Mothers, children, swelling legion of homeless

By Susan Krohn

Cyndra Ferris is 33 but the lines on her face bespeak a lifetime of stress. Still, it isn't immediately apparent that she is a member of the nation's burgeoning legion of homeless.

"I have a roof over my head, but I still consider myself homeless," she says, balancing her 2-year-old daughter on her hip.

For eight months, Ferris and her three children — Lee, 8; Robert, 7 and Shana, the toddler — have been living in a tiny, squalid room in a San Francisco shelter.

The hallways and stairwells are dingy. Rooms smell of meals cooked on hot plates. Mouse droppings and mildew stain carpets and mattresses.

Cheap locks on thin wooden doors do little to stop robbers and rapists, and drugs are sold openly. A recently police department study shows there were 942 reported crimes in San Francisco's 33 homeless hotels in a one-year period ending June 1987. Eighteen percent were rapes, robberies and other assaults.

"This is not a home," Ferris says. "You always have to be on your guard."

Families account for an increasing number of homeless in America, although estimates on the number vary dramatically.

The Washington-headquartered National Coalition for the Homeless estimates there are 3 million homeless people and that one of every six is a child. Families make up 40 percent of those on the streets.

Federal officials say the number is lower than coalition estimates, citing a 1984 study suggesting there were between 200,000 and 350,000 homeless at that time.

"But we feel the number has increased since then," said William Glavin, spokesman for Housing and Urban Development in Washington.

Families lose their homes because of layoffs, broken marriages, drugs and medical problems. Minimum-wage salaries, too low to support mortgage or city rent, cause some families to slide into poverty and keep others from climbing out.

Many of the homeless are mentally ill, but more and more are families for whom homelessness is a new and devastating experience.

"We're stuck in a hole we're never going to get out of," says Ferris, who lives in San Francisco's seedy Tenderloin district and had hoped to have an apartment by now, eight months after leaving an abusive husband.

Just getting a welfare check and food stamps is a time-consuming chore that illustrates, for her, the impossibility of accomplishing larger tasks, like looking for a job.

Each month Ferris receives a check for $753 and $92 in food stamps from the government's Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The money is enough to keep them in a homeless hotel, but not enough to rent an apartment in San Francisco, where an average two-bedroom apartment rents for $895.

"There are no shortcuts," she says. "In the system it's a fluke if something good happens to you."

The ease with which people can lose jobs and homes makes homelessness one of the most intractable social crises in the United States.

When the numbers of homeless families began increasing in the early 1980s, city officials across the country responded to what they saw as a temporary problem, building shelters that were expected to act as bridges from the street to permanent housing.

City, state and local governments increased spending on temporary housing and self-help programs. Thousands of hotel rooms in cities such as New York became stopgap dwellings, at nightly tees often astronomical compared to the price of ordinary housing.

As early as 1982, San Francisco was pouring $12.5 million in federal, state and city funds into the problem. The level of spending has increased since then despite other pressing needs, such as AIDS research and health care for the city's more than 5,200 AIDS patients.

Still, experts agree government efforts have failed to make a dent in the problem. The number of homeless Americans, they say, will rise at least through the next decade.

"It's going to be a really big problem," said Jerry McMurray, director of the federal congressional subcommittee on housing. "There is going to be more homelessness and more housing ore... w so."

The number of homeless in the nation's capital has increased by a third to 15,000 in the past year. Other cities that have had increases of 25 percent or more in their homeless populations include Chicago (30,000), Atlanta (6,000-10,000) and Los Angeles (50,000), says the National Coalition for the Homeless.

On any one night, most U.S. cities can shelter up to one in three of their homeless citizens, except for Chicago, where there are beds for roughly one in nine.

Many beds are taken up by the mentally ill, their situation partly the result of a massive exodus of patients from mental institutions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Still others are the emotionally fragile. Many have deteriorated into mental illness through lack of treatment, including Vietnam veterans suffering the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

"Shelters have become — aside from the asylums of the 1980s — kind of a clearinghouse for the mentally ill," said Dick Clark, a social worker at St. Anthony's Shelter for women in San Francisco.

"We don't have psychological support services here. Battered women come here and it's horrible for them because they're not used to the regimented life of the streets. Battered women have no place to go."

San Francisco Supervisor Nancy Walker points out that the city's shelter program "hinges on full-service shelters" that provide food, laundry services and showers, a system she says makes it easy to remain homeless.

A better solution than shelters would be to put government funds into job training, child care, substance abuse programs and programs that create permanent and affordable housing, Walker contends.

"We have to deal with breaking the cycle of homelessness," she says.

The biggest barriers to breaking that cycle are the lack of affordable housing and the difficulties of renting or buying the housing that does exist.

Renting an apartment frequently means paying first and last month's rent and a security deposit equivalent to another month's rent to compensate for any property damage that may occur during tenancy.

Under these terms, a renter must plunk down $2,400 for an $895-a-month two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco — a minimum requirement for a family of four — before moving in.

Steve LaPlante, assistant to San Francisco's Mayor Art Agnos, believes the city will have to build a large apartment complex to serve as transitional housing for homeless families. People could live there until they find reasonably priced housing or until the city renovates city-owned apartments.

But even this solution would be inadequate to meet existing demands, let alone the needs of the future.

San Francisco placed 10 families in city-owned and newly renovated apartments last year, said LaPlante, "but those families have already been replaced by 190 new families looking for homes.

Children are becoming an increasing focus for experts who despair of a short-term solution to homelessness and now worry about the future.

Unhoused and undernourished children who are homeless face a plethora of medical, social and intellectual problems in the years ahead — if they survive.

A 1987 survey of eight cities across the country showed 43 percent of homeless children do not attend school. "We have people out on the streets — we're talking about whole families, young kids out on the street," says Rep. Tony Coelho, D-Calif.

"What type of situation are we forcing these kids into in terms of their future?"

Pearl Pritchard, director of Oakland's Salvation Army shelter for women and their families, calls children "the silent victims of homelessness."

"I've seen children come through our meal line whose eyes are 100 years old," Pritchard said, noting the mothers of such children are often too occupied with their worries about jobs and dwellings to provide adequate parental care.

"One of the things they do is lose their touch with reality," Pritchard said of homeless children.

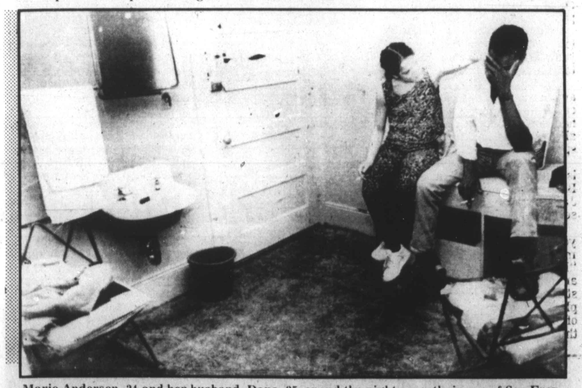
"They live in limbo — 'Where am I going to be tonight? Where am I going to be tomorrow? Am I going to have shoes on my feet? Do I have to go to school tomorrow? And nobody's saying 'Yes, you do.'

"They have no connection with society."

A homeless family waits with other homeless outside Oakland, Calif. Salvation Army awaiting opening of the doors for a night's shelter. The National Coalition for the Homeless, a Washington-based group, estimates there are 3 million homeless people and that one of every 6 is a child. (UPI)

This homeless man dozes on a bench just half a block from the cable car turntable of the Powell St. line in San Francisco which is a popular hangout for those unable to find shelter. Many of the homeless are mentally ill, solitary wanderers whose problems are exacerbated by the grimness of life on the street. (UPI)

Bag man William Washington, 62, spends the day pushing his shopping cart laden with used clothing and other items he hopes to sell, outside Oakland, Calif. Salvation Army shelter where he hopes he can spend the night. (UPI)



Marie Anderson, 24 and her husband, Dana, 35, spend the night recently in one of San Francisco's homeless hotels. Marie comforts Dana as they talk about how difficult it is to be homeless. Families lose their homes because of layoffs, broken marriages, drugs and medical problems, and minimum-wage salaries are too low to support a mortgage or city rent. In San Francisco an average 2-bedroom apartment rents for $895. (UPI)

Sales increase by 25 percent

Beeper industry expresses concern over drug dealers using product

By Darryl Elwood Owens
AFRO Staff Writer

LANSING, MI — The composite of the typical juvenile drug dealer dressed in designer jeans, gold ropes, lizard-skinned sunglasses and $100 tennis shoes, nowadays includes a beeper — to keep the teen tycoons just a phone call away from their clientele.

"Beepers" or "pagers," which retail for under $100 plus a small monthly service charge, have become de rigueur for these young drug kingpins, who combine their illicit business ventures with schooling.

Recently, in effort to eradicate the proliferation of drugs in Michigan schools, Governor James Blanchard signed legislation barring students from wearing "beepers" and using mobile telephones or other such devices while on school grounds.

The legislation authorizes the school board to set and enforce appropriate penalties for violations of the law.

"The action is an overreaction," said Stanley L. Krejci, vice president of Metrocall, one of the East coast's largest paging companies. "It's disappointing to a certain degree."

Krejci explained that many youths wear beepers (or pagers) for legitimate reasons such as a means of communication between parents and "latchkey" children, or to provide instant accessibility to children with

He acknowledged that there are persons who use pagers for illicit activities but pointed out "We cannot deny service to anyone 18 or over who can sign a contract."

The paging industry has enjoyed a 25 percent increase in sales over the past seven years, according to Krejci, however, he said this boom was not linked to increased beeper consumption by narcotics dealers.

"People are more naturally aware of paging. Pagers' prices have come down. The business is growing because of other external factors not related to consumption for illicit activity," he said.

"Just about anybody is a pager user because paging has become a reasonable special medical conditions. communication device used by everybody from corporate executives to working mothers", he said.

"You don't know who the end user is. It is very difficult to distinguish a drug dealer from any other person coming off the street."

He said that while concerns have been voiced about the link between drug dealers and pagers within the industry, owners are virtually prohibited from taking any action to monitor sales.

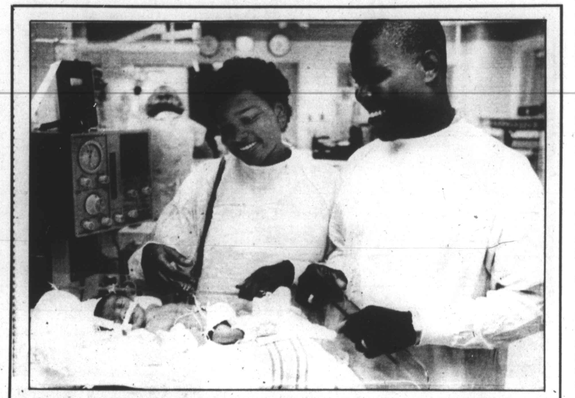
"We (the paging industry) really want to be responsible citizens by making sure we're not catering to a criminal element that we would not want to be associated with," Krejci said, "but you put yourself in a difficult position by denying potential legitimate users service because of a feeling."

In Washington, D.C. juvenile arrests for drug abuse violations have nearly tripled from 635 in 1984 to 1,894 in 1987, according to District police spokesman Capt. William White.

This situation led to then School Superintendent Floretta McKenzie's issuance of a directive sanctioning the confiscation of electronic communication devices from D.C. school students, according to Mary Braxton, D.C. school spokesperson.

The directive noted the "persistent and growing problem of students bringing beepers to school ... (And) all such items are subject to confiscation and may only be returned following a parent conference."

"The point is once this directive went out the message was out to the students that beepers in the school system would no longer be tolerated," Braxton said.



MIAMI: Mylene and Spenceer McCullum, are happy 7/7 as they are reunited with their baby Emera, two pound-11 ounce day old. Emera was born seven weeks prematurely aboard the cruise ship Emerald Seas in the Bahamas 7/6. U.S. Coast Guard helicopters took a team of doctors to the ship to care for Mylene, 23, of Lithonia, Ga., and the baby was taken to the Children's Hospital of Miami. — UPI

Pierce urged to be U.S. Attorney General

By Hamil Harris
AFRO Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, CA — Sam Pierce, the lone black and only remaining member of the original Reagan cabinet, should get the job as U.S. Attorney General recently vacated by Edwin Meese, say members of the California Black Republican Council.

In a telegram to President Reagan, the group urged him to consider Pierce because of his "outstanding credentials as an expert legal practitioner."

Pierce — who has served as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for over seven years — has the dubious distinction of being one of the few cabinet members to remain free of scandal and wrong doing.

"To appoint him would establish his place in history by making this the first appointment of a black Attorney General," the telegram said.

"But if Pierce is under consideration by Mr. Reagan," black presidential aide Robert Hobson said, "he alone knows about it. This is the first I've heard of the matter."

Hobson, a native New Yorker who served as the first black Court Justice for the state, said Pierce has impeccable credentials but still may have a hard time being on Reagan's mind.

In the early Reagan years, the President failed to remember Pierce's name at several official White House gatherings.

Hobson added that if Pierce is being considered, "then Melvin Bradley, the second highest ranking black in the White House would know about it."

While Bradley neither confirmed or denied Pierce's possibility of consideration, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater remained vague — shedding little news on the subject.

"There is still a long list of people that we are considering," Fitzwater said.

Pierce too, has also been kept in the dark as, his spokesman Bob Nipp said when notified about the telegram.

"The Secretary would certainly appreciate that he is held in such high regard by that organization," Nipp said, "but a decision on any other job assignment would be up to the President."

Black Republicans from Reagan's home state, however, said it would be in the president's best interests to consider their proposals. "We are bringing the largest black contingent to the Republican National Convention since the Reconstruction era," group spokesman Celes King, III said. "What he does now could have a direct impact on the future of the black vote within the party."

According to political observers, if the Republicans want to stay in the White House four more years they have to swell their ranks with more ethnic voters — which primarily includes blacks.

Jolly Jacks Softball Team awaits state championships

Fred Lindsey
AFRO Staff Writer

Despite their third place finish in their own tournament, the Jolly Jacks Fast Pitch Softball Team was in good humor and confident about its chances in the upcoming state softball championships.

Over the July 4th week-end, the Sixth Annual Jolly Jacks Fast Pitch Softball Tournament took place and watching two teams from Washington, DC play for the championship didn't set well with manager Vance Tyree, but he was quick to point out his team's past accomplishments.

"We have never finished lower than third, in the six years that we have had this tournament," Tyree says.

"In 1983 and '85, we won it and in the other two years we came in second, so we have had some success, but it is always nice to play for the top spot."

Although fast pitch softball is becoming extinct around Baltimore City, the Jolly Jacks take their game seriously.

Starting "at least twenty years ago," in South Baltimore, in an area known as "Pig Town," the Jolly Jacks are made up of former college stars and semi-professional players and is considered one of the best A softball teams on the East Coast.

Posting a 35-8 record, they are tough and fast, fierce and competitive and eager for the state tournament to begin.

"Our season starts at the end of April and lasts until the end of June," Tyree said, "by the time our tournament rolls around, we are ready to get to the real action."

The Maryland State Fast Pitch Tournament will be played at Patterson Park during the week of July 17th.

The top three qualifiers will go to a regional tournament in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and if successful advance to the national tournament in New Mexico.

Unashamed, to boast Tyree said, "We are a pretty fair softball team with some pretty decent talent. Our right fielder, Rick Simmons is batting .350 and he has 16 home runs and nearly 50 ribs (runs batted in)."

Being more specific, Tyree said, "16 home runs is a lot in fast pitch softball," but he also noted another standout.

"Our left fielder, Wayne Randall is batting .423," Tyree said, "and the amazing thing about that statistic is that half of his hits are bunts. The opposition can't seem to throw him out, but as a team we are well-known and well-respected."

Hard work and dedication appear to be only two factors as to why the Jolly Jacks have been around for the last two decades, but success and sponsorship ranks high on their list.

"As a manager, I see to it that the team plays the best they can," Tyree said.

"We are not afraid of losing and I think that's what has made us winners. When you think you are going to lose, you usually do. We have a different attitude about what it takes to win."

"Then," explains Tyree, "we couldn't have gone this far without the support and faith of Mance and Leslie Wells.

Because we travel to DC, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and other places, sponsorship is very important.

Wells Lounge has hung in there with us over the last eight years. We appreciate that because we need them."

When one talks with Vance Tyree, you can feel his love for softball and you can also feel that he is not happy placing third in his tournament on his home territory, but he has taken everything in stride.

"We had to drop back from Major A ball," Tyree said, "because we lost a few players along the way."

Major A softball is considered closer to professional softball.

"Our A team," continues Tyree, "has done very well and we are only one of a few black teams that can say that. In spite of our third place finish, we are ready to take on whoever is there. Things are not like the good old days, but I'm real proud of this team."

CCC Program on India Cancelled

Catonsville, Maryland — July 1, 1988 — The travel program on India scheduled for July 19th at Catonsville Community College has been cancelled. There are no further travel programs scheduled at CCC during the summer.

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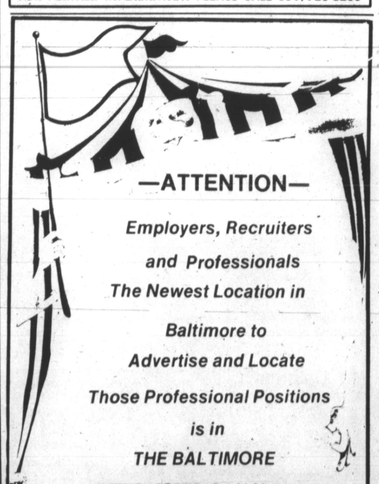

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