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On and of the streets

Local visual journalist to present ground-level perspective on homelessness and poverty

By [Howard Hardee](#)



Bill Mash (foreground) originally interviewed Adam Kurtz-DuBord, a former homeless youth, for his ongoing visual journalism project on homelessness. They've since become good friends.

PHOTO BY HOWARD HARDEE

Attend the festival:

The People's Palooza, which includes free food, will take place in the City Plaza from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Monday, Jan. 19).

The Poor People's Film Festival will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. the same day at 100th Monkey Community Café (642 W.

Back in September, Chico Police reported a strange occurrence: 44-year-old Rebecca Ware had been arrested after allegedly attempting to “forcibly take a child” from a woman on Broadway Street, then trying to take another child from a stroller near the corner of Third and Flume streets. In that case, a police press release noted, the mother “was assisted by an alert citizen, who physically took Ware to the ground.”

Fifth St.). Tickets are \$10.

A sneak preview of the festival will be shown at the Housing Authority of Butte County (2039 Forest Ave.) on Friday (Jan. 16) from 3 to 5 p.m.

That citizen was then-homeless youth Adam Kurtz-DuBord. He wasn't the only person to see the attempted kidnapping in progress, but he was the only one to react.

“No one else was doing anything,” Kurtz-DuBord recalled during a recent interview. “Dude, that’s a big deal—somebody is screaming ‘Help!’ What do you do? You go help them.”

The incident is an example of why Bill Mash, a local visual journalist who chronicles poverty and homelessness throughout the North State, is fascinated with Kurtz-DuBord.

The skinny 23-year-old with mad-scientist hair has been through a lot since hopping on a freight train and escaping a troubled home life in North Dakota a few years ago. Throughout his travels, he’s been turned away by homeless shelters—because older people were higher priority, he was told—ignored by passersby and hassled by police, mostly for sleeping outside. Even so, Kurtz-DuBord “exudes love,” Mash said. “He’s a beautiful human being.”

In his search for tangible solutions to long-term homelessness, lately Mash has focused on young people like Kurtz-DuBord, attempting to jump-start discussions of an overnight shelter for homeless youth in Chico.

“You want to end homelessness in 20 years? Stop youth homelessness,” he said. “Get these kids whatever help they need—now. They’re malleable; they haven’t been dragged through the trenches for years.”

To that end, Mash is hosting the Poor People’s Film Festival at 100th Monkey Community Café on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Monday, Jan. 19). Half the proceeds will benefit the 6th Street Center for Youth, while the rest will go toward Mash’s outreach efforts and Kurtz-DuBord’s goal of building a tiny house.

The festival will show 42 of Mash’s vignettes featuring more than 100 interviews on civil rights, unemployment, food insecurity and shelter “that paint the picture that is homelessness in Northern California and the communities’ reaction to it,” he said.

Mash knows of what he speaks. At 16 years old, he ran away from an abusive home in the Boston area and lived on the streets. He “went homeless” again in 2012, more by choice,

after a 25-year career as a program manager with Hewlett-Packard in the Bay Area.

He was homeless in a car from April to July of that year. Then he set out on foot, starting with a three-week stint on the streets of Sacramento. From there he walked to Marysville and Yuba City, then to Oroville, and finally arrived in Chico in February 2013. He used an iPod to record more than 150 interviews with the homeless people he met along the way. Now, after a couple of years living in Chico and continuing the project, he's completed more than 380 video interviews.

That includes six or seven videos focusing on Kurtz-DuBord. "For every video I make, the primary audience is the person I'm doing the story about," Mash continued. "Adam's story was the most poignant, because it started to lift him up. People got involved in his life and it showed him he had purpose, that he could do this."

Indeed, since being featured in Mash's videos, Kurtz-DuBord was informally adopted by a family, and he's currently working at The Lantern, the new Vietnamese restaurant adjacent to 100th Monkey Café. He's saving up the \$2,000 he needs for a tiny house—a 4-by-8-foot trailer complete with a bed, outdoor kitchen and a roof-rack for his bicycle—which he plans on parking at designated campsites and in his friends' backyards. And on Jan. 26 he'll attend his first classes at Butte Community College, where he'll study welding and peace and global studies.

Kurtz-DuBord says Mash's video projects are "a voice for people who don't have a voice. He gives us the time of day and treats us equally, looks at us like we're no different than he is. That's what I love about him the most."