

BRIEF DESCRIPTION – POVERTY SIMULATION.

THE SIMULATION EXPERIENCE

The poverty simulation experience aims to help participants grasp what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family, struggling to make ends meet month after month. **This is a simulation, not a game**, designed to raise awareness about the challenges faced by low-income individuals. Up to 80 participants can take on the roles of 26 different families experiencing poverty. A minimum of 60 participants is required to host the simulation.

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 takes place in a large room, with the “families” seated in groups at the center. Surrounding them are tables representing various community resources and services, including a bank, super center, Community Action Agency, employer, utility company, pawn broker, grocery store, social service agency, faith-based organization, payday and title loan facility, mortgage company, school, community health center, and childcare center. Around 20 volunteers are recruited to staff these resource tables and to play the role of a police officer.

The experience spans approximately two and a half hours. It begins with an introduction and briefing, followed by the actual simulation exercise. Afterwards, there is a debriefing session where participants and volunteer staffers share their feelings and experiences, discussing what they have learned about the lives of people living in poverty.

VOLUNTEERS - COMMUNITY RESOURCE TABLES:

Volunteers recruited as staff are encouraged to consider the roles they might want to fill. Their personal experiences may or may not make them particularly effective in portraying certain roles. Realistic portrayals are crucial to the success of the simulation.

The following volunteer staff are essential and include police officer, utility collector, pawnbroker, grocer, mortgage/rent collector, Quik Cash manager, two social service caseworkers, a social service receptionist, Community Action worker, employer, childcare worker, schoolteacher, faith-based agency staffer, community health care staff, and bank/loan collector.

The facilitator will meet with the volunteer staff 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. This will happen about 45 minutes before the start of the simulation.

At the end of the simulation, staff 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.