Poverty Simulation

COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN POVERTY SIMULATION (CAPS)

In 2014, the Community Engagement Center (CEC) purchased a Community Action Plan Poverty Simulation (CAPS) as a tool to assist faculty/staff and community partners with educating their constituencies about the numerous factors and complexities associated with individuals who experience poverty.

CAPS is available for individuals and groups to use! Our Poverty Simulation kit is all-inclusive and reusable, easily housed in a large, convenient storage container on wheels. You may use the CAPS kit as many times as you want. CEC staff can provide training for you to use inside and/or outside of the classroom.

Please contact the CEC if you would like more information on how to access the Poverty Simulation kit at CEC@csus.edu

What is CAPS?

Poverty is a reality for many individuals and families. But unless you have experienced poverty, it’s difficult to truly understand the challenges. The Community Action Plan Poverty Simulation (CAPS) bridges that gap from misconception to understanding. CAPS is an interactive immersion experience. It sensitizes community participants to the realities of poverty. It is a simulation, not a game.

Poverty is often portrayed as a standalone issue but this simulation allows individuals to walk a month in the shoes of someone who is facing poverty and realize how complex and interconnected issues of poverty really are. CAPS is not a game. It is based on real Community Action clients and their lives. CAPS exists to:

- **Promote Poverty Awareness:** During the simulation, role-play a month in poverty and experience low-income families’ lives.
- **Increase Understanding:** After the simulation, you will unpack your learning and brainstorm community change.
- **Inspire Local Change:** Together, you can be a voice to end poverty in your family, friends and community.

Why use CAPS?

The Poverty Simulation teaches empathy, and that goes a long way toward building a community of anti-poverty activists.
What will we be doing during the CAPS Activity?

During the Poverty Simulation, you will take on the identity of someone experiencing the struggles rooted in poverty. You will work together with your family (other participants) to live a month in poverty. Participants will navigate how 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, pawnbroker, grocery, social service agency, faith-based agency, payday and title loan facility, mortgage company, school, community health center, and childcare center.

Using the sample floor plan below as reference, you can arrange for a large room that accommodate the necessary number of tables and chairs. Allow enough room for participants to walk around during the simulation. A room of at least 3,000 square feet is suggested for a full poverty simulation.
Like real life, you need transportation to work or school. You need food on the table. You might struggle with a chronic illness or face an unexpected issue or expense. Throughout the month, you will face the daily stresses and challenges a person in poverty faces.

How many people can participate in the simulation?

Up to 88 participants can assume the roles of up to 26 different families facing poverty.

Who can participate in the Community Action Poverty Simulation?

Some examples of groups who have used the Community Action Poverty Simulation experience include:

- College students
- Community organizations
- Customer service groups
- Health care professionals
- Educators
- Clergy and congregations
- Social service providers
- Elected officials
- Management staff
- Corporations

What is included in a Community Action Poverty Simulation Kit?

A Director's Manual containing instructions for the facilitator on how to run a simulation, a sample invitation letter and new release, a script for the opening of the simulation and
an outline for the debriefing exercise. The director’s manual contains everything you know about running a simulation.

**Family Packets** for 26 separate families, which will accommodate up to 88 participants. The Family Packets include items such as money, transportation passes, identification cards, and a scenario, which explains the family’s situation. Examples include:

- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- Working parents
- Single parent household
- Elderly adults
- Young adult caring for under age sibling

**Resource Packets** containing instructions and materials for each community resource

15 Community Resources include:

- U Trust Us National Bank
- Quik Cash
- Community Action Agency
- Interfaith Services
- Food-A-Rama
- Sweaney’s Mortgage and Realty Company
- Big Dave’s Pawnshop
- Realville Police Department
- Friendly Utility Company
- Illegal Activities Person
- Department of Social Services
- Realville School
- Building Blocks Daycare
- General Employer
- Community Healthcare

**Accessories** such as printed signage, calculators, badges, dolls, to represent young children in the simulation, card, clipboards, and more.

**A Compact Disc** that contains pdf files of all the materials so that any which are lost can be reprinted with ease. In addition, there is a kit rebuild list to make it faster to put your kit back together once it’s been used.

How long does the simulation take (for facilitators)?

The experience can last from two to six hours depending on who is putting on the simulation and what outcomes you want to achieve. This includes set up, volunteer
orientation, participant registration, an introduction and briefing, the actual simulation exercise, the 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 and clean-up.

Organization and Presentation

As you begin your planning process, please keep in mind the following general suggestions.

- It is desirable to establish a committee of 4-6 people to assist in the planning and presentation of the simulation.
- The committee should review and become familiar with the CAPS manual to be prepared to assist participants and volunteers during the poverty simulation.
- Your planning can be greatly facilitated if you could involve someone from your area who has already participated in the poverty simulation. You may call the Missouri Association for Community Action (573) 634-2969, to see if there is such a person in your area.