

On the Street, on the Screen: Making the Homeless Real

By SETH KUGEL

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To the soaring strains of Yanni, the video starts with a slick montage of protesters during the Republican National Convention. Then comes the voice-over:

"This is Picture the Homeless," says Fay, her words measured and deliberate.

"Up first, interviews conducted Aug. 28 through Sept. 1," adds a smooth-voiced baritone named Wayne.

Then back to Fay: "These are images and voices from homeless people who want a chance to be seen and heard."

Like most of the members of their East Harlem advocacy group, Wayne Harris and Fay Holley are homeless. Their television production, a professional-looking 22-minute video that will be shown on the public-access Manhattan Neighborhood Network, is the first of what they hope will be a regular series on people like them.

"One of the best ways for someone to know you is for you to talk about yourself," Mr. Harris said the other day in the group's office on 116th Street. "Don't let anyone else describe you or stereotype you."

That is the goal of Picture the Homeless, a group whose name has suddenly become more literal with its new venture into television. Members of the group received free training from the network this summer and have been allowed to use its equipment.

In this, the group's first video, homeless people are shown holding a news conference outside the main post office, near Madison Square Garden. The issue: they would not be able to collect their mail during the Republican National Convention.

The first interview is with John Jones, a homeless man with cornrows and a backpack who could easily be mistaken for a graduate student. "Picture the Homeless wants to ensure the homeless people's civil rights are still preserved," he says solemnly, "despite the fact that politicians, who are supposed to preserve those civil rights, are going to be in this city for a couple of days." If it weren't for the group's camera, his words would have gone unnoticed: no outside reporters showed up.

The video goes on to document how the issue played out over the next several days; the resolution was that group members eventually served as bag checkers when homeless people were let into the post office. The video will be shown at 10:30 p.m. Thursday, 5:30 p.m. next Sunday and 9:30 p.m. Oct. 17 on the network.

The other day, over Sun Chips in Picture the Homeless's office, Mr. Harris and his colleagues reviewed footage for their next production. In it, Jean Rice, a 65-year-old member, is shown collecting cans outside Yankee Stadium to raise money for Congresco, a Brazilian organization. He ended up sending \$30, no small sum in Rio de Janeiro's impoverished favelas.

But Mr. Rice, who attended the meeting, was restless. He was eager to get up to the stadium to resume collecting cans during the day's doubleheader. He was expecting a big payday.