

Home Safe

A Documentary Community Development Project with Homeless Children and their Families

Sky Works Charitable Foundation has embarked on an ambitious and timely documentary community development project to make visible the experiences and needs of children and their families who experience poverty and homelessness. **Home Safe** – a documentary tool kit in four parts - will focus on children under the age of 18 in four different communities – Calgary, Hamilton, Toronto, and Sault Ste. Marie - who, along with their families, have been forced into shelters, motels, hostels or transition houses or who are ‘couch-surfing’ with family or friends – all as a consequence of poverty and/or family crisis.

While each film, or chapter, in the series will illuminate a different set of issues confronted by homeless children and their families, the stories and experiences will be universal and recognizable to audiences in communities and regions across Canada. Childhood poverty and homelessness mirror the economic disenfranchisement of underemployed families and those who are on social assistance or precariously employed. Housing has never been a central feature of children’s policy initiatives in our country, nor have the interests of children been well-reflected in Canadian housing policy.

It is estimated that there are currently 22,500 children in Canada who are homeless or without adequate housing. Even while attention to poverty, homelessness and the acute shortage of affordable housing across the country has grown more *evident*, family homelessness has become more *invisible*. This invisibility comes out of a number of factors. Homeless families face stigma and shame which make them less likely to disclose their status. In addition, communities become systematically de-sensitized to the needs of homeless individuals and families, in part because homeless families are commonly relegated to suburbs, or out-of-town motel shelters - out of sight, out of mind. Children experiencing poverty and homelessness are often subjected to bullying, social isolation, and discrimination at school and from peers.

Home Safe will be a powerful and compelling documentary resource to show the terrible price paid by children and families for economic, social and political neglect. We will work directly with children and their families, and others who are committed to confronting the issues, to build local responses and strategies for change.

In addition to the four films, the **Home Safe** project will include support materials to assist educators and facilitators in using the documentaries with audiences. A composite film including material from all four documentaries is planned, upon completion of the four chapters.

Home Safe will provide community leaders, educators, housing advocates, and others with a documentary tool kit they can take into board rooms and classrooms, conferences, community events, and policy meetings. In essence, this project will enable community spokespersons to bring homeless children and their families into those rooms, to bring them to the table, so that their voices are present and included in all the discussions that are about them.

The **Home Safe** project is being led by award-winning, community-based filmmaker Laura Sky, and advocate and Street Nurse Cathy Crowe. Cathy is a co-founder of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, the author of recently published book, *Dying for a Home*, and she is the recipient of the Atkinson Foundation Economic Justice Award.