it all, as she wasn't able to manage any of her affairs, and we went from having the sort of average American lifestyle to being completely broke with no way to pay the mortgage or the rent or provide for ourselves in any way, and we became homeless.

Bob Edwards: So did you seek public assistance at that point?

Thomas Healey: Oh yes, I sought public assistance. At that time, the Austin Department of Child and Family Services said that the only thing that was really an option for me was they were looking to place me into foster care and remove her of parental guardianship rights. As a 12-year old, and being the only person in the relationship who really had the cognitive abilities left, that really didn't seem like an

option for me. So, eventually we left and we moved to St. Louis.

Bob Edwards: Why St. Louis?

Thomas Healey: Honestly, it was just pretty much a dot on the map, I figured, you know, what's a new place to go. At 12 and 13 years old and you're making decisions there's really not a lot of logic that you're putting into it.

Bob Edwards: You decided?

Thomas Healey: I decided. Yes.

Bob Edwards: How did you manage?

Thomas Healey: Well, basically we hopped a Greyhound bus, moved up there, and my mom stayed at a shelter and I stayed on the street. After that, luckily St. Louis is sort of an economically depressed area, so there are lots of abandoned houses to stay in. I spent the next couple of years just squatting in houses, sometimes, occasionally having to break into them, hijacking local utilities. It's not necessarily a totally uncomfortable way to live, but it's not always the best.

Bob Edwards: Did you go to school?

Thomas Healey: No, I dropped out in the 5th grade. It's a little bit difficult to maintain the illusion of a stable lifestyle, and a large part of my goal was avoiding the

Department of Family and Child Services, and avoid being drawn into foster care.

Bob Edwards: How did you eat?

Thomas Healey: Sometimes I didn't, but there were soup kitchens. I supplemented my income occasionally with hustling and drug dealing, shoplifting if necessary.

Bob Edwards: Never got caught?

Thomas Healey: Never got caught, clean record.

Bob Edwards: Must have been pretty good?

Thomas Healey: Lucky, not good.

Bob Edwards: We'll get back to his story later, but first we turn back to Washington, D.C. to see how the nation's capital handles families like Tom and his mom. This city has a long history of warehousing its homeless families. Jamila Larson and Gina Kline first witnessed that treatment at the nation's largest homeless shelter located just a few blocks from the Capitol Building. Larson ventured down to that facility one day in the year 2000.

Jamila Larson: And when we entered the shelter and saw rows and rows of metal bunk beds, separated only by sheets, where infirm women with chronic health conditions shared the same room as women with children, and half naked children were sprawled out in the hall, in the hot hallway with no air-conditioning, half dressed.

Gina Kline: No screens on the windows.

Jamila Larson: No screens on the third floor windows.

Women in respirators limping past, and a woman was found dead by a child. She had died from whooping cough, and a child discovered her in the bathroom. I mean, this is the scenario of the children who live closest to our nation's Capitol Building.

Gina Kline: It's, you come off the Hill, you walk past the Children's Defense Fund, you are near the Department of Labor, it's a sunny day, you are strolling in your khakis, you're in D.C., and you go up these front steps and you open the door and you feel like you are in Beirut.

Bob Edwards: After seeing those conditions, Larson and Klein co-founded the Playtime Project, a weekly recreational program for D.C.'s homeless children. When the shelter, near Capitol Hill, received some bad press, the families were moved to DC Village, which seemed to be a step up for the parents and their kids.

Jamila Larson: We were excited to see how much green space there was. It was a former nursing home campus, and we moved our program outside, basically, to give children a chance to experience the great outdoors.

Bob Edwards: Jamila Larson showed us around that facility last summer and introduced us to the complicating factors of

the place. At that point there were rumors that DC Village was to be shut down, but nothing official yet.

Jamila Larson: We don't necessarily believe the rumor because there have been so many false sort of deadlines like that, and the city has not told us what the alternative will be.

Bob Edwards: I asked her why it is being closed down.

Jamila Larson: Because Metro wants to use this property as a bus depot.

Bob Edwards: Well, that's important.

Jamila Larson: Yes, now the bus depot is near the stadium and it's going to have to move because of the stadium, so it's kind of a trickle-down effect. And, I guess since we haven't heard where the families will be going we don't necessarily believe the October deadline, because that's really soon. So we're going to keep going and follow the children wherever they go.

Bob Edwards: DC Village is in the District proper, but it's in a remote part of the city. Take a relatively brief car ride across the Anacostia River, just beyond Boling Air Force Base, keep going until you get to an abandoned hospital, and then some other empty storage sheds, and around the corner you'll find a cluster of one-story brick buildings that act as shelter for the city's homeless families.

Jamila Larson: You're out in the middle of nowhere. I mean, we're surrounded by trees and swamps, an impound lot, a wastewater treatment plant, a bus that takes more than an hour to get into the center of the city after you transfer. So, it's a hard place to get back on your feet when you're not integrated in the community. I think that's another reason why families sometimes come here and feel stuck.

Bob Edwards: So it would be good to move?

Jamila Larson: Yes. It would, absolutely, but we can't imagine a positive scenario where families would have their own apartment in the center of the city.

Bob Edwards: D.C. outsources its homeless services to a non-profit group, which, according to Larson, won the city contract without any competition. Larson says there can be a lack of passion for serving the homeless families.

Jamila Larson: The staff is not trained as well as they deserve to be to serve such a tough population, and it means that the families don't get a real high quality of care, they're kind of just held here to fend for themselves. There are caseworkers, but those caseworkers are not well trained or well connected to be able to move them out fast enough. So families end up staying here for longer than they should.

Bob Edwards: Marta Beresin is a staff attorney at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless.

Marta Beresin: At DC Village you would not believe the things we've seen out there, diseases that you didn't think existed anymore, bedbugs have been really, really bad out there during the last year.

Bob Edwards: Phyllis and G.W. Delaney [phonetic] were at DC Village starting in June, prior to that they lived in a van with their 8-year old girl.

G.W. Delaney: Like I say, I've been exposed to a lot of things, but I still have the physical marks of unknown bites on my legs that hit my legs, my back, never seen anything in the room, I mean, we kept our own clean.

Bob Edwards: Do you think these were insects, or something bigger?

G.W. Delaney: I wish I could tell you.

Phyllis Delaney: We were exposed to TB, and it just, it was just a lot of things, you know, that, we're not saying that we wasn't glad for the help, but, it wasn't what we imagined.

G.W. Delaney: It seemed like we could have been safer in the van if those are the conditions.

Bob Edwards: After two months of uncertainty, city officials finally declared that DC Village would close down by September 30th, giving them one month to move the 115 families into apartment style housing. Michael Stoops is the Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. When we met with

him on October 10th, many families still were not moved, didn't know where they were going, and would not know until just a day or two prior to being moved. He says, this is a common experience across the nation.

Michael Stoops: Just like if your home was about to be foreclosed on, homeless people have the same fears, where are they going to go, because there is not enough shelter space in this city, and we need every shelter bed that we have, we actually need more, even though shelters are not necessarily the solution to ending homelessness, but it's like a band-aid on a bullet wound.

Bob Edwards: Homeless children get sick twice as often as other children, nearly half suffer from mental illness, and their numbers grow as fast as 20 percent a year. How do families and their kids end up in shelters like DC Village in the first place? Hear about that and the challenges faced by the children after the break.

The_Invisible_B]

Bob Edwards: Welcome back to a special broadcast of the Bob Edwards Show, "The Invisible: Children Without Homes," is our documentary about homeless kids in America.

Jamila Larson: I've walked up to my school on more than one occasion and stumbled upon an eviction in process. Once

you see it, you never forget it, it makes you sick to your stomach.

Bob Edwards: Jamila Larson of the Homeless Children's Playtime Project.

Jamila Larson: And at one particular day, it was drizzling a little bit, and I smelled gasoline, alongside the road there's a car broke down, and lining the sidewalk were couches and lamps and clothes and toothbrushes and rolled up clean socks and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and dishes that were broken and Christmas cards and tea bags and all the relics of a family's life. Imagine all of your belongings put out on the curb. That's what happens every day. And then I came upon one picture of a smiling little boy, and I just lost it, because this was a child at my school who I knew. And then I realized that I knew this family that had been evicted.

Bob Edwards: Being evicted marks the start of homelessness for many families, particularly now, with the mortgage crisis, evictions are on the rise across the nation. What's more, in the nation's capital, landlords evicting their tenants are responsible for providing the labor to do the heavy lifting, which is supervised by the U.S. Marshal Service. The common practice is to hire an eviction company. The eviction companies pick up day laborers based on how many evictions they

have that day. Many of those day laborers are homeless themselves.

Forty-four year old Tony Forte [phonetic] is a homeless man who sometimes works on the eviction trucks. We met him just up the street from where the day laborers gather every day to wait for work. He described the eviction process to us. After picking up the workers, the eviction company drives them to the residents where they wait for the U.S. Marshals. Once the U.S. Marshals arrive and gain entry to the house, the workers remove the items, placing them out on the street.

Bob Edwards: Can you describe that scene for me, what that's like?

Tony Forte: Sometimes you feel sorry for the people, you know, and then sometimes you have things, where, you go in the house and you know the people. They live very unsanitary, you are stepping over piles of clothes, piles of trash, but yet they're living in there. So, they have to be evicted, you know, because they're not paying their rent, or they've very late on their rent and their landlord wants them out.

Bob Edwards: So clothes are out there, children's toys, furniture?

Tony Forte: Yep, everything but food and chemical, like hairspray and all, yes.

Bob Edwards: People try to stop you?

Tony Forte: They ain't gonna stop too much with the U.S. Marshals there. They get mad, some people get mad, get upset, say things like they didn't get a notice of being evicted, you hear lots of things. Some say the money is on the way, things like that.

Bob Edwards: And, how long does that take?

Tony Forte: Sometimes you might run in there, there's only like a table, chair and maybe a lamp, and still you're 5 minutes, sometimes you go there and the house is packed, 2 hours. The pay is still the same though.

Bob Edwards: What they end up getting paid is usually less than minimum wage. So, last year, Michael Stoops, Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, opened a class action lawsuit on behalf of the homeless men.

Michael Stoops: I know I would not help someone being evicted, but when you're living on the streets you'll do almost anything for money. The eviction companies, for years, have been hiring homeless folks and paying them \$5.00 per eviction, and they might do three or four evictions in a 10-hour day.

Bob Edwards: These evictions, not only do they start the cycle of homelessness for many families, but they can complete it as well.

Bob Edwards: Did you ever evict anyone you knew?

Tony Forte: Sure, a couple times, yes.

Bob Edwards: That's got to be hard.

Tony Forte: It's hard, but, you know, then you do think, cause you want to help them out, you know, but there's not too much you can do. I mean, they got to go, they got to go, because it's not your say-so, it's the landlord and it's the marshals, it's up to them what they feel. What's on the writ, what it says has to be done, so there's not much you can do about it. So you do have feelings about it when there is somebody you know, but eviction is eviction.

Bob Edwards: Where do they go?

Tony Forte: I've heard of someone that was evicted, I think we was talking about this last week, and that person ended up being out here doing evictions with us.

Bob Edwards: Increasingly it's parents and their kids who are being forced out onto the streets and into shelters. Michael Stoops described the rise nationwide.

Michael Stoops: Your stereotypical image of who is homeless in America is still the single, bearded man, with the "Will work for food" sign, and the single adults do make up the largest number of the homeless population, over 50 percent. Forty-one percent of the homeless nationwide are families, and 25 percent are children under the age of 18.

Bob Edwards: Any idea what that is in raw numbers?

Michael Stoops: That's our most frequent question, how many homeless people are there in the country. There are around 800,000 homeless people on any given night, 3.5 million over the course of a year.

Bob Edwards: Any idea about numbers of children?

Michael Stoops: The Children's Defense Fund has a stat that says 1.3 million of the homeless are children.

Bob Edwards: And where are they concentrated?

Michael Stoops: It used to be homeless people were in the traditional skid row area of Los Angeles, or First Avenue in Seattle, but today there is no area of the country immune from homelessness, urban, suburban, rural, Native American reservation. So homeless people are actually everywhere. Unfortunately, a lot of rural areas where there is no shelter or soup kitchen people wrongly assume that there's no homeless people.

Bob Edwards: Some of those homeless families look to Washington, D.C.

Bob Edwards: The nation's capital, there has to be advocacy groups, so, I just felt like, if you can't get help here, I guess you can't get it anywhere.

Bob Edwards: The nation's capital used to have a Right to Shelter law, meaning that the city would open as many facilities as necessary to accommodate the homeless. Voters

banished that law in 1990, so now that leaves homeless families, children and teenagers without anyplace to turn. I talked to Kristi Matthews, who is the Outreach Coordinator at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. She says, currently, there are thousands of homeless teenagers on any given night, and about 300 families wait-listed to get into shelter.

Kristi Matthews: When I say 300 families, that could be over 1,000 people because we're talking about husbands and wives and children and families who range from being three to being ten. So that could be over 1,000 people with no place to go.

Bob Edwards: In addition to the 2,000 young people that are out there?

Kristi Matthews: With no place to go.

Bob Edwards: The city needs more shelters.

Kristi Matthews: Yes, we do. We need more shelters; we need more affordable housing in D.C. With all these condos coming up and all these places where I can't even afford to live, and that's just the bottom line. In order for a family to afford an apartment in D.C. on minimum wage they have to work over 200 hours a week, one person has to work over 200 hours a week in order to afford a place to live, and that's just not realistic.

Bob Edwards: Attorney Marta Beresin says the list is approximately six months long and only 1 in 9 who actually applies for it gets shelter within one year. Beresin says families do whatever they have to do while they wait for shelter.

Marta Beresin: Prior to going into shelter they usually spend a year or two doubled up and moving from place to place with a friend or a family or worse. We've had families who have stayed in their cars or their vans. We had a client for a while who has, there was this one bus driver who let them ride the bus all night long. So folks do really desperate things. I had a family that was staying in a, he was a construction worker, the father, it was a father and kids, and he was staying in one of the buildings that he was working on. So, obviously not a safe place.

Bob Edwards: Judith Dobbins is Executive Director of the Covenant House Shelter for Teenagers.

Judith Dobbins: We have young people who have been homeless most of their lives, and will tell you that when I was 2 and 3 years old that my family was homeless, and when I was a teenager my family was homeless, and that before I went into foster care my family was homeless, and I went into foster care and I've aged out of foster care and now I'm homeless. So

there are young people who've experienced homelessness all of their lives.

Bob Edwards: Donna Green [phonetic] is a mother of three who is being sheltered at the House of Ruth with her 10-year old son in the southeast quadrant of Washington, D.C.

Donna Green: I'm homeless. To me, though, being here isn't homeless, because homeless, to me, is out in the street. But, if I had my choice, I wouldn't be here. My biggest worry right now is my 16-year old daughter who is pregnant, and she's bouncing from foster home to foster home. Actually, I sent my son down, I was just talking to her on the phone, and she's waiting to be placed again today.

Bob Edwards: Can't be a lot of foster homes that want to take in someone about to have a baby.

Donna Green: Exactly. Exactly. And, I mean, my take on it, had I not been involved in drugs, this is something pretty normal for urban households.

Bob Edwards: Are you allowed to visit your 16-year old?

Donna Green: Actually, she's allowed to come here on the weekend. That's still, that's just real hard, letting her go Sunday. I mean, I know because, like she said, her last placement she was in, which was a couple of days ago, it was in Surgeon's Courts over on NE [indiscernible] and North Capitol, and I've never lived in the projects but these are places that

I wouldn't even go get high in. Okay. And I was a crackie, and I'm a crackie when I'm out there. These are places I wouldn't even, they are placing her places I wouldn't even go get high in.

Bob Edwards: Where she was, out there, happens to be the very same neighborhood where she is now being sheltered, though her new job as a cashier is quite different from the past.

Donna Green: I used to do trick right here coming up the other road. This used to be one of my strips. And I'm fine with it. I don't want to go back out there, it's too cold, and, actually, before my son come in, there was a guy that I dated that died, had full-blown AIDS. I'm clean. It doesn't make sense to go, it's computing, it's coming to grips, it doesn't make sense to go back out there and have unprotected sex and get burnt. I'm not trying to build myself up, but when I get high I left my kids in the house with food, everything was on but the cable.

I lived, my mother is the resident manager in the building I lived, and in my crazy thinking, and it was real stupid and crazy, leaving them in her building to me was cool. You know? To me, not taking the manners to my house was fine. And, actually, I even thought the other day, I wish nobody had called on us, because we did better, other than me getting high, but I knew where my kids where. When I finished, they

were home. And I know it sounds stupid, but it was rational to me at the time.

Bob Edwards: Donna Green seems to understand her past decisions have put her kids at risk and essentially caused her teenage daughter to be pregnant and homeless. Her daughter was allowed to move in with her temporarily at the House of Ruth after giving birth to her baby girl. But the young family will be back in foster care starting in January. Christel Nichols runs the House of Ruth. She says the problems facing this group are complex and cyclical.

Christel Nichols: People end up at places like House of Ruth because of all of the childhood experiences, and, it does things to us. So any being who would go through that would be altered. If you don't have the immediate and sustained assistance and interventions, it's going to stay altered, and it's altered on a biological level, on an emotional level, on an interactive level. And, so, we need to be aware of that, and understand that. It's not just, "Okay, you know, I've had years and years of abuse, so, therefore, I'm the same as someone who did not." That is just not true. And that's what's so critical with the children.

Bob Edwards: The children are being put at risk through no fault of their own. Legal advocate, Marta Beresin, told me about a family she recently helped.

Marta Beresin: It was a mom with two children, and she's been staying in a public housing building with a friend. I think it's an elderly-only building, so she has to sneak into the building every day so that she doesn't get kicked out or no one notices that she's doubled-up there, because if they notice then her friend will probably get an eviction notice. So, for a while, she wasn't even leaving the building during the day because she didn't want the front desk folks to see her. And, so, her kids weren't going to school. This was when she first called me in September, and I said to her, you've got to get your kids in school.

Deltonia Shrapshire [phonetic]: Moving from place to place, the mobility of the homeless family, is a challenge.

Bob Edwards: Deltonia Shrapshire oversees services for homeless kids in D.C. schools.

Deltonia Shrapshire: Making sure that students have a place to work at night to complete homework is a challenge. Getting parents in for meetings and parent conferences can often be a challenge.

Bob Edwards: Homeless kids have more health problems, learning disabilities, and emotional disorders, making school that much more difficult.

Deltonia Shrapshire: Unfortunately, our children, oftentimes, are not able to articulate, this is bothering me, I

don't know why we are going through this, why am I constantly moving, I'm constantly losing my friends. So we get problems in classrooms because children are exhibiting behaviors that look almost emotionally disturbed.

Bob Edwards: Shrapshire got a call from a school nurse one day who said there was a homeless child who needed dental care. Within days they got him to a dentist.

Deltonia Shrapshire: The child had a cavity that was a natural root canal, it was that deep. They gave him immediate medical attention. He was able to get that resolved, filled, taken care of. I talked to the counselor about a week ago, she said the child is a totally different child. Prior to that he was running in the hallways, he was acting out terribly, because, again, being able to articulate, "I'm in pain, someone help me, please," may not necessarily be the capacity of some of our younger children.

Bob Edwards: In that case the system seemed to work, but Shrapshire's budget has been cut by the Federal Government. As children become teenagers, they may start to challenge the systems and the parents who are supposed to protect them. After the break, how homeless children become homeless teenagers, and other, often violent, reasons that kids would rather hit the streets than stay where they are.

The_Invisible_C]

Bob Edwards: It's the Bob Edwards Show on XMPR. Today, a special broadcast, "The Invisible: Children Without Homes," stories about homeless families and kids.

Earlier, Thomas Healey told us about living with his mother in abandoned buildings. When he was 16, he realized St. Louis probably was not the best place they could be. So, much the same way he left Austin, Texas, four years earlier, he put his finger on a map and hopped a bus to Washington, D.C. Once again, he was split up from his mother, went into an emergency shelter, leaving him alone to fend for himself as a teenager.

Thomas Healey: Most of the time shelters separate men from women. Families, oftentimes, are put into women's shelters. Now once a male child goes past the age of 12, that's usually the cutoff point, and they're not allowed to stay anymore. Which means, they have to go to the men's shelter, or social services. And, yes, there were men shelters that would accept me, but most of the times those places are a death trap for a 13-year old and 14-year old boy. So, the street is a lot safer. I don't have to go through a women's check, I was able to stay basically safe because I was by myself.

Bob Edwards: He had heard horror stories about foster care. So, with his mentally ill mom living in a shelter,

Thomas Healey found a way to survive at Washington's Union Station.

Thomas Healey: I was sleeping there, in and around the by-crack area, next to the parking lot.

Bob Edwards: Were you panhandling?

Thomas Healey: I was panhandling and hustling and occasionally selling a little bit of dope on the side.

Bob Edwards: That's dangerous.

Thomas Healey: I've had a few run-ins that have given me pause and said, "What the hell am I doing, I really wish I could get out of this a lot quicker" than I was, but, when you need cash and you're desperate people will pretty much do anything.

Bob Edwards: Rick Koca is the founder of Stand Up for Kids, a non-profit organization that works on behalf of homeless teenagers.

Rick Koca: Children are on the streets, and they don't want to be, and I mean children, I'm not just talking older youth, certainly. In our country, a case of child abuse is reported every 10 seconds, a child runs away every minute, and 13 children die on the streets every day.

Bob Edwards: There are children who are homeless as part of homeless families.

Rick Koca: That's true.

Bob Edwards: And then there are children who are on their own.

Rick Koca: On their own, more than 1.3 million. If you were to put them all in the same city it would be the seventh largest city in the United States. And other things we know about them, Bob, are that 20 to 40 percent of all the kids on the street are gay, lesbian, transgendered, or, another 20 to 40 percent are all failures of the foster care system.

Bob Edwards: Sexual factors out of financial survival, or--?

Rick Koca: If you're asking me, do kids get involved in prostitution, within 48 hours of leaving home 42 percent do. You know, and the young people that we work with, they'll tell you, that, well, at least I'm not over there on that avenue selling my body, and the kids over there will say, well, at least I'm not over there on that avenue selling drugs to other kids. You know, we know that over half the children on the streets are under the age of 15, about 650,000 of them.

So if you're under the age of 15, you can't legally work, what would you do to survive every day? Get up and beg for money? Lots of kids do. Steal things and sell them, or steal food? Lots of kids do. Could you do that every day, week in, week out, month in, month out? Not without getting caught, which means you break the law every day, which means you end up

in jail, you end up in juvi, you end up locked up, you end up in group homes, and you stay for X amount of time and then you end up on the streets again.

Theresa Phelps [phonetic]: I was actually introduced to the idea of prostitution when I was 11. My stepfather asked my sister if she would have sex with someone. She was a virgin at the time. He knew somebody that would buy her virginity from her.

Bob Edwards: Theresa Phelps says she was sexually abused by her stepfather. And her mother, tired of dealing with her rebellious daughter, abandoned Theresa on the front steps of juvenile hall in Fresno, California. Because the 12-year old hadn't done anything wrong, the authorities couldn't take her in. She slept in the doorway for three days, and then was placed in a group home before running off with a girlfriend. This is how she survived.

Bob Edwards: You said a "friend's uncle took me to Motel Drive for the first time and told me that he would take care of me and I would take care of him, and I was supposed to know what that meant."

Theresa Phelps: Exactly.

Bob Edwards: "And I did, by that time. I knew what that meant. I knew that meant I was supposed to have sex with him." That's a lot for a 12-year old to understand.

Theresa Phelps: Yes, it was, and it was scary, and I wanted a way out. The thing about being alone and on the streets like that is there is nowhere to go, your parents have already abandoned you and let you out. That night, when my friend's uncle picked me up, I had been kicked out of a place where I was taking care of her aunt's kids.

Bob Edwards: Why?

Theresa Phelps: I just didn't have any place to live, so I was their live-in nanny, I guess you'd say, and I did it for leftovers, just so I had something to eat. This one, I was staying with a friend's aunt, and they were drug addicts, but I didn't think that they would ever hurt me. The father came into the room one day, and, I was sleeping in the boys' room, I was taking care of these little toddlers, and started trying to get into bed with me, and the wife caught him. Then the next day she just said, "I don't need a 12-year old as much as I need a husband, as much as I want to get rid of him I have to get rid of you." That's when I left, onto the street again, and had nowhere to go.

Bob Edwards: That dynamic shows up so much when a woman has to choose between a provider and who is doing wrong and --

Theresa Phelps: It was the same thing with my mom. She basically asked me to leave because she was not going to leave her husband for the things he was doing.

Bob Edwards: You're out on the streets and you got into some trouble there.

Theresa Phelps: Yes. My friend's uncle took me to Motel Drive, basically he bought me a hot dog and a coke, and pulled me close to him and said, "I'm going to take care of you and you're going to take care of me." I was sick to my stomach. He took me to this Villa Motel on Motel Drive in Fresno.

I went straight to the bathroom and just remember thinking, "I want to get the hell out of here and there's no way to get out, and I just have to do what I have to do," and kind of just pleased him, and then he left and said, "I'm going to bring you some things in the morning, a comb, toothbrush." You know, that's what I was doing it for, for shampoo, for normal day-to-day sustenance, and that's what's really sickening.

Bob Edwards: Theresa Phelps lived like that for years. When she was 18, a social worker eventually helped her to get off the street and into school. She is now 30 and recently graduated from UCLA with an MBA and a law degree. She has the courage to talk about her past life. But what about now?

Bob Edwards: What about personal relationships?

Theresa Phelps: I was proposed to on the Eiffel Tower. I've been in very highly romantic relationships that have been fabulous, and I haven't settled down yet.

Bob Edwards: You understand where I was going, just wondering if it was made impossible for you to have a normal --

Theresa Phelps: No, but one thing I would identify with, is, I am dealing with issues from that time when the cop picked me up and I was 12 and arrested me and didn't take me to a hospital. The pimp, or one of the people that he sold me to, gave me Chlamydia, and it's a pretty common STD. Because it wasn't addressed right away, and I wasn't taken to the hospital and given medication for it, it stayed in my body for two years until I fell over with a fever and was bleeding and it caused permanent damage that may prevent me from having children.

Bob Edwards: If you could go down to juvenile hall, or wherever, and put them all on a bus and give them a tour, where would you take them?

Theresa Phelps: I'd go to the tracks, the tracks where the girls are. I mean, it's monstrous. Taxi-cab drivers, taxi-cab companies, limo drivers, hotels, all these people make money off of kids being prostituted on the streets, and it's absolutely disgusting. We go to bed at night, and we put our head on our pillow, and we don't think about the fact that this is happening in our neighborhoods. I mean, that's the first place I would go. And I would say, tell a kid that you care, and just watch them change. It takes so little. You know,

somebody told me I had potential, they didn't even say, "You're smart," they said, "You have potential."

Bob Edwards: Has anything gotten better out there since you were out there?

Theresa Phelps: It's gotten worse. Worse, with Craig's List, with Las Vegas having prostitution be legal, kids are trafficked into Las Vegas and people think it's okay when they go to a convention to sleep with a kid. It's not okay. I don't care if that kid is sexy, if they're putting on a show for you, if they're acting like they like it, it doesn't matter.

The average age of entry into prostitution is 12-years old. Twelve years old! And the average length that a prostitute spends in their career is five years. So, if you think about it, it's like 12-16 you start to figure out, yes, you can get job, and you'd rather flip burgers or serve coffee than sell your body. It's a no-brainer.

Bob Edwards: Abuse of all kinds is common before, during and after being homeless as a teenager, and that was clear from the teens we talked with at the Sasha Bruce House in Washington, D.C. That program provides emergency shelter and services for homeless and runaway teens.

Zanoni Bishop [phonetic], now 17, says she ran away from home after she and her mentally ill mother moved to DC.. four

years ago. She said, rather than deal with her family drama, it was better to couch-surf, moving from friend's house to friend's house. And when she wore out those welcomes, she would sleep in the park.

Bob Edwards: How come the authorities didn't know about you?

Zanoni Bishop: I don't know, oh, maybe because I always went to school.

Bob Edwards: You always went to school?

Zanoni Bishop: Always went to school, no matter if I was hungry or if I was filthy or what it was, I'd always go to school.

Bob Edwards: And your teachers, did they know you weren't?

Zanoni Bishop: I think my English teacher knew my situation pretty well.

Bob Edwards: Aren't they supposed to call foster care or something, child services?

Zanoni Bishop: I guess, but, he didn't.

Bob Edwards: Do you ever think about foster care?

Zanoni Bishop: I think I can make it without foster care.

Bob Edwards: In the park?

Zanoni Bishop: I can make it.

Bob Edwards: How do you eat?

Zanoni Bishop: Well, at school they have free breakfast, so, of course I get breakfast, and, you know, I can nibble off somebody's plate for lunch. Dinner, like, even now, I don't eat dinner. I think I've gotten used to not eating dinner because I won't, I just won't eat dinner.

Bob Edwards: Nobody makes a call here, nobody thinks maybe--?

Zanoni Bishop: Uh-uh.

Bob Edwards: They just let you drift? Doesn't that strike you as odd?

Zanoni Bishop: No. I know a lot of people who drift.

Bob Edwards: That was a trend among all of the kids that we talked with; they had been neglected time and time again, by people who should have cared. And, like almost all of the homeless teens we talked to, Zanoni suffered from more than just neglect.

Zanoni Bishop: I had a stepmom who would like really, really beat me. I remember one time she beat me so bad that I forgot what happened, like, my brother and my sister had to tell me what happened because I absolutely could not remember. And me and my mom got into, like, a ridiculous fight about something, and I remember that she landed a vase on the top of my head, and I wanted to kill her. In my mind, I saw myself, like, killing her, and hiding her body. And nobody would ever

really find out because she's a psychopath anyway. And if they did find out I could always just say it was self-defense, because she's loony. And if I went to jail, hell, I'd have a warm place to stay.

Bob Edwards: She said she found her way to the Sasha Bruce House because she needed a place to study for her advanced placement exams.

Zanoni Bishop: So, like, this is a point where I really wanted some place just to, like, settle down. I needed some place where I can finish studying, some place where I can be warm, and some place where I can eat.

Bob Edwards: Okay, just to back track here. You are drifting between friends, and the park, and you're taking AP courses?

Zanoni Bishop: Yes, AP world history, AP U.S. history, AP lit and AP chemistry.

Bob Edwards: Where are you doing all this homework?

Zanoni Bishop: Oh my God, like, you have to do your homework before the sun goes down, because if you don't, then you're going to have to do it by the streetlight, and your eyes are going to start aching. If I get it done outside, under the sunlight, that's cool, but the English lit class was hard because you've got to read a lot, and you don't even just have to read, you have to critically read. And then the chemistry

class, oh my God, this was, like, hard, because I'm the worst at math.

Bob Edwards: So you'll graduate in June?

Zanoni Bishop: January.

Bob Edwards: January.

Zanoni Bishop: I'll finish in January.

Bob Edwards: Oh, you're close.

Zanoni Bishop: Yes, but I want to stay and take some, what they call, padding classes, just like to boost my GPA. I have, like, a 3.7 right now, but I can, I think that I can work harder.

Bob Edwards: What do you want to do?

Zanoni Bishop: I want to do international business with a minor in linguistics, first, then I want to do international law, and then I want to do mass communications. I want to take it step-by-step because my main, my core interest is emerging economies, like Brazil and Latin America. They have, like, their rainforest is holding the cure to everything. So if can, like, affect laws that are being made in terms of how they are treating this environment, then, at least I can make that little, little difference.

Bob Edwards: Joseph Coles [phonetic] is the other extreme. He's optimistic about life. He has some pretty big challenges ahead of him. When we first asked Joseph Coles

where he was before he ended up at Sasha Bruce when he was 17, he said he lived with his aunt.

Bob Edwards: So why are you here?

Joseph Coles: Well, because, say you're on the middle of the 12th grade, there was a lot of stuff going on at home, and, you know, it was, like, my aunt and me, my cousin, plus my cousin's boyfriend, all living in a one-bedroom apartment. I'm a young man doing well for myself, and, you know, I couldn't do that if I'm surrounded by negative influence, or, you know, you know, shoved in a house with five people in a one-bedroom apartment. That ain't healthy, especially if you try and work.

Bob Edwards: What was it like when you were little?

Joseph Coles: Well, you know, when I was young I didn't have much of a childhood. My mom died when I was a baby. My father was paralyzed when I was 7. My grandmother died when I was 5. At the age of, I think, 6, my father moved me down to North Carolina with his wife and his daughter. A year later he got, he blew up, stopped walking, so I pretty much had to raise myself, you know, take care of my father, take care of the house, because my stepmother, she only had one arm, she abused me a lot. So, I was taking care of my father, cleaning up around the house, was like more of a bellboy, than, you know, a son.

Bob Edwards: You said "drama in North Carolina," that's several dramas. So, you moved here?

Joseph Coles: Yes, I moved to D.C. with my aunt, because, you know, my aunt, she got drama with them too. You know, I didn't feel wanted because, you know, I get a check for, well, I used to get a check for \$650, based on my learning disability, and my father and my aunt fought against that. So, you know, I believe, like, that's the only reason that I probably had a home when I was in D.C. That's how I feel. Like now, you know, I'm out on my own, my aunt about to get kicked out of her apartment because they can't pay the rent, but, I can't do for them right now. You know?

Bob Edwards: We soon learned that what he called "drama" meant physical beatings. He described the abuse inflicted by his stepmother, abuse which the authorities ignored.

Joseph Coles: I've been choked; I got a cut in the middle of my head, chest, shoulders. I mean, me being a kid, you know, they didn't really believe what I said, because, you know, their story always out-weighed mine. So, I had to stick it out.

Bob Edwards: How old were you when you were getting all these injuries?

Joseph Coles: It was between the ages of 11 and 13, my teenage years, because that's when I stopped letting her do

what she wants. I never hit her, but I wasn't going to keep constantly letting her hit me either.

Bob Edwards: Did your father witness any of this?

Joseph Coles: Yes, my father seen it all. But, you know, I guess because of the grades I used to bring home, it was, you know, I was a troublemaker, but it wasn't never really like that, it was just some effect. When I was young I wasn't the one everybody said, hey, well where's that Joseph now? I was the one with the cross-eyes. I was the one with the Payless Shoes on, with the holey t-shirt. Now, I hope I do get finished so I can show you all, and let you all take a look around my apartment because, you know, when I was young I didn't have too much.

Bob Edwards: Now he does have some of those things he liked as a child, and he was eager to show them off.

Bob Edwards: I've got to see this closet. Oh my! It'll take you a week to pack. You've got the suit, a nice gray suit, looking good. You've got the shirts. How'd you get so neat?

Joseph Coles: That comes from my childhood, cleaning up behind my father and everybody will get you that way.

Bob Edwards: So, one last question for Joseph.

Bob Edwards: What do you think you need that isn't being addressed?

Joseph Coles: What I need I can't get, so I've got to replace it with everything else. I need my father. I need my family. I don't have that. So, you know, that's my biggest need right now. There's not anything else, because, you know, pretty much the basics I can handle, I've been doing it all my life, but, I mean, I need my family. I don't have them.

Bob Edwards: The conclusion of today's documentary will be just after the break.

The_Invisible_D]

Bob Edwards: Welcome back to, "The Invisible: Children Without Homes," a special broadcast from the Bob Edwards Show about homeless family and youth. We return to the story of DC Village. In September the Mayor announced he was closing the city's only shelter for families. Over the next several weeks, the nation's capital scrambled to find apartment-style housing and get the families of DC Village moved into the new sites throughout the city. Because of that backlog, they stopped accepting any new families into the system.

Carrie: Ohhhhh, I made a big mess, someone is going to have to wash this blanket.

Bob Edwards: Unfortunately for Carrie, whose name has been changed, and her 6-week old baby, that was just about the time that she realized they were homeless. Nine months prior,

Carrie was locked up, then she learned that she was pregnant. During her jail time she was evicted from her apartment, and she said she lost everything, including important paperwork, clothing and furniture. When we talked to her, Carrie was living doubled-up, sleeping on a back porch without heat, in a house where her paralyzed mother lives with three other people. Carrie has five children, but the newborn is the only one in her custody.

Carrie: I'm recovering. I'm a year clean, and I'm trying to stay clean and sober. I'm trying to be a better mom. I'm trying to be there for my children. I have other children, but they are grown. I have another teenager that is staying with a family member in another state. So I have this baby here with me, with nowhere to go.

Bob Edwards: So, unemployed, and just released from jail, like other homeless families in D.C., she went to the intake shelter down near the city's navy yard.

Carrie: Today I was told that they weren't taking any more intakes. I was like, "Please, Ma'am, could you please take me, because I catch a cab down here, I have no place to stay, I'm homeless." She was like, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and take you, but the intake list is closed for today." And then she said, "Have you seen the District section in *The*

Washington Post today, where they closed DC Village," and that's one of the reasons why they have nowhere to put people.

Bob Edwards: Carrie receives \$236 a month from public assistance, not nearly enough for diapers and food, much less housing. Clarence Carter knows her needs as well as anyone in Washington, D.C. He is the Director of Human Services in the nation's capital, and one of his challenges is to help women like Carrie learn to take care of themselves, and their children. Another challenge is how to spend tax dollars on D.C.'s homeless.

Bob Edwards: Mayor Fenty said that apartment-style housing is more economical.

Clarence Carter: Well, it is more economical, and I'll just take DC Village as an example. We were expending, as a city, an average of \$84,000 per family a year to house them at DC Village. Now, you could take that same amount, if you were to put that amount of money in that family's hand, they could certainly purchase, or rent, a residence within the District. And, so, as we have moved folks to these scattered site houses, getting them out of that congregate style is absolutely more economically efficient in the District.

Bob Edwards: Have all the families been placed in apartments now?

Clarence Carter: All 115 families that were in DC Village when my tenure began on the 23rd of July have been moved to apartment-style shelters.

Bob Edwards: So who are all these people on waitlists for housing?

Clarence Carter: Well, there continue to be many individuals in the District of Columbia who are, how shall I say, they are doubled-up with a relative or a friend, they don't have their own space. Those are individuals that still have the challenge of not having their own place that they can call home, whether that's something they own or rent in the District.

Bob Edwards: Two weeks ago that list was 200 families long.

Clarence Carter: Yes, sir, and, individuals, I'm sorry, families will continue to present, and, so, we simply continue the work to identify these new scattered site units, and as families present themselves for being homeless we attempt to not only find suitable housing for them but also look at the conditions that are attended to them being homeless, address those aspects also, so that we can not only find shelter, but grow them beyond homelessness.

Bob Edwards: The new emergency hypothermia shelter for this winter is going to be the old DC General Hospital?

Clarence Carter: It will be, actually, overflow capacity, yes, sir. I'm going to put 144 men there, additional, there will be space there for 50 families, which, again, will be overflow space. If we've used up all the other space, we would have space for 50 families and 144 men on the campus of DC General. Yes, sir.

Bob Edwards: Doesn't that present the possibility, the potential, of a return to communal living?

Clarence Carter: No, again, what will be different this time is that this is truly what we are doing for the hypothermia season, and it is overflow space. When the hypothermia season ends, we will no longer use these facilities as an intervention for our homeless families.

Bob Edwards: So they have closed DC Village because the communal style setting there is illegal, but, a month later, they have opened up another illegal facility, just in a different location. Even if DC General is open only for the winter season, that doesn't mean the homeless problem will go away with the bad weather in the spring. Those kids and families will still be out there.

There is one who is still not out there, though, Thomas Healey. When I talked to Healey in New York in June he was nearing the end of his spring semester at Columbia University. He has moved back to D.C. to attend George Washington

University on a full scholarship. Amazing, considering he was a 5th grade dropout.

Bob Edwards: Got an Ipod?

Thomas Healey: Yes, got an Ipod.

Bob Edwards: Got to have an Ipod.

Thomas Healey: I've got to have an Ipod. It's just, that was the big symbol that I had made it. I had spent a good many years watching people with those little white ear buds, you know, just kind of wander past me. And, so, it's kind of hard to panhandle when people have earphones in. Excuse me, spare change? You've got to wave at them. It's a pain in the ass. So, eventually I got my Ipod, and, boy, I really joined the whole mobile set.

Bob Edwards: Gina Kline watched Tom evolve through the system.

Gina Kline: Tom is miraculous in that he has a certain way about him of continuing to fly right, and, certainly, all of the incentives would have taken him in another direction. There was an inner-character that enabled him to negotiate those very difficult choices.

Bob Edwards: Tom has his own perspective.

Thomas Healey: I suppose a small part of me feels, you know, well, I made it out there, I owe the universe something for having let me escape my former life. And a large part of

it is me wanting to understand how it is that I could have lived this sort of life, how the system could have failed so miserably. When you grow up for the first 12 years of your life hearing about the American dream, and then watching it crumble around you in a heartbeat, there is a disconnect from reality where you have to say to yourself, "What just happened to me?" And even to this day, I still have, I still have almost no idea. Looking back on it, it's incomprehensible trying to figure out what happened.

Bob Edwards: In the past hour we've heard of the many ways a parent's bad luck, bad judgment, or just plain badness can leave a child homeless. A medical calamity, job loss, divorce, domestic violence, homophobia, cruelty, mental illness, substance abuse, it's a long list. The changing economy, mushrooming foreclosures, and tens of millions of Americans without health insurance guarantee that more children will be homeless in the future.

Homelessness robs young people of their childhood, which is supposed to be a time of innocence, unburdened by financial worry, a time to learn, a time to play. The saddest stories we've heard are from children who are not just homeless, but loveless, kids who have never had a loving relative to give them hope, comfort and guidance. Indeed, some of the young people you've heard are already parents themselves, children

having children. City services and charity may spare them death on the streets, but who repairs the hole in the heart of the unloved child?

The Bob Edwards Show is produced by Steve Lickteig, Dan Bloom, Chad Campbell, Andy Danyo, Ed McNulty, Cristy Meiners, Ariana Pekary, Geoffrey Redick, Shelley Tillman, and Sam Wright. Our email address is Bob@XMRadio.com. For information about today's program, read our blog, and to download our free pod cast, go to BobEdwardsRadio.com.

Tomorrow, 60 years after the trial of the Hollywood Ten, we'll hear from a blacklisted actress and screenwriter. Thanks for listening. This is XMPR, channel 133.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]