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HEADLINE: Growing Up Homeless



THV Extra: Growing Up Homeless

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Arkansas is one of the worst offenders when it comes to homeless children.

That's according to the **National Center on Family Homelessness**. The research group put Arkansas in the bottom five states in the U.S. **Arkansas was ranked 48th.**

The ranking considered four areas: the percentage of homeless children; their overall well-being; risk factors for homelessness, such as poverty and foreclosure rates; and what the state is doing to address the problems.

The same study also found one of every 50 American children experiences homelessness and that most states have inadequate plans to address the worsening and often-overlooked problem.

Weekdays around 2 p.m., a school bus unloads on East Roosevelt Road in Little Rock and Our Club members spill out.

"Ms. Georgia" Mjartan the director hears all about their day. Many of these kids in this after school program and their families live in **Our House**.

"Our goal is to equip people to make it on their own," says Mjartan.

To stay at Our House homeless adults have about two weeks to find a job. After that they pay \$3 a day.

Our House is much more than a homeless shelter. Yes, families eat and sleep there but they also get childcare, job training and more. Of the 120 beds, about a third belong to kids.

In Arkansas, relatively few homeless shelters cater to families or single fathers. Our House does.

Living there, 9-year-old Rory and 8-year-old Morris became fast friends. Rory Lives with her dad, Robert Parker, and little brother Robert Jr. They share a room in family housing.

"When I first got here, I was like 'wow' honestly," Robert Parker explains. "But after being here a while, it's not a bad place; it gives people the chance to start over."

"It's a scary thing no matter how beautiful our campus is or how nice our staff is, it's scary to walk into a homeless shelter" says Mjartan.

Lately, Mjartan says she's seeing more families coming to Our House because their minimum wages aren't enough to survive.

"There's parents who really are working; they're really trying who just can't make it anymore," says Mjartan.

Sandra Wilson of the Arkansas Homeless Coalition says many homeless families miss out on such support because they fear having their children taken from them.

Meanwhile, Arkansas legislators recently created a housing trust fund to help provide affordable and safe housing. (See related links for previous story and Act 661.)

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