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HEADLINE: Children Forced Into Street By Economy



Children forced into streets by economy

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Children at play



By Anthony Wilson

DURHAM (WTVD) -- Studies show one out of every fifty children in the country is homeless.

The children are part of the worst recession since the Great Depression and they are living among us in shelters and on the streets.

Dawson Locklear's home, for now, is the Samaritan Inn --a service of the Durham Rescue Mission.

He's the 2-year-old son of parents making the transition from homelessness.

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"It's not the kid's fault, it's the parents' fault and I wrestle with that on a daily basis," father Burlie Locklear said. "I'm glad he's so young, because he won't realize and won't remember. So by the time he's old enough to remember, I want him to know that he's got a good mother and father working hard for him."

He's not the only child there --or across America-- hoping for a permanent home.

According to a recent report by the National Center on Family Homelessness, one out of every 50 American kids was homeless between 2005 and 2006.

"It's obscenely high, it's a statistic I'd expect to see in a Third World country," said Ryan Fehrman with Genesis Home. "And it's embarrassing for this country, the richest country in the world, to have a statistic where one in 50 children is homeless."

And current economic woes could make the problem worse.

"We track the shelter nights that we provide to homeless families, and what we found is that from 2007 to 2008 the number of shelter nights we provided increased by 62 percent," Fehrman said.

"Sometimes it's the economy that turns down, and it causes problems out there," said Rev. Ernie Mills with the Durham Rescue Mission. "But they're just the innocent victims out there and they're the precious ones that we want to help here at the rescue mission."

"There are a lot of folks who are doubled up, who are 'couch surfing,' especially within our family population where friends and family don't want to let those families become homeless," Fehrman added. "So it's hard for us to know how much worse it's going to get. We're just hoping it starts to get better soon."

But other children still exist on the streets, while others live in cars.

Two years ago, Selma Johnson was living in her SUV.

"I had an SUV, and we were pretty much living in an SUV," Johnson said. "My grandson had a problem going to the bathroom, wetting himself. So it was difficult. We tried to find gas stations and other places where I could bathe him, because I really didn't have anywhere else to go."

But now Johnson has a job and a home, with the help from what she says is a higher power.

"And my faith was really strong," she said. "You don't have anybody else to trust in! You don't have no money, you don't have nobody to turn to."

But the journey out of homelessness is not easy for children and parents.

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"Homelessness is traumatic for young children, for school aged children," Fehrman said. "The children who we serve at Genesis Home have often bounced around, even before coming to the shelter."

"If it's just a mother, she's got to get up early, fix breakfast, catch the bus, take the baby to the baby sitter," Mills said. "Then after the baby sitter, wait 30 minutes for the next bus to go to Durham Tech or a job. Then get back on the bus, go to work, and then get back on the bus, pick up the kids, come back home and then do supper. It's rough for a family out there."

That's why organizations serving homeless families work to provide a calm atmosphere, under a safe roof.

"Before, we were just at each other's throats," Locklear said. "Now we can have normal conversations, and also play with him. Just to see the smile on his face, and that's what I want to keep on his face, a smile."

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