

Home Safe Documentary Gives Voice to Homeless Kids

Among the lessons learned by Sky Works from the successful *Kids Care* project (that dealt with young people coming to terms with the loss to cancer of a friend or family member), the most important were that it showed that children are good teachers and that our organization can work with them to make good documentaries. Those lessons have given us the courage to take on *Home Safe*, a documentary that tackles the complex systemic issue of homelessness in Canada. A conservative estimate puts the number of homeless young persons in Canada at 60,000, of which 10,000 are children. Our new project - now in its research stage - will be made with, for, and about homeless children and their families.

Home Safe will tell its story from four different communities across the country – communities in which local support for the project is highly engaged and where networks of people and organizations are ready to take on the issue of homelessness, an issue that has persisted far too long.

In Toronto, *Home Safe* will visit Women's Habitat in Mimico where shelter is available to women and their children who are escaping abusive family relationships or as newcomers to Canada, escaping the terror of war and violence in the many zones of conflict around the world.

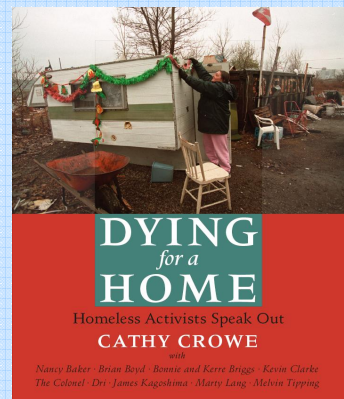
Although Sault Ste. Marie has one shelter for women escaping with their children from violent relationships, growing numbers of women and children are falling into poverty and homelessness as the economic base of the region declines. These conditions also worsen the plight of the substantial Aboriginal community in the region. Our filming will focus on a strong local network of advocates and frontline service workers determined to hear and respond to the needs of children.

Calgary's a different story altogether. In one of the wealthiest cities in the country, homeless children line up with their belongings in sports bags, waiting for transportation to yet another church basement where they will sleep with their parents tonight. They seem to have been abandoned by a political environment convinced that the marketplace can solve all its problems, where the idea of social housing is discredited, and where, incredibly, many homeless families are working families.

On the other hand, Hamilton has made action on homelessness a civic priority. Even though Hamilton is coping with economic constraints of its own, a coalition of agencies and groups in the city is devoted to "Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child" and see *Home Safe's* potential as a powerful tool in its effort to deal with homelessness in their city.

Home Safe will not be about experts telling us what we ought to think. The project will give direct voice to children and families who are homeless. They will be our experts. They will challenge the invisibility and shame they experience as well as the stereotypes that keep them marginal.

Cathy Crowe, a member of the Sky Works Board of Directors and the Executive Producer for *Home Safe*, has been busy since early May on a cross-country tour to launch her new book, *Dying For a Home*. Cathy is the much-respected street nurse and co-founder of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee which in 1998 declared Canada's level of homelessness a national disaster.



Dying For a Home is a collaboration by Cathy with ten activists who work for an end to the scourge of homelessness and who share their stories and experiences of living in conditions of poverty on the streets and in the shelters of Toronto. The book is widely praised for its depiction of these remarkable lives, but also for the clear direction it provides for ending the Canadian-made disaster that now affects a quarter million Canadians who are homeless or disgracefully underhoused.

Congratulations Cathy, from all of us here at Sky Works! Your good work inspires our effort on *Home Safe*.

From the Executive Director:

Changing the World, One Documentary at a Time

Sky Works is becoming the organization that I always hoped it would be. Since I began documentary work 35 years ago, I have longed to build a responsive and courageous program that would work alongside groups and individuals who are committed to positive social change. I have always felt that our place was on the front lines, creating and using our documentaries as tools to encourage those we work with to participate in the issues that effect and shape their lives.

It is these working relationships that give our organization a role in ensuring the inclusion of marginalized or excluded people in national and regional program- and policy-making. That's why we work with young people, families, people struggling to be heard in the health care system, at their schools, in their neighborhoods, and workplaces. Real people doing real work for real change – that's community activism.

Our documentary work has a catalytic effect on the communities we work with from the moment our research begins. This is why we emphasize the community development aspect of our work, rather than simply highlight the documentaries we produce.

For Sky Works, community development means contributing our documentary research, production, and dissemination to a community's effort to create strategies that deal with issues that matter. Such strategies require that they expand their capacities, build their bases, and share their wisdom and knowledge with likely, and even unlikely, collaborators.

The community might be a group of kids helping others deal with grief and loss; women who share their wisdom with others like them who are dealing with breast cancer; people fighting against addictions and want to help others do the same; people who stand up against stigma and discrimination. We're there, and we're with them.

Now, in the **Home Safe** project, we are working with communities in Calgary, Hamilton, Sault Ste. Marie, and Toronto. Our goal is to create a social development tool that will support those communities in their efforts to protect families and children from homelessness and poverty. We believe that they need powerful tools to create and sustain lasting solutions.

Here is how one project partner experienced the effect of our work in the Sault:

The buzzing is still going on about your visit, and the conversations that ensued during the two days you were here have put homeless females/ families further on the radar scale. Yes, based on the stats we do keep, it would appear we do not have many; however, we also realize we have to dig a bit deeper to find out what is really going on with this vulnerable group. Take care, keep up the good work; you provide much inspiration for all of us!



We are proud of what we do and how we do it. The pain of discovering injustice and disparity, and the absence of compassion and care is relieved by the knowledge that we have a major contribution to make, and that our documentary tools are an active part of community campaigns for real change.

Laurie

Kids Care wows Seattle!

Laura Sky, Sky Works Board Chair **Pat Davidson**, **Kerri** and mom **Nancy Ford**, **Corey** and mom **Delia Lourenco** and Sky Works Communication Director **Helen Kampfmuller** are still talking about their whirlwind visit to Seattle, Washington in late April to attend the Council on Foundations' (COF) Annual Conference and Film and Video Festival. The gang was there to accept a Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Film and Digital Media for *Kids Care*. The Lawson Foundation had provided major funding for *Kids Care* and subsequently had nominated the documentary for the prestigious award, which recognizes excellence in documentary filmmaking focusing on compelling social movements and issues. Both **Angie Killoran**, Lawson Foundation Executive Director, and President **David Gardiner** were there cheering Sky Works on.

And what a time they had! On Monday, April 30, the group screened *Kids Care* and facilitated a discussion at a festival Meet the Filmmaker session. Later that evening, everyone was decked out for the awards gala, referred to as the "Philanthropic Academy Awards," at the beautiful Benaroya Symphony Hall. During the Sky Works segment, a short clip from *Kids Care* was shown and Laura accepted the Henry Hampton award from Hodding Carter III. In a brief, but moving speech Laura pointed out Kerri and Corey to the audience of 2,200, noting that they represented all the many young people who had given so much energy and inspiration to *Kids Care*. As they left the hall, Laura, Corey and Kerri were showered with congratulations and best wishes from audience members.



The winners! - L to R, Helen, Kerri, Laura, Corey, Pat, Nancy, Delia

From there, it was off to celebrate with other award winners at Seattle's unique music and science fiction museum. As well as that, the group attended seminars and took part in screenings, discussions and dinners for other award-winning documentaries.

And yes, somewhere in between, there was a bit of sightseeing, including a visit to the historic Pike Street Market.

As an award-winner, *Kids Care* enjoyed good exposure at this international event, which included representatives from grant-making foundations and corporations. But best of all, the festival highlighted the courage and determination of all the kids who made *Kids Care* such a powerful statement and served to acknowledge the support of the project's 130-plus funders. That group, in addition to the Lawson Foundation, included Ronald MacDonald House Charities, TD Financial Services, and The Henry White Kinnear Foundation.

Kids Care in the Schools

Our major goal this year is to take *Kids Care* into schools to provide an on-going resource for students and staff. Last September in St. Catharines, we trained 10 school facilitators including four staff from a local high school and a number of retired school personnel. Their objective: to introduce *Kids Care* into Niagara region schools as part of Hospice Niagara's new teen grief program.

Led by Hospice Niagara's **Jane Gordon**, the group's effort to have *Kids Care* piloted in a St. Catharines high school was rewarded this spring when it was screened at Denis Morris High School. A number of students subsequently formed a bereavement support group as a result of the showing. *Kids Care* was screened again for students at another local high school, where a second screening is being considered. We are following the progress of Jane and her group and will apply the lessons we've learned in St. Catharines to other school efforts.

Beyond the Niagara region, we're working on a pilot program at the Toronto District School Board with the help of a retired high school teacher and Bill Byrd, a senior administrator of the Safe Schools program at the TDSB - both very big supporters of *Kids Care*. We'll keep everyone posted on our progress but in the short-term, if you have any Toronto school contacts, i.e. principals, guidance counselors, who'd be interested in using *Kids Care* and could help us navigate the school system, please let us know.

We are also planning to take *Kids Care* into schools in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, where a great need exists for a resource such as *Kids Care*. We're pleased that former screening hosts in both provinces are assisting us with this initiative.

And in May **Sheila Damore-Petingola**, leader of our 11-member Sudbury satellite facilitation team, presented a screening of *Kids Care* with **Laura Sky** at the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology

Conference in Winnipeg. In June, the Sudbury group is at the Northern Health Research Conference in Sault Ste Marie and in October they'll be screening *Kids Care* for the Regional Oncology Conference in Sudbury. Sheila plans to extend the group's screenings to rural communities such as Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock Falls, Kirkland Lake, New Liskeard, North Bay and Sault Ste. Marie. Expect to hear a lot more from this dynamic group.

Building a Sustainable Future

Jackie Garrow, recently appointed as Sky Works' first Development Coordinator, is full of excitement and impressed by the challenge of her new job.

Jackie realizes that a lot has changed at Sky Works since our last newsletter. In March this year, **The Lawson Foundation** very generously granted Sky Works Charitable Foundation four years of core funding to carry out our strategic plan. Jackie's new position, in fact, is part of that plan. The tremendous vision and support from Lawson sets us on our way to building a sustainable future as an innovative, leading national non-profit that uses documentary film to engage communities in social change.



Are we happy? Laura Sky with Lawson Foundation President David Gardiner and Executive Director Angie Killoran in Seattle with the Henry Hampton Award.

This level of encouragement and belief in what we do—in the funder's words, "changing the world, one documentary at a time" has infused Sky Works with renewed energy, focus, and sense of potential.

Buoyed by the core grant, Sky Works continues to secure support of key projects for different phases of their community life. We were thrilled to receive \$30,000 from long-time supporters **Ronald**

McDonald House Charities for the French versioning and community dissemination of *Kids Care*. The RMHC grant makes it possible for Sky Works local teams to engage French-speaking youth in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick for years to come.

On the new projects front, **The SickKids Foundation** has funded the research of *Living With Miracles*, a project that looks at issues affecting medically fragile and technology dependent kids. At the same time, Sky Works, in conjunction with **Dr. Franco Carnevale** of McGill University (School of Nursing) and **Dr. Barbara Gibson** of University of Toronto (Department of Physical Therapy) has received an HCTP (health care, technology and place) Interdisciplinary Capacity Enhancement Grant to evaluate the impact of *Living With Miracles* on our various user groups. The grant is titled Documenting the Documentary: Recognizing the voices of Disabled children living with assistive technologies. This is our first separate evaluation grant and we hope the beginning of a trend, since effective evaluation is crucial to our ongoing success in community development.

Home Safe is well into development and engenders new and energizing partnerships almost daily. In Hamilton, Calgary, Sault Ste. Marie and Toronto, we are engaged in research and set for filming and community development work on the urgent but nearly invisible issue of family and child homelessness in Canada. We extend our thanks to initial funders at **Canadian Auto Workers' Social Justice Fund**, the **Henry White Kinnear Foundation**, the **Laidlaw** and **Marion Armstrong Foundations**, and the **Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario** for setting the stage for further funding success and support on this massive and important initiative.

Our project on women and addictions is also in development and actively seeking funding for production and community development work. Thanks to the **Iris Addiction Recovery for Women Foundation** in Sudbury, to the **United Steel Workers of America, CAW National, Sudbury Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (local 598)** and others for providing momentum on this project.

Growth is in the air. We've initiated a Sky Works North office in Thunder Bay, coordinated by long-time Sky Works friend, documentary filmmaker and community advocate, **Jim Hyder**. Jim is focused on two projects currently. The first will use documentary film as a tool to aid native youth affected by issues of trauma and grief. The second assists the efforts of support groups for men living with prostate cancer in the Thunder bay area.

We are also honored to welcome new board members **Janet Mosher, Sara Jackman and Seana Massey**. While on the staff side, **Verne Sparks** is back onboard as staff researcher and writer and **Helen Kampfmuller** has extended her Sky Works commitment to become our new Program Manager.



Sky Works is about helping communities engage with the issues that matter to them.

Verne's work is currently focused on a commissioned film for the **Central Eastern Ontario Public Education Committee**, a collaboration of mental health agencies and services stretching from Muskoka and Barrie over to Peterborough. Sky Works will produce an anti-stigma, anti-discrimination documentary for the Committee who will use it to support the development of a "culture of recovery" throughout the community. This is a front-burner project for us right now and will be camera-ready very soon.

And so our community widens daily with new supporters and participants - individuals and organizations who are generous with their time, thoughts, and dollars, and who above all believe in the social change we are a part of. Our inaugural annual appeal and open house this past December raised close to \$20,000 and we hope to exceed this amount with new, forthcoming initiatives.

In closing--we can't say it enough--thanks to the organizations and individuals listed next page. Sky Works has experienced a banner year of exciting growth and positive change because of your generous financial support.

Sky Works Charitable Foundation Donation Form

You can donate anytime

Your contribution will be much appreciated and will help to extend Sky Works' community development and education efforts. You can donate online at www.canadahelps.org or return this form by mail or fax to Sky Works.

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