



# POVERTY SIMULATION

**AN INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE AIMED AT HELPING PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAND POVERTY**

## WHAT IS THE POVERTY SIMULATION?

The Poverty Simulation is a unique, enlightening experience that helps individuals begin to understand what life is like with a shortage of money and an abundance of stress. It moves people to think about the harsh realities of poverty and to talk about how communities can address the problem collectively. Most importantly, it encourages people to make a difference.

The simulation is based on the Missouri Community Action model.



# HOW DOES THE POVERTY SIMULATION WORK?

In the simulation, participants assume the roles of up to 26 different families facing a variety of challenging, but typical circumstances. Some are homeless, others have recently become unemployed, and some are suddenly faced with the responsibility of raising grandchildren.

In addition, volunteers play the roles of resource providers, such as social workers, loan officers, employers, pawnbrokers, grocers, utility collectors, police officers, and teachers.

The program is conducted in a large room. Participants are seated in family clusters, and

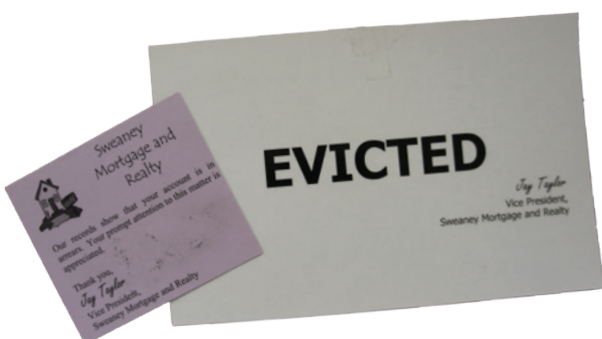
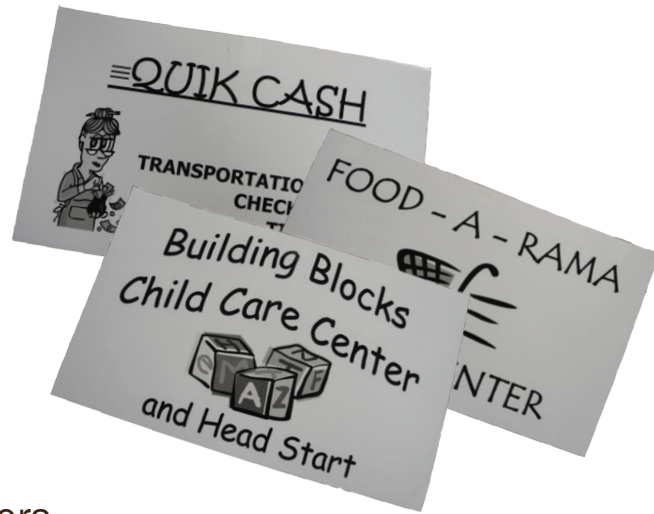
community resources are located at tables around the perimeter of the room. To start the simulation,

each family is given a card explaining its unique situation, as well as a small amount of “money.” Then, the families must secure food, shelter, and other basic necessities by accessing the various resources during the course of four, 15-minute “weeks.”

The activity lasts approximately three hours and includes an introduction and briefing by a facilitator, the simulation exercise itself, and a debriefing in which

participants and volunteers share what they have learned about living in poverty.

The simulation leaves a lasting impression on participants and communities.





# WHY IS THE ISSUE OF POVERTY IMPORTANT?

Families and individuals living in poverty face multiple challenges every day. They often must ask themselves: how will I pay for the gas to get to work? How can I afford the medicine I need to live and the food I need to be healthy? How will I stretch my limited income to pay for rent and child care this month? How will I cash my paycheck when no bank will accept me as a customer? What if something unexpected happens that lands my family on the streets?

Poverty rates in West Virginia and across the country are at record levels, and the faces of the hungry and the poor are often not easy to recognize. According to the West Virginia Center on Policy and Budget, 3 in 10 West Virginia kids under age 6 live in poverty. The West Virginia poverty rate is 18.5% which means that 332,347 individuals have income below the poverty line.

Often, poverty and hunger lead to increased emotional and financial stress, increased risk of illness, poor school performance by children, poor productivity by working adults, and ultimately a cycle of struggling that can seem insurmountable.

## HOW CAN THE POVERTY SIMULATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The Poverty Simulation can mean different things to different participants. For resource providers, it can help them to better identify with the needs of their customers. For community leaders, it can help them create and implement policies and programs that address the issue of poverty with more effectiveness. For students, it can help them gain empathy and appreciation for the diverse world around them. For everyone, it can inspire a commitment to making a positive difference in their communities.



*“What an eye opener!  
Makes you want to do  
more to help out.”*

*“I think this should be  
required for all our employees.”*

**What REAL  
participants are  
saying about their  
experience!**

*“Wow! I learned  
a lot more than I  
thought I would.”*

*“Very good! Outstanding  
way to open everyone’s  
eyes to reality.”*

## **HOW CAN YOU HOST A POVERTY SIMULATION?**

We can host a Poverty Simulation !

Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine Office of Diversity can help you plan your Poverty Simulation. You will need to provide:

- Approximately 3 hours
- 15-20 volunteers
- At least 3,000 square feet of space
- 40-80 participants
- 12 tables and 175 chairs

Contact Dr. Shelvy L. Campbell to discuss scheduling, fees, and other details:

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