

HOMELESS AND ALONE

An interview with Spencer Jackson of South Bend by Cheryl Hall-Russell:

His head is down as he shifts in his seat, sharing his harrowing experiences with state legislators. At 18, Jackson is a fit kid with baggy pants and age-appropriate acne. But his appearance belies his experience. Jackson has spent the last two years of his life as an unattached youth.

"I was living in St. Louis with my parents when we got into it. They sent me to Michigan to my grandmother. I got into some trouble with the police and then she kicked me out. I didn't have anywhere to go. I stayed with friends for a while, sleeping on couches and floors. Finally I ended up living in the woods off a public trail. I stayed there on and off for 18 months," said Jackson.

He depended on the kindness of others for food and occasionally stole to meet his basic needs.

After a few scrapes, Michigan police gave him the address of a homeless shelter in South Bend. It was there he met Brady August, director of street outreach for the Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County. August found emergency shelter for him at the bureau's Safe Station.

"One night I got so cold that I knew I had to get off the streets. I want people to know that homeless teens are just like other kids; they just need an adult to be patient and to care about them," Jackson said.