

Media-Promotional Packet



**Seven women share their experiences of
homelessness...**

A riveting new documentary film

Director
Laura Vazquez

Producer
Diane Nilan

© 2010, Nomad Productions

Introduction

Ask any individual or audience about the image in their mind when you say “homeless person.” Chances are quite good that they will describe the stereotypical disheveled, disorientated older man standing on a street corner in Big City, USA.

Truth is, while homeless men comprise the most visible and, sadly, easily dismissible segment of this nation’s homeless population, by no means are they the largest percentage of this hard-to-count populace. Nor is homelessness strictly an urban issue.

Consider this approximation of the overall categories of the millions (no credible estimate of this country’s homeless populations exists) of un-housed persons in the United States:

- Single men 45%
- Single women 20%
- Single and two-parent families with children 25%
- Unaccompanied youth (13 - 24 years old) 10%

Single men likely comprise close to half of the overall homeless population. Certainly their needs are as important as the needs of women, children and teens. But historically, women, children and youth have not been proportionally calculated when homelessness was considered. Homelessness and myriad causes of it, especially poverty, continue to escalate unabated, forcing millions to experience life as “poverty nomads” migrating across urban and non-urban America. The latest economic assault on poor and vulnerable people in the financial fall-out of the Great Recession/Depression of 2008 has only added—significantly—to this nation’s homeless census.

REALITY: Policymakers have not adequately addressed the needs specific to families and youth. The public exhibits little recognition of their existence. Schools strain to identify and serve homeless students. Communities grapple with homelessness in general, under-prioritizing families and youth. Shelters and other emergency solutions are often restricted or overcapacity, leaving families and youth unserved. Advocacy organizations present fractured pictures of who and how many experience homelessness. And Congress remains woefully in the dark about the millions of invisible homeless children, youth and families on our nation’s streets.

When Laura Vazquez and Diane Nilan, **on the edge** director and producer, set out to make this documentary in 2006, they very specifically focused on women who end up **invisibly** homeless. Sadly, women whose lives have fallen apart in a significant way, whose families, including their children, are no longer part of their lives, may eventually become known as “bag ladies,” lumped in with the grizzled guys on the street. But before they cross that tragic threshold into visible homelessness, it is likely that many lived lives much like the seven women of **on the edge**.

Perhaps when the scope of homelessness is better understood—how it affects babies, small children, teens, young adults, women as well as men, millions of them—perhaps then sufficient outrage about this solvable issue will resonate in communities and in Congress.

The courageous women whose lives are revealed in this film deserve immense credit for opening minds and hearts of viewers of **on the edge**. To make their sacrifice worthwhile, the paradigm of how this nation views and addresses homelessness needs to change. ***This film is that call to action.***

on the edge *Think you know homelessness? Think again...*

on the edge, DVD, documentary. 68 minutes running time. Laura Vazquez, Director. Diane Nilan, Producer. nomad productions. 2010.

Includes:

- 2 trailers, 4 minutes and 8 minutes, and
- Q/A session (20 minutes) with Professor Markus Redding, Columbia University School of Social Work and his MSW students. (Available summer 2011)

Recommended Viewers: People of every knowledge level, ages (mature) 13+. **on the edge** provides an extensive, personal account of issues common to many women, children and teens who find themselves without a home.

Overview

on the edge discloses a world seen by few—the nomadic existence of women and children far from gritty ghettos and urban poverty.

In **on the edge**, seven women reveal intimate stories of their fall from housing and independence, taking viewers beyond stereotypes, exposing brutal realities of poverty and homelessness by those who endured it.

This hour-long documentary chronicles the struggles of seven women trying to escape homelessness in small towns and resort communities across America.

Audiences that will benefit include: individuals, advocacy organizations, shelter staff, human services personnel, government workers, college/university students (social work, health fields, education, sociology, psychology), law enforcement personnel, social justice groups, elected officials, educators on all levels, and corrections officials.

Production Notes

on the edge was filmed over the period from 2006 – 2008. This film explores a cross-section of a largely invisible and little-understood part of the larger population. The focus on women was the filmmakers' decision. Filming occurred in: AZ, NM, LA, FL, PA, NY.

Subjects did not receive compensation for their participation. Although the project received considerable support, monetarily and in-kind, the bulk of this project was a labor of love on the part of Laura and Diane who share a commitment to the eradication of homelessness for families and youth, and the incredible support of two institutions: Northern Illinois University's Department of Communication and the nonprofit organization HEAR US Inc.



50-word description for program booklets:

on the edge discloses a world seen by few—the nomadic existence of women and children far from gritty ghettos and urban poverty. Seven women reveal intimate stories of their fall from housing and independence, taking viewers beyond stereotypes, exposing brutal realities of poverty and homelessness.

on the edge *Think you know homelessness? Think again...*

About the Filmmakers:



Laura Vazquez, an accomplished documentary filmmaker, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL. She has taught at NIU since completing her Ph.D. at Northwestern University in Radio/TV/Film in 2000. Vazquez has worked on several projects in conjunction with HEAR US and other organizations focusing on homelessness including:

- [My Own Four Walls](#) (2007), winner of the '07 NAECHY Outstanding Media Award
- [FAFSA FIX](#) (2007) featuring homeless youths' efforts to gain access to college
- [On Their Own](#) (2010), a training film explaining education rights for homeless youth

Vazquez received two grants from NIU to work on the documentary **on the edge** during her sabbatical in the Spring/Summer 2008. Since then she collaborated with Andrew McCormick and Diane Nilan to complete editing the documentary.



Diane Nilan, founder and president of [HEAR US](#) Inc. has over 25 years' experience working with impoverished and homeless families including directing the shelter at Hesed House in Aurora, IL for 13 years. In 2005, Nilan formed a national non-profit organization, HEAR US Inc., to call attention to the hidden issue of homeless families and youth. Her initial documentary project **My Own Four Walls** united her with Vazquez's documentary expertise. In addition to producing **on**

the edge, Nilan's work includes:

- ["Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness,"](#) (Booklocker, 2005) her reader-friendly book about homelessness.
- ["REACH"](#) (Information film and materials, 2008) to empower incarcerated parents helping them secure their children's education
- ["Learning Curve Express"](#) (You Tube, 2009) interviews with homeless mothers in doubled up and motel situations; and
- Homeless and poverty blogs "invisible homeless kids," Change.org's ["Poverty in America"](#) and ["Wanderings."](#)

Nilan, in her RV/office known as "Tillie" continues her cross country journeys to non-urban communities to chronicle poverty and homelessness, particularly for invisible families and teens, conducting trainings, developing grass-roots advocacy support and filming for future projects.



on the edge won the **Best of Festival Award** in the Faculty Documentary Division of the Broadcast Education Association (2011).

It was an Official Selection of the Geneva Film Festival (July 2011), the [Naperville Independent Film Festival](#) and [Sycamore Film Festival](#) (September 2011).

Laura and Diane are grateful to:

on the edge Major Donors

McGowan Family Fund
Naperville (IL) Noon Lions, <http://napervillenoonlions.org>
Ellie Nilan
George Winston, Dancing Cat Records, <http://georgewinston.com>
Benedictine Sisters, Lisle, IL, <http://shmlisle.org>

HEAR US Boards of Directors and Advisors, supporters

Collaborators and Production Partners

Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication
Gene and Catherine Bellini, graphics

And most specially, the women, men, children and youth who agreed to participate in this endeavor.

For more information about **OTE**, the filmmakers, or to arrange screenings:

- Laura Vazquez, Professor, Northern Illinois University, Department of Communication, lvazquez@niu.edu, 815/753-7132
- Diane Nilan, President, HEAR US Inc., diane@hearus.us, 630/225-5012

Nomad Productions is a collaboration between Laura Vazquez and Diane Nilan. Other film projects are being planned.

on the edge may be ordered through
HEAR US Inc., <http://hearus.us>, \$30 + \$6 s/h