

*St. Vincent*

**POVERTY**  
**EXPERIENCE**

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILIES!!!**

### **WELCOME TO THE STATE OF POVERTY!**

The purpose of this simulation is to give you a small taste of what life is like on an extremely limited income. For the next hour you will join the millions of U.S. citizens who live, for one reason or another, with incomes below the poverty line. You will be facing some of the many challenges that real low-income families face. It may be that this experience will generate some vivid feelings in you and your “family members.” If so, you may wish to note these thoughts and emotions for the discussion which will follow.

Read the following instructions carefully and look over the materials in your packet, so that you are fully aware of your situation and resources. This next hour represents a month of time. You will have to work rapidly to get your tasks done. A signal will be given at the end of each “week.”

#### **In order to survive the “month” you will need to:**

- Keep your shelter secure
- Buy the required amount of food each week
- Keep your utilities on
- Make all your payments
- Respond appropriately to unexpected factors in your life
- Keep tots in day care and school-age children in school

Remember, the simulation is not a game. Millions face the challenge that is before you. Do your best to survive the month and better your situation.

### **1. Family Profile**

First read the description of the family of which you are now a member. Assign a role to each of the persons in your group of chairs. Put on your name tag – each family member has one – and try to consistently be that person for the next hour. **ACT YOUR AGE!!** In your packets are all the resources you have available to you. If you are on welfare, your welfare check is enclosed; you will have to cash it. If you have any cash on hand, it is in your packet. If you have a paycheck, it is also enclosed. You have six picture cards which represent some of your belongings. In a pinch, each of them (valued at \$200 each) might be pawned at the pawnshop or sold on the street, but will then not be available for your use in the future unless you redeem them.

### **2. Community Resources**

Look around the room at the resources available to you in your community. These are identified with signs on or near the tables.

- **Food Stamps** – If you are already on food stamps there is an ATP (authorization to participate) card in your packet. You will have to exchange this for food stamps at the Quik Cash (Currency Exchange). Food stamps can be used at the grocery store for food items only. They may not be used for toilet tissue or other paper products, soap, detergents, etc. If you do not have an ATP card, you may wish to go to the welfare office to learn about eligibility.

- **Transportation** – Each time you move from one resource to another, you will need to submit a pass for yourself and each person with you. This represents bus fares, gasoline, taxis, or walking time. Since you can go nowhere without a transportation pass, make sure you get a supply early in the “month.”
- **Grocery** – One of the most important tasks you have during this “month” is to feed your family. You must buy food for EACH of the 15 minute “weeks” or risk illness. You may buy for the entire month at one time if you wish. The grocery accepts food stamps for food purchases only. Don’t forget that inadequate diet can damage your family’s health.
- **“Luck of the Draw” Cards** – During the hour, you will probably be given a “Luck of the Draw” card from a deck that represents life’s little surprises, both good and bad. You must follow the instructions on the card you select.
- **Pawnshop/Shopping Center** – If necessary, you may pawn some possessions, but be aware that it will be more expensive to redeem the items should you wish to get them back in the future. The pawnshop is also the location where you need to turn in your money for clothing, uniforms and other miscellaneous items.
- **Housing, Health Care and Utility Costs** – During the “month,” you need to pay your rent, mortgage, health care and utility costs. If you do not go to the correct vendor and make your payment, don’t be surprised if the vendor comes to you. These vendors may be impatient with you, or angry that they have had to trouble themselves in collecting your debts. Be prepared to deal with their demands.
- **Other Possible Resources** – You will see other agencies/businesses stationed around the room. Most of these have resources that may or may not assist you through the month. Remember that you must consider who you are and your age in contacting these agencies. A child, for example, could not take on this kind of task alone.