

America's Invisible Children

Lillian: School, I love school. School is like kind of my thing. I like to read any kind of books, trying to learn something every day, trying to do my best. It makes me very sad and every time my, my friends ask me, "Where, where's your bus stop, where do you live?" It's kind of hard, really hard question to answer.

Male narrator: In the next hour you will meet just a few of America's 1.3 million homeless children. You'll be shocked by their personal stories of hardship. Jodeena: I stayed at the park on a bench and it was kind of – I was scared. Male narrator: You'll see the enormity of the problem.

Karen Fessler: Six thousand kids in our city experiencing homelessness. We're not even hitting half of them. Male narrator: Most of all you'll be amazed by the determination of these children to defy the odds and overcome the obstacles of the nameless, faceless world of homelessness. They are America's invisible children. (Children singing My Country Tis of Thee) My Country tis of the sweet land of liberty. Of thee I sing.

Joan Lunden: Hello, I'm Joan Lunden. We all know that America has a homeless problem. We see the adults in a sleeping bag under an overpass or asking for change on a street corner, but not children - but they are there. An estimated 1.3 million children in this country are without homes. Where are they? They do not hold up signs or advertise their situation. It is just too embarrassing and too dangerous for them. They are hidden away, sleeping from house to house, on a friend's floor or in a shelter or simply riding the bus all night long. The only hope they have to rise up and out of their situation and break the chain of poverty is to get an education.

Robert: I've had my daughter for six years on my own. Her mother just recently got out of jail because she abused her her daughter from what I understand. Female narrator: This is Tampa, Florida, where people come to enjoy the beach, but for Brittany and her father Robert, the beach is no longer a place for fun.

Robert: When this first started happening, I lost hope. I thought this was it; this is the bottom line. The plant closed down in Georgia and the place we were living in, you know, the bills kept getting so high. I lost my electricity first and then I lost my water and then my gas went out. So I ended up losing the house.

Female narrator: To survive after he lost his job, Robert sold everything he had except a few tools and his vehicle. They were fully paid off and he knew he needed them to make a living. Robert is a trained carpenter and building maintenance engineer with many skills and eighteen years of experience, but in Georgia no one was hiring. So he and Brittany headed to Florida in a desperate attempt to find work. Unfortunately, once they got to Tampa, Robert discovered that jobs were hard to find there too.

Robert: I'll work my butt off, whatever it takes to make a dollar. I'm not afraid of nothing, I'll work. I, I even tried applying at McDonalds. It just is not happening. Female narrator: Robert also found that while there was assistance for mothers with children, there was much less available for a single father.

Robert: No program out there for a man and a child. Shelter-wise, that that doesn't exist. Me and my daughter ended up staying right here at this beach and live right here in this car, put the seat back. Brittany: Living in the car is okay, but you don't have a bathroom or food. You can't wash your clothes. I can't have any friends come visit me. I have no toys.

Female narrator: Despite living in the car, Brittany still needed to go to school. Fortunately, there are people like Kathy Wiggins who can help. Kathy Wiggins: To date, within the school district, we have just under 1900 students, identified and coded as homeless.

Female narrator: Kathy works as a homeless liaison. According to the 1987 McKinney-Vento act, every school district in the country is required to designate a homeless education liaison to ensure that even students without homes can get

an education. Kathy gave Robert some gas cards to help get Brittany to school. Today, she is helping seven-year old Paige. Kathy: All right, so this morning we were working on getting you home from school, all right? And try and get the bus set up because the bus maybe can come right to the hotel.

Female narrator: Paige and her mother and father arrived in Tampa on a bus a week ago. After becoming unemployed in Illinois, they came down here in search of a better life. But they have already found out jobs are not as plentiful as they expected. The family's remaining savings have been used up to pay for a cheap motel.

Kathy: And what are some of the things that she is going to need for school?Paige: Ice cream!Kathy: Does she have a backpack with school supplies and everything?Kathleen: Uh uh.Kathy: No, okay.

Female narrator: Fifteen minutes later Kathy is headed to another school. It's yet another day where she feels like she's just stretched too thin.Kathy: We're already overwhelmed and every day, a new day of families. We get, on average, five new ones, sometimes a day, easily ten, fifteen a week, and each one of those are a crisis.

Female narrator: Robert worries about the future.Robert: This gets emotional. I cry a lot you know, I you know and my inspiration – she keeps me going. The feeling is deep - just to have to deal with all this this – pretty deep – it really is. It is really hard.

Female narrator: 1500 miles away is Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, the twin cities, home to 660,000 people and 9,000 homeless children. It's 5:30 AM. Lillian and her nine-year old sister Delilah are waking up for school inside a cardboard cubicle in a church basement shelter.

Lillian: Every day I go to school, I just wear, I have to wear the same uniform. I try not to get stains in my clothes and everything. I just try to try to fix myself up cause I don't want to be going to be school looking raggely. If one person knows I live in a shelter, they're going to spread a rumor about it and I'm gonna feel very bad about that. If they did know, they'll say, "You don't have a home? You don't have a mom?"

Female narrator: Lillian's mother left two months ago. She went to live in Chicago with her boyfriend.Lillian: That makes me very very sad, how my mom just left – up and left us like that and never came back. And I don't think she's ever going to come back. I don't have a mom to wake me up in the morning and do my hair. I don't have a mom to tuck me anymore and I don't have a mom to love me, but I do have my dad though.

Female narrator: Frank is doing the best he can to bring up Lillian and Delilah on his own.Frank: A bus line is not set up for both so I have to take them by by a city bus and it's a pretty hectic job, leaving this early in the morning.Female narrator: It's a long two-hour trip. If they miss any buses along the way, they run the risk of being late for school.

Lillian: The worst thing about riding the city bus every morning, it takes a really long time for me to get to school. I'm always late for everything like morning meetings, breakfast, stuff that my teacher says.Female narrator: From the last bus stop, it's a twenty-minute walk to Lilly's school.Lillian: This is what we're trying to get right now, a yard where we can play in, a house that's nice. It's now 8:11.

Frank: Wow, we're early.Lillian: Finally.Female narrator: Today is a rare day. Lillian makes it on time to school, but Delilah still has her journey to the other side of town.Frank: She's supposed to be in at nine o'clock and her bus doesn't get here until 9:13, so you're going to miss breakfast, right?

Female narrator: Back on the other side of town, Lillian is at her second class. It's her favorite, reading. At 2:30 Frank heads back to meet Lillian for their two-hour bus ride to pick up Delilah and then get back to the shelter. But tonight they take a side trip to show us their old home.

Lillian: My room was right there, that window, the big one up at the top. When we were moving I was kind of hoping that we would take Sabrina with us but I don't thing that's gonna happen because we're up in a shelter right now and they don't allow pets.

Female narrator: Lillian and her family didn't leave this house and join America's homeless by choice. Frank has worked hard all his life but a heart attack and other medical problems caused his unemployment so now money is short. Ultimately though, it wasn't the lack of money that forced them out of the house, it was gang violence.

Frank: And one night my son was approached by gang members and they hit him in the head with a gun and robbed him, took his wallet. Lillian: Too many gang members, shootings, fightings. Frank: I knew then it was time for me to get out of the neighborhood.

Female narrator: Frank did not have the money saved for the deposit and first and last month's rent needed to move into even the cheapest apartment. Fortunately, a nearby church allows people to sleep in the basement at night. Frank: We're just trying to start our lives over again.

Lillian: This is where I sleep. This is where my sister sleeps. This is where my daddy sleeps. With me living in a room with cardboard around it, it's kind of hard because it's noisy every night, babies crying and everything and can't sleep. Female narrator: At nine o'clock on weeknights it's lights out at the shelter because at 5:30 tomorrow morning, Lillian and the other residents have to wake up and do it all again.

Joan: Besides Lillian, there are 9,000 more homeless children in the twin cities. We'll be right back.

Male narrator: Coming up, one student in rural America deals with a devastating accident. Sarah: Didn't think that would happen to us but it could happen to anybody. Male narrator: When we return to America's Invisible Children.

Female narrator: What percentage of America's children live in shelters, A. 10 %, B. 24%, C. 56%? The answer when we come back. To take the full quiz and learn more, log on to America'sInvisibleChildren.com. 24% of America's homeless children live in shelters.

Joan: America has 1.3 million children experiencing homelessness. They keep their unfortunate situation to themselves so that no one will know. They are truly invisible. In fact, you've probably met several of them and you just don't know it. Teen 1: Order up.

Female narrator: America's homeless youth do not fit any stereotype. They are bright elementary students and high school cheerleaders, football players, members of the band and even celebrities have been homeless. Jewel: I ended up homeless and living in my car for about a year and I had bad kidneys at the time. I couldn't afford, you know, medication or things like that. For me the biggest obstacle of being homeless or being poor was hopelessness.

Female narrator: The majority of these homeless children are not living in cars or even shelters. 54% are in a situation commonly called "doubled up", where they regularly rotate between several homes of friends or relatives who will let them stay but only for a few days at a time. Then they are sent off to somewhere else continuing their cycle of homelessness. This is Pikeville in eastern Kentucky. Jeff is sixteen years old today. The one present he wants most is a permanent home, but his mother cannot provide that and he's lost contact with his father.

Jeff: The last time I heard from my biological father would definitely be two, three months. Female narrator: But Jeff has a talent that not only helps him escape his problems it may, in the future, help him out of poverty. Robert Scheeler: He started actually in sixth grade he started on the clarinet and within two weeks we already knew he was going to be a star. When he decided in his eighth grade year that he wanted to change to trumpet, he had picked it up faster than anybody and he had just taken what it takes people years to be able to do.

Female narrator: As Jeff performs in the first chair position with his school band at an annual competition, it's hard to tell that he's homeless. Jeff: Well, the kids at school don't know because I usually conceal it, keep it secret. I've deceived them into thinking that I'm just a normal middle class kid. I'm, I'm defensive when it comes to my financial situation because literally I cannot help it. The reason I'm in this situation is because my parents never received an education. I intend to receive that so I won't have to go through the exact same thing like a chain cycle.

Female narrator: As determined as Jeff is, overcoming obstacles to go to school is a daily challenge. Jeff: There are

certain times of the month where we do have food and certain times where food is scarce here. I usually go from place to place. There are five different houses that take residents in.

Robert Scheeler: And there are no clothes at those particular places so he may wake up to go to school, be all ready to go but he has the same clothes on that he had the day before. So it's difficult for him to be able to go to school. Jeff: It is difficult to keep track of my belongings. My possessions, I usually lose them. I lose my tape players often and I have to borrow someone else's to get through class.

Female narrator: One thing Jeff hasn't lost is his love for music. Fortunately someone recognized that and helped him focus on it despite the chaos around him. Jeff: This trumpet was purchased by Rick Branham, the homeless coordinator in Pike County.

Rick Branham: That's what this program is about, is keeping homeless children in school because if we can keep them in school until they graduate, you know their chances of success are far far far greater. Female narrator: And today, on Jeff's sixteenth birthday, Rick has a surprise for him, something he'll need to progress to the next level.

Rick: If you're committed to rising above the way you have been raised, getting your high school education, getting a college education, then my commitment to you will be that we will buy you the professional trumpet that you need in order for you to fulfill, you know, your dream. That's what we'll do, you know, so that means your gonna stay in school.

Jeff: Oh I'm by no means gonna drop out of high school under any circumstance. Female narrator: Even though he's made a big difference in the life of this talented young person, Rick knows there are many others that need help. Rick: I'm not reaching all the kids that I need to reach. You know, I'm one person. I have 23 schools. We're the largest county east of the Mississippi River. No, I'm not getting them all.

Female narrator: On the other side of town another talented young person is homeless and needs help. Sarah: I love to draw. I want to try to become an artist. Female narrator: But her goal to graduate from high school and go on to art school will be difficult to achieve. Sarah's life was deeply affected by a tragedy that has had a far-reaching impact on this area.

Judge Wayne T. Rutherford: No family, including myself, has not been touched in Pike County. We've all been touched. Female narrator: In eastern Kentucky, coal is abundant but so is something else – prescription drug abuse, especially involving the powerful and addictive painkillers oxyContin and hydrocodone. Judge Rutherford: We have a severe drug epidemic here. We became the oxyContin capital of America.

Female narrator: Heavy industry often produces injuries that require painkillers, but the large amounts of these drugs in this community allow drug abuse to skyrocket. Betty has been struggling to care for her four grandchildren since their parents were put in prison and rehab.

Betty: The reason that the grandchildren are with me is because D.P.P. stepped in and they removed three of them from the home – from the mother and daddy – and it was all on account of drugs.

Female narrator: While Sarah and her siblings were trying to concentrate at school while living with a broken home life and poverty, they were unprepared for what would happen next. Betty: On the sixth day of March my house burnt. Sarah: My brother Austin, he came in here and told Mamaw that the house was on fire.

Betty: It's hard to talk about. Down there, my home used to sit down there. Female narrator: Betty had no insurance. She couldn't afford it. Right now she and her four grandchildren are doubled up in a relative's mobile home. But next month they will have to move and they have nowhere to go.

Betty: You know I've went to trailer lots. I tell them how much I've got and there was one trailer lot wanted me to pay \$6,000 down and I can't hardly have six dollars sometimes let alone six thousand. Female narrator: Rick is trying to help Betty and her grandchildren but he single-handedly assists 480 homeless children in his district. He can supply

one trumpet, but not housing for them all.

Rick: Those cases are the worst. They they have to start over from nothing. Male narrator: Coming up, an honors student struggles to rise above her horrible past. Stephanie: My stepmom started the fire, then she took gasoline and poured it all over the house, inside the house and set it on fire pretty much. Male narrator: When we return to America's Invisible Children.

Female narrator: How many of America's Homeless Children are under the age of 5? 50,000, 100,000 or 500,000? The answer when we come back. To take the full quiz and learn more, log on to America's Invisible Children.com. 500,000 American children under the age of 5 are homeless.

Joan: Many of America's 1.3 million homeless children continue to fall under the category of unaccompanied youth: young people who have no parent or guardian they can count on. They are truly on their own at much too young an age. Female narrator: Zack, like many in his situation, has been couch surfing for years, living day-to-day, sleeping wherever someone will let him.

Zack: Right now I am homeless. I go from couch to couch to find somewhere to sleep every night. Female narrator: Young people like Zack all have one thing in common: it was not their fault. Zack: My parents brought me up to a camp in Ely, Minnesota. It's a month-long camp and they dropped me off and they never came back and got me from the camp.

Jodeena: I'm at the Lighthouse right now for kids that don't have anywhere to stay. And I got here because my mother, she didn't want me, so... Romeda: My mother, she put me out basically. Looked these people in the face and said, "Take my child, I don't want her anymore," like it was like they were clothes she was taking back to the store or something.

Cleophus: My mom was neglecting me and she wasn't around. Shawn: My parents got into a divorce. It just went down the tubes from then and I just became homeless. Terrence: My aunt had passed away, the one I was living with, and I had nowhere to go when she had died.

Female narrator: Without any parent in their life, often the only person these young people can look to for help is the school district homeless liaison.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, the homeless education program helps more than 2,000 homeless children every year. Karen Fessler knows that these young people need so much help, she must bend her job description far beyond just getting them enrolled in school.

Karen: Well we're gonna stop by this hotel room to check out why this young lady hasn't been in school. Well she's homeless, she was on the streets and got a hotel room for a couple of nights to avoid staying in the drop-in center, and since then hasn't been in school so I'm going to check and see what's up with her.

Female narrator: The 18 year old girl Karen is checking up on is one of 800 homeless students she works with in her district. Karen: Stephanie, you you gotta get to school. Stephanie: I lost my [inaudible].

Karen: Well you need to look for it. Okay, let's empty your purse and get start looking for it. Female narrator: Stephanie first became homeless at age 9 when she was severely burned in a house fire.

Stephanie: My stepmom started the fire, then she took gasoline and poured it all over the house, inside the house and set it on fire pretty much. She is in jail for the rest of her life. She confessed to it, she killed my little brother, my little brother died, he was seven. He died at the scene. I was very close to my little brother, very very close. It took me a hard long time to accept the fact that I was never gonna see him again. I had to go through over 100 surgeries because they made me a thumb, it was pretty cool.

Female narrator: Since the fire, Stephanie has had little contact with her father and other family members. She spent

the last nine years in foster care but now she has turned 18 and, as an adult in the eyes of the law, she is no longer eligible for a foster home. Now she has found herself homeless once again.

Stephanie: It's hard being homeless, it's it's embarrassing, you know. It's embarrassing, you know, and I think well it's really not my fault. Female narrator: Somehow, despite all the adversity in her life, Stephanie has done well in school. Stephanie: I won outstanding student. I have a trophy like I feel like an Oscar winner or something like that because it's just so amazing.

Female narrator: One of the biggest obstacles homeless students face is the lack of family support for both their achievements and their problems. When Stephanie starts missing school there is no one to ask her why, except Karen. Karen: What's up with these prescriptions? They haven't been filled? So you're not taking any of your medications? Honey? Okay, well, that here's the problem dear. You can't get out of bed, you're tired, you want to sleep all of the time. So you know you need these meds, right? Okay.

Female narrator: Karen makes the necessary arrangements for Stephanie to receive her medications. Hopefully, now she can get back on track toward attaining her life's goal. Stephanie: I want to be a nurse, an RN, a registered nurse at Shriners Hospital for burned children, the burn unit. I was a patient there. Female narrator: Today Stephanie is getting the help she needs but Karen knows that other homeless young people are not.

Karen: There's so many kids out there that still aren't getting served. Last year I served 800 kids. One person cannot intensely provide services for 800 kids in the way that these kids need services provided. Male narrator: Coming up, a talented young dancer finds a way to deal with years of homelessness. Crystal: I just couldn't stop. I was crying, crying, crying and I didn't know why. Male narrator: When we return to America's Invisible Children.

Female narrator: What is the fastest growing segment of the homeless population, single men, teenagers, or families with children? To take the full quiz and learn more, log on to America'sInvisibleChildren.com. Families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.

Joan: Homeless children are often missing essential things to enroll in school: a birth certificate, medical records, and even more shocking, a legal guardian. The law provides the school's homeless education liaison with the power to immediately enroll them anyway. But when it comes to getting the most out of the school experience, often that depends on the sheer determination of the students themselves.

Female narrator: In Independence, Missouri, one amazing homeless student found a way to excel as an honors student, cheerleader and even homecoming queen.

Crystal: Growing up things were pretty good. My mom was a nurse and she made pretty good money. I was a cook and I did lots of sports. I was in dance and everything. We had a house and we had cars and everything. It was going good. And then in seventh grade, things changed. My little brother died due to complications and we didn't take it very well. My mom like got really depressed and so then they just stopped paying the bills and we wouldn't have heat, we wouldn't have electricity. I had to wake up at 4:30 every morning for school and walk to my friend's house and take showers. I mean I didn't want anyone to know at school what was going on.

Female narrator: Starting at the age of 12, Crystal lived with her difficult home life for 4 long years. Crystal: One day, I just got my first job, I turned 16 and I got I remember coming home from the interview and I was like I got a job and my dad said, "The bank took over the house." And I was like so where do we go from there? They just kind of looked at me and said "we have cars." So we were gonna sleep in our cars.

Female narrator: That is when Crystal at 16 years old became homeless. From that time on, she has had very little help from her parents. She moved around, staying in her car or with whomever she could. The pressure of being homeless finally led Crystal to a breakdown in her dance class. Crystal: I just couldn't stop. I was crying, crying, crying and I didn't know why.

Female narrator: But somehow Crystal pulled herself together and persevered. Crystal: And I had to get three jobs to

afford my bills and everything like that. I serve ice cream and make ice cream and I work at Steak 'n' Shake at night. And I also work at a dance studio and I teach beginner acrobat classes and things like that.

Female narrator: Then Crystal was able to rent her own apartment and with help from the school homeless liaison she was able to continue cheerleading. This year, Crystal's incredible "never give up" attitude paid off in many ways. Crystal: I've always wanted to be homecoming queen. It was a great honor, that means obviously I did something right. Female narrator: And now she has been accepted to a university.

Crystal: The life I lived was not my choice and now that I'm going to college I feel like this is where my life begins and I can do what I want to do.

Male narrator: Coming up, a young woman pulls herself up from a devastating home life. Jamechia: Both parents were addicted to drugs and then you know I was struggling to survive, I was really living in poverty. Male narrator: When we return to America's Invisible Children.

Female narrator: Which state has the highest number of homeless children per capita? The answer when we come back. To take the full quiz and learn more, log on to America'sInvisibleChildren.com. Louisiana has the most homeless children in America per capita, but every state has homeless children.

Joan: For more than a million homeless children in America, life is a constant challenge. Many don't know of or can't get to places where they can find help and some are afraid that they might be taken into custody and put somewhere even worse than their current situation, maybe even jail. How would they know? After all, they are only children? Often the only person they feel they could really trust for help is at school, but can they do enough?

Female narrator: Karen Fessler knows first hand that there is not enough money to do all that is needed. In fact, it's not even close.

Karen: We have helped tens of thousands of kids over the years and when I say help I mean we've done everything from helping families enroll children in school, providing backpacks, school supplies, hygiene kits, bus tokens, making transportation arrangements. We need increased funding from the federal government. This is a growing problem. Our numbers go up every year but the money doesn't seem to really increase every year.

Female narrator: So Karen helped develop a nonprofit fund to supplement the federal dollars. Still, it is not enough to deal with the quickly growing problem. Karen: The Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition estimates 6,000 kids in our city experiencing homelessness. Project Connect helps between 2,000 and 2,500 kids a year. We're not even hitting half of them and we know that. If everybody starts calling us and telling us and we start identifying all 6,000 of these kids there's not enough of us to serve them.

Female narrator: All over America homeless children advocates have to seek help wherever they can. Often they look to charities. Steve Guttenberg: Sight For Students is a great program put together by all these terrific companies that afford glasses to children that aren't able to have them because of financial reasons. So far I think over 50,000 kids have gotten glasses.

Female narrator: In a small town south of Rockford, Illinois, today is a special day. The U.S. based international charity Feed The Children is delivering 1600 school backpacks to be distributed among the homeless liaisons from surrounding school districts. Woman 1: Here we've got two boxes of macaroni and cheese dinners with a nice jar of peanut butter and jelly and on the other side here we've got a bag that's filled with all the school supplies they're gonna need to get started for the school year.

Larry Jones: Well we're giving away nearly 50,000 of those backpacks over a year ago, this year we're increasing it to 80,000. And we hope in the next two or three years we'll be able to help every single homeless child who goes to school with a backpack filled with school supplies. Female narrator: In the life of a homeless child who has almost nothing of their own, even something as small as a backpack does seem to make a difference.

Frances Jones: I think the backpacks are important because it gives the child self esteem. I think that child feels like in some way they fit in at school now. Female narrator: Still the list of challenges that young people without homes face every day just to go to school is often overwhelming.

Joe: A lot of people make fun of you because you stink or you look really gross and grubby and it's just really hard. But I still go to school no matter what. Grethell: It was really hard for me to go to school because when I was sleeping in the car and then when I woke up in the morning I didn't have a shower, I didn't have a place to get ready. Jamechia: All my clothes were in my trunk so I would put on the clothes and come to school and try to wash up.

Girl 2: Everybody kind of looks at us like we're bums or we want to be this way but once you get there there's so many obstacles in your way to get out that it just seems almost impossible to find a... Zack: It's hard for me to stay focused when I always have to think about where am I gonna sleep the next night, where am I gonna go? Where am I gonna find a meal, what am I gonna do? Girl 2: I've been jumped maybe a total of seven times in the past two years.

Boy 1: You always have to carry all your textbooks, all your homework and everything on you. Boy 2: ... to be homeless and go to school at the same time. You don't have clothes, you don't have a place to do your homework, you don't get a good night's sleep ever.

Female narrator: In a high school in Kansas City, Jamechia's graduation is rapidly approaching. Jamechia: I grew up in Gaston, Alabama, I was the youngest of 10 kids. From the outside looking in we were like a picture perfect family, but both parents were addicted to drugs and then, you know, I was struggling to survive, I was really living in poverty.

Female narrator: After years of suffering, Jamechia moved up to Kansas City on her own to escape a home life filled with drugs, abuse and evictions. She stayed with whoever would take her in. Soon, things started looking up when she got a job and with the help of the school's homeless liaison, got into an apartment and got back on track in high school. Jamechia: I determined, you know, I'm going to be successful.

Female narrator: Now, her dedication is paying off. Jamechia is graduating at the top of her class and has been accepted to a prestigious university. Jamechia: Everything is really looking up for me. The future excites me and I look forward to that as motivation to seeing what I can become.

Female narrator: In Rockford, Illinois, another student who has experienced homelessness is graduating. Kevin: This all started to happen when my father passed away about four years ago. We lost the house because weren't able to make ends meet pretty much and not pay some of the bills.

Female narrator: Kevin received help from the Rockford school district homeless program. It enabled him to keep up with his activities in the drama department where he is directing Hamlet, and today, he is graduating. Male narrator: Coming up, success, graduation day for some homeless students, but it is bittersweet.

Karen: Unfortunately, I'm one of only a handful of people that's in that audience watching them graduate. I think that's really disappointing. Male narrator: When we return to America's Invisible Children.

Female narrator: What percentage of school districts in the U.S. received the McKinney-Vento funding for homeless assistance, 80%, 40%, or 3%? The answer when we come back. To take the full quiz and learn more, log on to AmericasInvisibleChildren.com.

Larry Jones: Did you know there are 1.3 million children that are homeless today right here in America? Yes, it's true, but there is hope. If these children can get an education, they can break the chain of homelessness and have a future. Feed The Children would like to help them do just that. We want to send every homeless child in America a school backpack filled with essential school supplies, personal care items and ready-to-eat foods and snacks, but we can't do it alone. Please, call our toll free number or log on to FeedTheChildren.org/backpack.

For a small donation of only \$18.00 we can send one backpack, \$90.00 for five backpacks and for only \$180.00 ten backpacks. Send the homeless children in America a message that someone does care. Please, call our toll-free number

or log on to FeedTheChildren.org/backpack. Feed The Children: it's who we are; it's what we do.

Female narrator: Only 3% of school districts in the U.S. receive the McKinney-Vento funds. All of the children in this program are fortunate enough to live in funded districts. Joan: Of the 3.3 million young people graduating from high school in America this year, about 50,000 of them have experienced homelessness during their schooling. Just imagine how taking that diploma in their hands must feel for a homeless student because it was so much harder for them than for anyone else.

Man in white cap and gown sings the National Anthem: Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hail...

Karen: They deserve a thousand people in that audience applauding them because to get to that place has been so much more difficult for them than it is for most kids. For many kids, unfortunately I'm one of only a handful of people that's in that audience watching them graduate and I think that's really disappointing. I want to make sure that the kids get the credit for what they're doing because they're the ones that have gotten up every day and done it, with a little bit of help from people.

Female narrator: Every homeless child you met in this hour has a dream for their future. Lillian: When I grow up I want to be so many things. Brittany: When I grow up I want to be a doctor. Jeff: I'll either make a living out of this, out of playing the trumpet, or teach, or possibly both.

Jodeena: I want to go to high school and graduate and become a lawyer. Jamechia: I am destined to be a judge. Crystal: Maybe a reporter or news anchor or something like that, 'cause the camera loves me. Female narrator: Will they make it through homelessness and reach their life's goals? It will take help from all of us but mostly incredible determination on the part of each child.

Stedman Graham: Just a decision that a person has to make and says you know what, regardless of what my circumstances are, even even though I'm homeless, you know, I'm going to still work hard to try and be somebody. That's a choice. Female narrator: In Illinois, a graduation party is being held by the school for homeless students who otherwise would not have any sort of celebration.

Shaquita: I'm just so happy all I do is just cry thinking about how these people helped me and they came into my life and changed everything. Martharee: And, yeah, now I am going to graduate, it's decided! You make me feel like I just climbed the biggest mountain in the whole United States.

Joan: Yes, all over the country homeless young people are climbing that mountain of challenges they face and making it to the top. But those are the most fortunate ones. The ones who got the help they needed. What about the others? Remember what our advocates said ...

Rick: I'm I'm not reaching all the kids that I need to reach. Karen: We're not even hitting half of them. Kathy: We're already overwhelmed. Female narrator: And these are the lucky ones - they work for funded programs. Of the nearly 15,000 school districts in the U.S., only 450 receive McKinney-Vento money.

Karen: I know in the unfunded districts there's all kinds of kids who are throw-aways and couch surfers who are just out there not attending school.

Female narrator: And the problem is getting larger. Over the 20 years since the McKinney-Vento Act came into law, estimates say that the number of homeless American children more than tripled and it continues to increase at an alarming rate.

Joan: How can we solve this overwhelming tragedy? While these children are victims of circumstance, we need to provide all of them with the education they need and deserve as Americans. After all, our children are our future and within them lies our best hope for solving the problem of homelessness forever. I'm Joan Lunden, thank you for joining us.

Children singing My Country 'Tis of Thee: My country 'tis of thee sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside let freedom ring.-

-- End of Video --