

They hide in plain sight. They survive on school breakfasts and lunches, join sports teams in order to shower, sleep on friends' couches, in parks, or on the streets. Their official designation is "unaccompanied homeless youth"—they are not "runaways" breaking free from strict parenting; these are kids seeking safety. They have escaped abusive parents, been abandoned, or never had a home to begin with.

When Vicki Sokolik's son brought home a classmate who was living on her own and about to drop out of school to work a minimum wage job, Vicki stepped in to help. Soon she was introduced to other kids who lacked adult supervision, support, and the means to survive and thrive. As she learned more about the invisible population of young people navigating life alone, she discovered the countless ways they are overlooked and impeded by the system. She founded a nonprofit and worked to change legislation in her home state of Florida to give these kids agency over their lives. Listening to the kids opened her up and changed her; and in turn, her unwavering belief in them transformed their ideas of what was possible.

*If You See Them* wakes us up to the issue of youth homelessness in America through Sokolik's own story of advocacy and through the voices of the kids themselves. Her grassroots action demonstrates the world-shifting power of compassion, acceptance, belonging, and self-determination, and the capacity each of us has to change our communities for the better.

**VICKI SOKOLIK** is the founder and CEO of Starting Right, Now (SRN), a pioneering, comprehensive program in Florida that provides social and health services to unhouseed students who are not living with a parent or guardian and are not safeguarded by foster care. Her work has been recognized by many organizations, and in 2019 she was named a CNN Hero. Sokolik has coauthored and amended legislation to pass ten bills protecting unaccompanied youth in Florida and has served on the state's Independent Living Services Advisory Council.

READ BY YINKA LADEINDE, JOSE NATERAS,  
AND WENDY TREMONT KING



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IF YOU SEE THEM VICKI SOKOLIK

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