

## Crusader tackles 'larger problem than most people realize'

By Lee Provost

Diane Nilan has spent much of her life trying to help those who can't seem to help themselves.

She is the author of "Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness" and has put together a 60-minute documentary, "My Own Four Walls."

"My Own Four Walls" is a compilation of some 75 interviews she completed with children throughout the country in small towns, rural areas or in resort communities, detailing what it's like to be a young and homeless.

She is now conducting interviews and gathering video images for a new project through her non-profit organization called Hear Us. Her new video project called "On the Edge" could be ready for distribution in late 2008.

"This is a more intensive look at how people can get out of homelessness but at the same time how easy it is to fall back into it," she said.

Nilan said homelessness is a much larger problem than most people realize, because many political leaders simply don't want this information out.

"I've worked in this field for years; and since I've been out traveling and talking, it's much larger than I even thought. This issues needs to be put out in front of the public. We have to do something about this now," she said.

Nilan acknowledges that while the public is more accepting of children who are homeless, the adult homeless can't be just swept away.

"We can't just help the children. It's more complicated than that."

Nilan spent 20 years working with the homeless by either running suburban shelters or fighting for legislation guaranteeing educational rights for homeless students and training educators about those rights.

The author and video producer said she prefers to stick to the rural- or small-town view on homelessness because that aspect seems to get lost in the discussion.

"I could go to Chicago and interview a thousand homeless people. I chose to go to areas that defy our logic of what homeless is. These are kids who have hopes and dreams just like everyone else."



**Photo:**

Diane Nilan sits in her recreational vehicle at the Kankakee River state Park. Next to her is a display of the faces of homeless children. Nilan travels across the country to raise awareness about the plight of the homeless.

[More photos from this shoot](#)