

Miley Cyrus' VMA-Acceptance Speech on Homeless Youth Hits Hard in Mass.

By Doug Saffir

Boston.com Staff

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On Sunday night, Miley Cyrus made headlines yet again for something unusual she did at MTV's Video Music Awards. Thankfully, this year's version didn't involve twerking.

When Jimmy Fallon announced that the pop star had won the Video of the Year award for her hit song, "Wrecking Ball," Cyrus passed up the chance to thank her producers and managers for helping her achieve her goals. Instead, she sent up a former homeless teen to deliver a short speech intended to raise awareness about the issue of homeless youth.

"I have survived in shelters all over this city," Jesse, Cyrus' proxy, said, describing his experience as one of the 1.6 million homeless young people in the United States. "I've cleaned your hotel rooms, I've been an extra in your movies. I've been an extra in your life. Though you may have been invisible to you on the streets I have a lot of the same dreams that brought many of you here tonight."

And while Jesse asked viewers to visit [Cyrus' Facebook page \(https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152701750877147&set=p.10152701750877147&type=2&theater\)](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152701750877147&set=p.10152701750877147&type=2&theater) and [make a donation \(http://www.prizeo.com/prizes/miley-cyrus/vip-concert-in-rio?utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=Miley&utm_content=miley1\)](http://www.prizeo.com/prizes/miley-cyrus/vip-concert-in-rio?utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=Miley&utm_content=miley1) to a Hollywood homeless shelter for young people, the issue of homeless youth is hardly local to California. In fact, here in Massachusetts, it's a problem that only seems to be getting worse.

Earlier this year, The Boston Globe [reported \(http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/01/12/homelessness-increases-across-state-downtown-boston-feels-surge/5JLnvKaHubZbv6jYDLskoL/story.html\)](http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/01/12/homelessness-increases-across-state-downtown-boston-feels-surge/5JLnvKaHubZbv6jYDLskoL/story.html) that state officials attributed Massachusetts' increasing number of homeless people primarily to homeless youth, with the number of homeless students between preschool and 12th grade at a record high after doubling in less than 10 years. 935 were reported to be living without a parent or legal guardian and local shelters reported caring for two-, three-, or even four-times as many children as in recent years.

The Globe report came just over six months after the state's Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth issued its [inaugural report \(http://www.mahomeless.org/files/Special_Commission_on_Unaccompanied_Homeless_Youth_Report.pdf\)](http://www.mahomeless.org/files/Special_Commission_on_Unaccompanied_Homeless_Youth_Report.pdf) in June 2013. According to that report, there are as many as 6,000 homeless children with no parent or guardian who attend public or charter schools in Massachusetts, a figure that does not account for homeless youth who do not attend school and are largely "invisible... highly mobile, and, in many cases, reluctant to engage with traditional state or local services." According to the commission, those young people are more susceptible than housed children to a variety of health risks, including drug use, gang-activity, sexual assault, and suicide.

The Commission has made recommendations, most notably that the state set up tools to identify and connect with Massachusetts' homeless youth. But as Jesse said on stage in front of millions of eyes at the VMA's last night, these children are frequently "extras" in our lives—an afterthought that doesn't frequently break into the national or even statewide conversation. Maybe this year's version of the "Miley Cyrus VMA Headline" will change that.

For more information on homeless youth in Massachusetts, visit [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](http://www.mahomeless.org/) (<http://www.mahomeless.org/>) or the [Massachusetts page](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/massachusetts/homeless) (<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/massachusetts/homeless>) on the US Department of Housing and Urban Development website.



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