



HEAR US Inc.
...giving voice & visibility to homeless children & youth ...

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Diane Nilan: Biography, Her-Story

Unconventional. Whole hearted. Daring. Determined.

For 3 decades, Diane has aimed her relentless energies at homelessness. A philosophy major by education (College—now University—of St. Francis, Joliet, IL, 1973), with experience in teaching, photography, lighting, insurance inspecting and food service, Diane applied her innate curiosity to poverty and homelessness in the 80s and hasn't stopped.

From unemployment lines to a contract job at Joliet Catholic Charities, she eventually was recruited to “do something about homelessness” by her MSW boss. “I’m not a social worker,” she replied. But she looked into the extent of homelessness in Joliet and found that it went far beyond the mislabeled “street people.”

Nilan and a small group surveyed local inns and were appalled by what they found—families and individuals using every last dime to keep a roof over their heads in “no-tell- motels.” Her boss let her loose. “Start a shelter.” She explored the nearby PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) model. Daunting but doable. She started, with help from many of her social service colleagues, Will County PADS, the county’s first homeless shelter open to anyone. That was back in 1987.

Why are people becoming homeless? stuck in her craw. She invited national activist Mitch Snyder to Joliet for National Hunger and Homelessness Week. She led the Illinois **Housing NOW!** campaign, recruiting hundreds to travel to Washington DC for this history-making event in 1989.

The esteemed IL Senator Paul Simon influenced her advocacy efforts further, telling her that if DC lawmakers didn't hear from their constituents on an issue, it wouldn't be addressed. Diane took those words to heart, becoming intricately involved in giving homeless persons the right to vote and making IL the first state to pass the **Housing Trust Fund**.

She became president of the IL Coalition to End Homelessness, serving for several terms. Her greatest accomplishment, however, was aimed at homeless school kids.

The stories of the **IL Education for Homeless Children Act**, aka **Charlie's Bill**, and the subsequent national McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, are best told in Diane's book, **Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness**.

She pursued the implementation of this groundbreaking law, costing her one job, leading her to start HEAR US, her ambitious undertaking since 2005. She has used her skills and passions to make sure kids without homes can get an education, a seemingly endless task.

In July 2005 she created the national nonprofit HEAR US to give voice and visibility to homeless children and youth. She sold her home, car and most of her possessions to purchase a motorhome so she could live on the road, something she's done since she set out to chronicle the plight and promise of families/youth experiencing homelessness.

Her track record since starting HEAR US speaks for itself. Check out www.hearus.us

*HEAR US ~ 10 Years Giving Voice & Visibility to America's Homeless Children & Youth
2005 - 2015*