

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

THE SIMULATION EXPERIENCE

The poverty simulation experience is designed to help participants begin to understand what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family trying to survive from month to month. **It is a simulation, not a game.** The object is to sensitize participants to the realities faced by low-income people.

In the simulation, up to 88 participants assume the roles of up to 26 different families facing poverty. It is recommended that dolls be used for the 1-3 year old children, as these roles do not actively participate in the simulation. (If you use dolls in these roles the number of active participants is reduced to 80.)

Some families are newly unemployed, some are recently deserted by the "breadwinner," some are homeless, and others are recipients of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, formerly AFDC), either with or without additional earned income. Still others are senior citizens receiving Disability or Retirement or grandparents raising their grandchildren. The task of the "families" is to provide for basic necessities and shelter during the course of four 15-minute "weeks."

The simulation is conducted in a large room with the "families" seated in groups in the center of the room. Around the perimeter are tables representing community resources and services for the families. These services include a bank, super center, Community Action Agency, employer, utility company, pawn broker, grocery, social service agency, faith-based agency, payday and title loan facility, mortgage company, school, community health center, and child care center.

Volunteers, preferably persons who have faced or are facing poverty, are recruited to staff the resource tables. Volunteers are also recruited to assume the roles of police officer and an "illegal activities" person.

The experience lasts from two and a half to three hours. It includes an introduction and briefing, the actual simulation exercise, and a debriefing period in which participants and volunteer staffers share their feelings and experiences and talk about what they have learned about the lives of people in poverty.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEER STAFFERS

Persons recruited as volunteer staffers are asked to think about the role they might like to fill. Staffers may have had personal experiences that enable them to be especially effective in portraying a given role. Realistic portrayals contribute greatly to the success of the experience.

The following staffers are essential and must be staffed for every simulation: police officer, utility collector, pawnbroker, grocer, mortgage/rent collector, Quik Cash manager, two social service caseworkers, a social service receptionist, Community Action worker, employer, child care worker, schoolteacher, faith based agency staffer, community health care staff, and bank/loan collector. The caseworkers will need to have some command of pertinent facts and information. Familiarity or experience with a local social service office is highly desirable. If possible, the Community Action worker should be someone who has had real-life experience in this role.

It is essential that the facilitator meet with the volunteer staffers for an orientation prior to the simulation being conducted. An overview of the simulation will be given at that time, assigned roles and responsibilities will be agreed upon, and instruction packets will be given to each staffer.

At the end of the simulation, staffers will be asked to comment on the simulation experience. This could include a summary of how the participants reacted to the staffer's role, comments about the participants' ability to cope in the State of Poverty during this "month," previous experiences or special information or facts which the staffer may have that could reinforce the realities of living in poverty, how it feels for the staffer to be "on the other side of the table" during this simulation, and whether or not there was a perceptible change of attitude on the part of the participants during the simulation.

