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Thousands of Area Youth At-Risk of Homelessness -Local Nonprofits Partner to Raise Support During Critical Winter Months-

Milwaukee, Nov. 19 – More than 2,000 youth in Milwaukee are at risk of homelessness this winter. Often cited as an invisible population because of “couch-hopping” with friends or acquaintances, the number of homeless youth and teens has been steadily on the rise both nationally and locally. On any given night, it is estimated that over 400 youth and teens are without a safe place to sleep. Less than half of them will find it.

“As temperatures drop, the need for youth shelter becomes even more critical,” said Dan Magnuson, president and CEO of Pathfinders, the youth homeless shelter and Milwaukee-based nonprofit providing services to youth in crisis, “Kids can be homeless because of poverty, family conflict or abuse. People often forget that young people can be homeless too.”

That is why Pathfinders has partnered with Serve Marketing, the volunteer-led nonprofit that takes on local causes, to raise a warning flag on the issue of youth homelessness. The group kicked off its campaign last week when a live person “slept” on one of the campaign billboards. The unorthodox tactics continue this week when hundreds of replicas of “sleeping kids” are plastered on buildings throughout the city. The “sleeping kids” can be found at places like City Hall and the Bradley Center, as well as office buildings, restaurants, cabs, stores, movie theaters and even spas.

“The replicas are needed because the real youth aren’t getting noticed,” explained Gary Mueller, founder of Serve, the volunteer-led nonprofit which takes on local causes, “We believe this campaign will help make this seemingly invisible group of kids more visible,” said Mueller.

The ad campaign will run through the duration of November, national homeless youth awareness month, and conclude with a fundraising campaign.

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Interview Opportunities

- Anthony – A Milwaukee teen who has escaped homelessness and can talk on his experience
- Heather Aldrich – Executive Director of Serve, who can talk about the ad campaign and tactics
- Dan Magnuson – President/CEO of Pathfinders, local youth homeless shelter and an area nonprofit for youth in crisis who can talk about the homeless youth emergency

THE NUMBERS

- Currently, there are less than 16 emergency beds in Milwaukee that house youth and teens.
- In Milwaukee, it is estimated that on any given night over 400 youth (ages 11-17) will desperately seek for safe shelter. Almost half of them will not find it.
- Due to a weakened economy, the number of homeless youth and teens has increased by at least 67% in the last three years.

CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

- Because of their age, their inability to earn enough money to meet basic needs makes many youth turn to “survivor sex” trading sex for food, clothing, and shelter – within 72 hours of being on the street.
- Homeless adolescents often suffer from severe anxiety, depression, poor health and low self-esteem.
- Homeless children are at high risk for falling behind in school, repeating a grade and dropping out, and becoming homeless as adults.

About Serve

Serve is a nonprofit advertising agency whose mission is to give underserved charitable causes a stronger voice in the community. Since 2002, Serve has helped create behavior-changing marketing campaigns for over 30 non-profits, both locally and nationally, on issues ranging from teen homelessness, child sexual violence and shaken baby syndrome to teen pregnancy, ovarian cancer and gun violence. To date, Serve has donated over \$11 million of in-kind creative, media, web, pr and strategic planning services to non-profits, in an effort to raise their profile and increase their impact in ours and other local communities.