

DATE: 5/18/09
SOURCE: USA Today
HEADLINE: Boy, 11, On Trek to Help Homeless Kids



Boy, 11, on trek to help homeless kids

Updated 5/18/2009 10:20 AM

By **Emily Bazar**, USA TODAY

The first five days of walking are the toughest for Zach Bonner, 11, no matter how hard he trains. The Florida boy's feet ache, his tummy rumbles, his legs stiffen.

But the young philanthropist is on a mission to help homeless children, and after several days of walking at least 11 miles per day, he loosens up and the pain subsides. "I want to help other kids that didn't have the same opportunities," he says.

Zach, who founded the Little Red Wagon Foundation in 2005 to help homeless and underprivileged children, started a 668-mile hike from Atlanta to Washington, D.C., last week. Along the way, Zach is collecting letters from children that he hopes to give President Obama in July.

He has raised about \$35,000 for this portion of the walk so far, he says.

The previous two walks — from Tampa to Tallahassee in 2007 and from Tallahassee to Atlanta in 2008 — brought in about \$42,000 total.

"These kids don't have a home, they don't have a safe place to sleep at night," he says. "They're out on the streets not because they want to be, but because it's out of their control."

The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that 1.5 million children are homeless in the USA at some point each year. "It's getting worse ... because of the depth of the economic recession and the staggering numbers of housing foreclosures nationally," President Ellen Bassuk says.

DATE: 5/18/09

SOURCE: USA Today

HEADLINE: Boy, 11, On Trek to Help Homeless Kids

Zach's push to help other kids began after Hurricane Charley hit Florida in 2004. He went door to door with his wagon to collect water, tarps and other supplies. He collected 27 pick-up truck loads of supplies, he says. "To continue helping kids more efficiently," he says, he and his mother established his foundation in 2005.

Since then, he has thrown holiday parties for kids living in hurricane FEMA trailers and filled about 2,000 backpacks with food, toiletries, candy and toys for homeless children.

Zach, who lives in Valrico, Fla., is in fifth grade. He walks 11 to 13 miles each day with his mother, Laurie Bonner, 43. His sister usually drives a car ahead of them. They sleep in a donated recreational vehicle.

Laurie says "it makes him so happy when he finishes a project and sees all the kids." Zach's progress is tracked at www.LittleRedWagonFoundation.com. Children can e-mail letters for Zach to take to Washington to letterstopres@aol.com.

"He is a very unusual young man," says Deborah Shore, executive director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork in Washington, D.C., which provides services for runaway and homeless teenagers, including a shelter.

"Even as a very young person, he has been able to ... make a difference."