

*St. Vincent*

# POVERTY

## Experience

### Director

#### **Director Packet Contents:**

- 1 Director Instruction Sheet and Suggested Script
- 1 Family Listing
- “Luck of the Draw” Cards
- 1 pad of paper
- 1 pen/pencil
- 1 whistle or bell
- 1 timer
- 1 name tag

#### **General Information**

These instructions include a sample script that the director might use in conducting the simulation. The script includes instructions or comments that are in italics. It is more effective for you, as the director, to become very familiar with the content and flow of this material so that you can use your own words and style.

Remember that your manner and example are as important as your words in reinforcing that this is a simulation, not a game. Take the simulation seriously while helping participants appreciate the experience so they will be receptive to the information shared.

In addition to setting the tone for the families, a confident attitude on your part will help the volunteer vendors handle whatever comes their way. Vendors have to think quickly in responding to the unlimited number of situations the family members may create. Your creativity will be stretched in presenting this simulation.

#### **Before the Participants Arrive**

Be prepared to make last minute substitutions for vendor roles since sometimes a volunteer will not arrive by starting time, or at all. In such cases, you might combine roles if the number of simulation participants is small (30 to 40). For example, the director can double as police, or the grocer can also act as the banker.

You may also, no matter what the size of the group, decide to ask members of your planning committee to stand by in case they are needed as last minute substitutes in the least critical roles. Sometimes the community volunteers have had experience in a variety of situations and may be willing to make a last minute shift to another crucial role.

The Quik Cash (currency exchange) can become extremely busy, especially during the first two weeks. You may wish to ask a member of your planning committee to be prepared to help out the Quik Cash vendor if the lines become too long.

#### **When the Participants Arrive**

As participants enter the room, help them fill the chairs in family groupings. Ask them not to rearrange the chairs, and not to open their packets until asked to do so. Planning committee members may be designated to serve as greeters/ushers, and to help them register.

It's possible you may not know until the last minute the exact number of persons participating. Even if you have asked for reservations, someone is bound to cancel at the last minute or bring a friend along. You will probably need to make last-minute adjustments so that the family groupings correspond with the exact number of participants. Make sure that there are at least two families from each family profile category (A to C, D to F, etc.) and that each family unit has the correct number of persons represented.

When you know the exact families participating, ask someone to tell the vendors which families will not be included in the simulation, so they can note it on their recording sheets.

## **The Opening Orientation – Sample Script**

### **Introduction**

Welcome! Welcome to the Poverty Experience! During the next hour you will be participating in a simulation of what it might be like to be part of a typical low-income family trying to survive from month to month. You will be living in the state of poverty for one month – a month consisting of four 15-minute weeks.

The object of this experience is to sensitize us to the day-to-day realities of life faced by low-income people and to motivate us to become involved in activities which help to reduce poverty in this country.

### **Family Units**

When you entered, you were assigned to a family unit and given a packet of information. The packet contains:

- A description of your family and its individual members
- Your sources of income, your possessions and your bills
- Name tags and identification documents
- Various other items which you will need to survive the month

### **Reviewing the Packet**

During the next few minutes we will give your family some time to study the contents of the packet, choose your family roles, and put on your name tags. Study your instructions and your family description very carefully, because this defines who you are going to be for the next month. We'll allow about 5 minutes for reviewing the packet, and during that time, I will circulate among you answering any questions that may arise.

At the end of the 5 minutes, I will blow this whistle (or ring this bell). Then I will give you additional information about your responsibilities and introduce you to the community resources (vendors) around the room.

Circulate among the families as they read. After about 5 minutes, blow the whistle to gain the group's attention.

### **Not A Game**

I want to reinforce the fact that this is a simulation, not a game. You may be tempted to treat this experience as a game, since the "play money" and other "props" may be reminiscent of some Milton Bradley recreational product. But the statistics and situations we use are real, based on real-life experiences of low-income families. Poverty is not a game for the over 40 (you may need to update this figure) million US citizens whose lifestyles you will simulate. It is not a game for the 1 in 10 (you may need to update these as well) Americans who currently receive food stamps. You are going to try to walk a mile in the shoes of those who are poor.

Your family unit is struggling with poverty, but it doesn't represent the lower end of the poverty spectrum. Rather, it typifies the average of vast majority of low-income homes. Likewise, your expenses are based on average amounts, not the lower or upper end of the scale.

### **Your Responsibilities**

Be as realistic as possible about your role. Act the age and position of the role you have chosen. Remember:

- No healthy teenager likes to sit quietly at home.
- A child who has not eaten all day will cry and complain.
- Adults seeking work are often frustrated and irritable.
- Parents can get desperate in their search for food and shelter for their children. Try to think as a person facing poverty would think.

### **“Luck of the Draw” Cards**

Sometime during the month, I, or my assistant will be visiting your family with “Luck of the Draw” cards. These represent the unexpected hand of fate in all our lives, sometimes bringing good news, sometimes, bad. You are expected to follow the instructions on these cards.

### **Transportation Passes**

Let me say a word about the transportation passes in your packets. Transportation is one of the most critical considerations for low-income families. Community resources are seldom neatly clustered within walking distance of your home. You will need bus fare, gas money, or walking time to move about. In this simulation, you cannot go ANYWHERE without a transportation pass. Each community resource will ask for a pass from you and each person with you before you can be served. Passes can be purchased for \$2 at Quick Cash (the currency exchange, as it is called in many states).

### **Ground Rules**

Now for a few ground rules: When figuring your budget or writing notes, use the blank paper in your packet. Please do not write on any other materials.

Your 1-hour month is divided into four 15-minute weeks which will be designated by this whistle. Blow whistle. When I blow the whistle, please stop whatever you are doing and be very quiet until I tell you to start your next week.

### **Director's Role**

I am the person you may come to see if you have questions about the simulation or if your family has a medical emergency during the month. No transportation pass is needed to come see me. We thought you'd enjoy getting at least one break.

If someone comes to you with a medical problem, for example, a child having an asthma attack, take them aside for a moment and give them a band-aid to place on their name tag as a symbol that they have received medical care. You might warn the family that Medicaid/Medicare does not cover all treatments and service, so they may get a bill later. If they say they do not want to receive anything which is not covered, say the regulations are so confusing that you are not sure exactly what is covered.

## **Community Resources (Vendors)**

At the various tables around the room are the community resources here in the State of Poverty. Your family will need to rely on these resources in order to survive the month.

The vendors around the room can call out the title of their business or service or you may identify them yourself.

## **Your Goals**

Keep in mind that your goals during this month are to keep your home secure, feed your family on a regular basis, keep your utilities on, make all necessary loan and rental payments, pay for miscellaneous expenses, and meet unexpected situations. (If your simulation includes a school, add the following.) And for those families with school aged children, you must see to it that your children are in school every week.

## **The Debriefing**

After the month is up you will have a chance to reflect on and talk about your experience. You will also be introduced to the community resource vendors, who will also make comments on the simulation.

Are you ready?? As I blow this whistle, your first week in the State of Poverty will begin.

## **Your Responsibilities during the Poverty Month**

- Keep track of time, blow the whistle, and announce each new week
- At the end of each week ask everyone to quickly return to their homes. The community resources are not open during the weekend.
- Between the weeks, remind the families to feed their families and to pay the rent/mortgage.
- See that the “Luck of the Draw” cards are distributed. Give each family at least one. Remind the family that they must follow the directions on the card.
- If participants or vendors are confused on any issue, you might turn their confusion into an object lesson during the debriefing.
- If your simulation includes a school, sometime during the third “week” the teacher may ask you to blow the whistle and announce that the school will be closed for the rest of the week due to a watermain break.

## **The Debriefing Period**

After you have blown the whistle on the final week, ask the following:

Please return to your homes at this time. If you would, can you each return all your materials to your packets? Ask someone to collect the packets.

Now we will spend some time reflecting and commenting on our month in the State of Poverty. You will be given the opportunity to share both your experiences and your feelings. You will also have a chance to hear from our community resources.

You may have the vendors introduce themselves and tell how the experience felt for them before or after the participant debriefing. Here are some suggested questions for your use in leading the debriefing discussion with the participant group. You may choose from these questions or construct your own.

1. What feelings did you experience during your month in poverty? How did you feel about yourself? Why did you feel that way?
2. What happened to your family? What good things? What bad things?
3. How did other people respond to your needs? How did you feel about their response?
4. Did your attitudes change during the month? If so, how?
5. How many families:
  - Paid the rent or mortgage bill?
  - Kept the utilities on?
  - Bought the required food each week?
  - Made loan payments?
  - Carried out their “Luck of the Draw” cards’ demands?
  - Were evicted?
6. How many families:
  - Improved their situation through the month?
  - Are in a worse situation now than at the beginning?
7. How many people:
  - Looked for a job?
  - Neglected their children?
  - Cheated, stole money, or did something else illegal?
8. Did any of you help each other out?
9. How did those of you who were children feel about the family’s situation? Why? How do you think poverty affects relationships?
10. What insights or conclusions have you come to about the life experiences of low-income families?

*Be sure to allow time for dialogue between participants and vendors.*

*When time has run out, thank the entire group. Ask them to remember what they have learned and how they have felt, and to direct those feelings and learnings toward positive action. Encourage them to move beyond charity to working for justice. Charity seeks to remedy today what justice could have prevented yesterday.*

*It is strongly urged that you close by sharing information about a specific issue on which their advocacy and support could make a difference for a low-income person...perhaps a bill in the U.S. Congress or state legislature, or perhaps some local issue or initiative.*

# Do Not Laminate Family Listing

4 Members – Newly Unemployed	
<b>ABER</b>	
<b>BOLING (Farmer Family)</b>	
<b>CHEN</b>	
3 Members – Applying for TANF, Food Stamps	
<b>DUNTLEY</b>	
<b>EPPERMAN</b>	
<b>FUENTES</b>	
<b>GONZALEZ (Speaks Little English)</b>	
3 Members – Receiving TANF, Food Stamps	
<b>HANLOW</b>	
<b>ISMA</b>	
<b>JOLLY</b>	
<b>KAMINSKI</b>	
<b>LOUIS</b>	
4 Members – Employed Pt Time, TANF, Food Stamps	
<b>MORRIS</b>	
<b>NATTIN</b>	
<b>OLSON</b>	
<b>PEREZ</b>	
<b>QUANT</b>	
<b>ROGERS</b>	
1 Member – Receiving Supplemental Security Income	
<b>SMITH</b>	
<b>TISKIT</b>	
<b>USSAR</b>	
<b>VIMMER</b>	
2 Members – Receiving Supplemental Security Income	
<b>WISCOTT</b>	
<b>XANTHOS</b>	
<b>YARROW</b>	
<b>ZUPPOT</b>	

# Photocopy on GREEN Paper

## Luck O' the Draw



### LOAN REPAID

A friend returns money that was borrowed.  
Collect \$60 from the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### PURSE STOLEN

Your purse or wallet containing all your cash, food stamps and ID is stolen. Give your cash, food stamps and ID card to the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### DAY JOB

You find a one-time housecleaning job. If you have no children left uncared for at home and are not sick during the current time period, collect \$70 from the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### BAIL BOND

A member of your family is arrested. The person from whom you receive this card will deliver one member of your family to jail where she/he will remain until \$200 bond is paid or police decide to release him/her. Pay bank \$200 for bond.

## Luck O' the Draw



### ADDED INCOME

Your neighbor asks you to baby sit. If you are not sick, stay home for 5 minutes and then collect \$20 from the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### TRANSPORTATION COST

If you have a car, your registration is due. Pay bank \$50. If you don't have a car, your bus pass is lost. Turn in all your transportation tickets to the bank.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**MONEY FOUND**

You find \$10 on the ground. Collect \$10 from the bank.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**VISITING RELATIVE**

A cousin has come to town to look for work and has to stay with you. Pay the grocery store an additional \$30 per week for the extra costs.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**LOTTERY WINNER**

You win the lottery. If you have \$2 in cash, you may trade it for \$20 from the bank. Otherwise, return the card to the Director.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**DEATH IN THE FAMILY**

An out-of-town relative has died and you are responsible for the funeral costs. Pay the health clinic \$400.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**UTILITY REBATE**

The gas company rebates you \$30 on your gas bill. Collect \$30 from the bank if your bill is paid.

**Luck O' the Draw**



**DENTAL WORK**

You have broken a tooth. Pay the health clinic \$50 for cost of emergency dental work.

# Photocopy on GREEN Paper

## Luck O' the Draw



### LOTTERY LOSER

You buy lottery tickets hoping to win the jackpot but you lose. Pay \$10 to the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### PLUMBING PROBLEMS

Your water line is leaking and soaking your property. Pay the bank \$50 for cost of repair. If you are renting, ask the Landlord to fix leak.

## Luck O' the Draw



### DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

There is a drive-by shooting in your neighborhood. Stay at home for the rest of the week to make sure everything is OK.

## Luck O' the Draw



### BROKEN WINDOW

A guest in your house has broken a window. Pay bank \$50 for repairs. If you are renting, ask Landlord to repair.

## Luck O' the Draw



### ROBBERY

Your house has been robbed and your cash, food stamps and television are stolen. Give your television to the pawn shop and your cash and food stamps to the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### BROKEN REFRIGERATOR

Your refrigerator has broken and the food has spoiled. Pay \$50 to the bank for repairs and \$20 to the grocery store to replace spoiled food.

# Photocopy on GREEN Paper

## Luck O' the Draw



### IDENTITY THEFT

Your bank statements are stolen from your trash can. Pay \$100 to the bank for forged debits to your account.

## Luck O' the Draw



### CAR VANDALIZED

Your car is vandalized. Pay \$75 to the bank for new repairs.

## Luck O' the Draw



### GARAGE SALE

You sell your TV at a garage sale. Collect \$30 from the bank.

## Luck O' the Draw



### BABYSITTER VISITS

A relative offers to babysit for the week. If you have children, you have no child care costs for the week. If you have no children, return this card to the Director.

## Luck O' the Draw



### COUPONS

Redeem this coupon at the grocery store for \$50 worth of free food.

## Luck O' the Draw



### CHILD IS SICK

School calls and you must pick up your child and miss work. Give \$40 and 2 transportation passes to the bank. If no children, return card to Director.

Nametag

