Poverty Awareness

October 2012

Couleecap
your local community action program
Couleecap’s Mission

Couleecap fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency for people in the Coulee Region. We identify needs, mobilize resources, and provide quality services to people and communities in four counties of western Wisconsin: Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon.
Couleecap makes a difference in the lives of people in the Coulee Region. To do this, we pledge to:

* Empower people to achieve their full potential;
* Promote social and economic justice;
* Serve as a catalyst for change; and
* Strengthen families and communities.
Definition of Poverty

According to Webster:

The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions

Other Definitions:
The state of being poor; lack of the means of providing material needs or comforts.
The condition of being without adequate food, money, etc.

The extent to which an individual does without resources.
European Union Definition of Poverty

“The poor are those whose resources (material, cultural, and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State in which they live.”

United States Official Poverty Guidelines: 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>$11,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>$15,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>$19,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>$23,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wisconsin Income Distribution

- 12.2% Near Poor (100-185% poverty level)
- 8.7% Poor (Below the Poverty Line)
- 79.1% Other (Above 185% of poverty level)

Other 79.1%

Near Poor 12.2%

Poor 8.7%

CouleeCap
Your local community action program
# People Living in Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Crawford</th>
<th>La Crosse</th>
<th>Monroe</th>
<th>Vernon</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total persons living below 100% of poverty level (%)</td>
<td>2,076 (12.9%)</td>
<td>14,557 (13.5%)</td>
<td>6,148 (14.1%)</td>
<td>3,950 (13.6%)</td>
<td>637,613 (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children, under 18, living below 100% of poverty level (%)</td>
<td>645 (18.0%)</td>
<td>3,222 (13.6%)</td>
<td>2,573 (22.6%)</td>
<td>1,620 (21.1%)</td>
<td>208,131 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adults, 18 and older, living below 100% of poverty level (%)</td>
<td>1,119 (11.8%)</td>
<td>10,058 (14.4%)</td>
<td>3,106 (11.8%)</td>
<td>1,952 (11.6%)</td>
<td>372,230 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persons, 65 and older, living below 100% of poverty level (%)</td>
<td>312 (10.4%)</td>
<td>1,277 (9.1%)</td>
<td>469 (8.0%)</td>
<td>378 (8.4%)</td>
<td>57,252 (7.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (www.factfinder2.census.gov)
What is it like to live in poverty in Monroe County?

John and Stephanie live in Sparta, with their three children Ella (age 6), JJ (age 3), and Justin (age 1). John works 40 hours/week at Century Foods International, in a Machine Operator position, earning $12.71/hour. This totals $26,436.80 a year. Stephanie is a stay-at-home mom. How do John, Stephanie, and their children live on $26,436.80? How do they budget?
Major Expenses Each Year

- Rent - $9,108 (small three-bedroom house in Sparta)
- Utilities - $3,600 (heat and electricity)
- Transportation - $6,500 (car payment, gas, insurance, repairs, and maintenance)
- Food - $3,500 (this is in addition to food share/QUEST Card program)
- Health Insurance - $3,900 (this is the amount John pays in addition to the portion that his employer pays)
These expenses total $26,608

... which is $171.20 more than John has earned. And, all of the family’s needs have not been met. What about the other items that were left out? Clothes, shoes, phone, cleaning supplies, toiletries, holiday gifts, and entertainment? How do they pay for these? How do they decide what to leave out? How do they handle an unexpected expense?
• Making Ends Meet Exercise
Wages and Net Worth

- 22% of U.S. workers earn less than $8 an hour.
- 29 million U.S. workers hold jobs for at least half a year and earn less than $15,000.
- Median net worth for top 10%: $833,600
- Median net worth for bottom 20%: $7,900
If you did *everything* your caseworker told you to do, got a job and kept it for a year, never missing a day of work, *how much closer (if at all) would you be to being out of poverty at the end of that year than you were at the beginning?*
Is Poverty More Than a Lack of Money?

As mentioned earlier, poverty is more complex than simply a lack of household income, it is the lack of resources for the individual and household.
What Are Resources?

• **FINANCIAL**
  Being able to purchase the goods and services of that class and sustain it.

• **EMOTIONAL**
  Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. Shows itself through choices.

• **MENTAL**
  Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life; education; trade or skills

• **SPIRITUAL**
  Believing in (divine) purpose and guidance; one’s cultural base
What Are Resources?

• PHYSICAL
  Having physical health and mobility; appearance, fitness, athletic abilities

• SUPPORT SYSTEMS
  Having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources.

• RELATIONSHIPS/ROLE MODELS
  Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, nurturing, and who do not engage in destructive behavior.

• KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES
  Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.
Poverty is Relative (in comparison to others) and is experienced first on a very personal level.
Generational Poverty is Different than Situational Poverty
What Are The Causes of Poverty?

- Generational poverty
- Lack of education
- Job loss/inadequate job opportunities
- Divorce/loss of partner (income earner)
- Illness/Health issues
- Discrimination (age, gender, race, disability)
- Violence (can lead to incarceration)
- Economy/Rise in Cost of Living
- Substance Abuse (can lead to incarceration)
Labor Statistics show:

- If uneducated, and you work 10 years, you will experience $2.00/hr. increase and $.25 increase in the last 15 years of your employment.
- You don’t move up, gain more, get ahead. People earn less because they get old. Are in the workforce less time.
- People who are educated move up, get promoted, and work longer.
The context of poverty teaches people a world-view that is different than the context of middle-class or wealth. We have to meet people where they are and expose them to possibilities.
Class

Poverty

Middle Class

Wealth
## Driving Forces in Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Political Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Financial Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Material Security</td>
<td>Social Connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Class

## Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present is most important</td>
<td>Future is most important</td>
<td>Traditions and history most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions made for the moment based on feelings or survival</td>
<td>Decisions made against future ramifications</td>
<td>Decisions made partially on basis of tradition/decorum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Class

## Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power linked to personal respect</td>
<td>Power/respect separated</td>
<td>Power in expertise; connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to fight</td>
<td>Responds to position</td>
<td>Power in stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t stop bad things from happening</td>
<td>Power in information &amp; institutions</td>
<td>Influences policy and direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MONEY

POVERTY
To be used, spent

MIDDLE CLASS
To be managed

WEALTH
To be conserved, invested
Love and acceptance conditional, based on whether individual is liked.

POVERTY
Love and acceptance conditional, based on whether individual is liked.

MIDDLE CLASS
Love and acceptance conditional and based largely on achievement.

WEALTH
Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections.
Social inclusion of people he/she likes

Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency

Emphasis is on social exclusion
Activity

Could You Survive in Poverty?
Middle Class?
Wealth?
Hidden Rules of Class

How did you do?

If you fall mostly in the middle class, the assumption is that everyone knows these things.

If you did not know many of the items for the other classes, the exercise points out how many of the hidden rules are taken for granted by a particular class.
Poverty is often internalized as a personal deficiency. If people do not get strong messages that there are good things about them, they may not see hope or possibility.
“The healthier you are psychologically, or the less you may seem to need to change, the more you can change.”


“Tyranny of the Moment

“The need to act overwhelms any willingness people have to learn.”

Source: *The Art of the Long View* by Peter Schwartz
WHAT CAN WE DO?
Develop empathy for the experience of living in crisis situations, and respect for the strength and resourcefulness that people come to develop because of it.
Behaviors and values are products of social context that we live in and are not necessarily reflective of the kind of person we are. Suspend judgment and know that people are making the very best decisions they can in their own contexts.
We cannot blame the victims of poverty for being in poverty.
We cannot continue to support stereotypes and prejudices about the poor.
Curious
I find myself more late with every crisis
More angry with every injustice
More needy with every deprivation
More rude with every judgment
More disorganized with every eviction
More negative with every untreated illness.
More unstable with every insecurity.

I find myself more civil with every bite.
More respectful with every kindness.
More hopeful with every chance.
More grateful with every opportunity.
More ready to learn when I am safe.
More motivated when there is hope.
More happy when I am valued.

I find myself like the 39 million people in poverty responding in very human ways to my environment.