How the Poverty Simulation Works

The Community Action Poverty Simulation breaks down stereotypes by allowing participants to step into the real life situations of others.

Poverty is often portrayed as a stand alone issue - but this simulation allows individuals to walk a month in the shoes of someone who is facing poverty and realize how complex and interconnected issues of poverty really are.

- A single parent with limited resources and no transportation must find a way to get to work and get their child to daycare.
- An elderly person must find a way to pay for both utilities and medication.
- A young adult must care for siblings while their parent is incarcerated.
- An elderly couple must raise their grandchildren and deal with their own health and employment issues.

After the experience, individuals then have the opportunity to discuss what they’ve learned with their peers.

The Community Action Poverty Simulation is a tool that helps participants rethink the challenges that millions of low income individuals must face each and every day. More importantly, this tool helps people identify areas of change that can directly impact the effects of poverty on individuals, families and communities.
Living a Month in Poverty...

The simulation involves participants who take on the roles of members of up to 26 families, all facing a variety of challenging, but typical, circumstances.

To start the simulation exercise, each family is given a card explaining its unique circumstances. It is then the families’ task to provide food, shelter, and other basic necessities by accessing various community resources during the course of four 15-minute “weeks”.

In addition, about 20 volunteers - preferably people who have experienced poverty - play the roles of resource providers in the community. This allows individuals who have firsthand knowledge of poverty bring their perceptions to the exercise.

The Community Action Poverty Simulation is conducted in a large room. Participants are seated in family groups and community resources are located at tables around the perimeter of the room. The facilitator opens the simulation with an orientation to the activity, goes over ground rules, and answers participant questions during the exercise.

The activity lasts about three hours. This time frame includes an introduction and briefing by the facilitator, the simulation exercise, and a guided debriefing in which participants and volunteers share their observations and insights from the activity.

RECAP’s mission is to mobilize and coordinate public and private resources to address the basic needs of low-income people and assist them in attaining the skills, knowledge, motivation and opportunities needed to become economically self-sufficient.

Participants will experience the lives of 26 separate families which will accommodate up to 88 participants. The families will be provided with money, transportation passes, identification cards, and a scenario which explains the family’s situation. The situations include:

- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
- Working Parents
- Single Parent Households
- Elderly Adults
- Young Adult Caring for Underage Siblings

The simulation occurs in a community of approximately 3,000 square feet. The community resources available to the participants include:

- U Trust Us National Bank
- Quik Cash
- Community Action Agency
- Interfaith Services
- Food-A-Rama
- Sweaney’s Mortgage and Realty Company
- Big Dave’s Pawnshop
- Realville Police Department
- Friendly Utility Company
- Illegal Activities Person
- Department of Social Services
- Realville School
- Building Blocks Daycare
- General Employer
- Community Healthcare

The poverty simulation is approximately three hours long. After living in poverty for a month, there is a facilitated debriefing for participants to share their experiences. It is an opportunity to discover a multitude of issues that accompany poverty. Participants learn that poverty is much more than merely not having money. It is also an opportunity to explore ideas of what we can do individually and as a community to address the issues surrounding poverty.

RETHINK POVERTY.