

## **Educator Resource Guide for Poverty Simulations**

The purpose of this guide is to provide information about the poverty simulations that can be incorporated into a class assignment or learning activity. This guide includes a detailed description of the simulation written for learners, resources, learning objectives and a self-reflection writing assignment.

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As part of this course, you will be participating in a poverty simulation for UAB students from across campus. The poverty simulation experience is designed to help participants begin to understand what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family trying to survive from month to month. It is a simulation, not a game. The object is to sensitize participants to the realities faced by low-income people.

### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this simulation, students will be able to:

1. Describe how poverty affects individuals, families and systems of care in the United States;
2. Contribute as a team member in their defined role as part of the simulation;
3. Identify through critical reflection the influence of personal biases and values of working with diverse individuals and constituencies, especially those living in poverty;
4. Discuss the importance of engaging in practices that advance social and economic justice.

### Simulation Requirements:

To successfully complete this simulation, students must complete the following tasks:

1. Arrive on time and refrain from use of electronics during the simulation.
2. Complete any required readings prior to attending the simulation
3. Participate in an assigned role as member of a family living in poverty
4. Participate in one of the small group debriefings during the simulation
5. After attending the simulation, write a brief self-reflection about the experience

### Community Partners:

The following organizations are involved in the facilitation of poverty simulations at UAB:

1. Alabama Possible
2. UAB Office of Interprofessional Simulation
3. The Department of Social Work, College of Arts & Sciences at UAB
4. UAB School of Nursing
5. UAB Office of Service Learning
6. UAB School of Medicine
7. UAB School of Dentistry
8. UAB School of Optometry
9. UAB School of Public Health
10. UAB School of Health Professions

### About the Poverty Simulation:

The Poverty Simulation was developed by the Missouri Association for Community Action (MACA). Poverty Simulations take approximately three hours to run. The main part of the simulations includes an orientation, the four- 15 minute weeks, and a debriefing period at the end of the simulation. During the debriefing,

participants and volunteers share their feelings and experiences and talk about what they have learned about the lives of people in poverty. The maximum number of participants per simulation is 80.

In the simulation, participants assume the roles of up to 26 different families facing poverty. 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, also known as welfare), 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 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, pawn broker, grocery, social service agency, faith-based agency, payday and title loan facility, mortgage company, school, community health center, and child care center.

#### Before the Simulation:

Your instructor may ask you to review the following resources about poverty in the United States. Additionally, please review the following information:

- Debro, A. (2014). *Simulating poverty to teach: Alabama Possible role playing activity brings home the reality of being without*. Available at: <http://weldbham.com/blog/2014/03/06/simulating-poverty-to-teach/>.
- Alabama Possible’s website at: <http://alabamapossible.org/>
- Alabama Possible’s Poverty Datasheet: <http://alabamapossible.org/datasheet/>
- Spent: Looking For Change (Documentary Movie) <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=YAxL4TB6pmQ>

#### During the Simulation:

It is important that you arrive on-time or even 15 minutes early to the simulation. Part of the process is being assigned to “family” and being oriented to the simulation. If you arrive after the simulation has started, you will not be able to participate.

When you arrive at the simulation, you will check-in with a volunteer and be assigned to a “family” with a name badge. You will be directed to a configuration of chairs with your family’s name and an instruction packet. These chairs will represent your family’s home throughout the simulation. Do not open the instruction packet until directed.

When the simulation starts, the Head Facilitator will provide you with an orientation to the simulation. There are a variety of props that are used as part of the simulation including fake money, paper, pencils and direction sheets. Please be careful with these props as they are used for multiple simulations. At the end of simulation, you will be directed on how to return the props.

During the debriefing session, you will be assigned to a small group and led through a series of questions by a trained debriefer. You will be asked to comment on the simulation experience. This could include a summary of how you reacted to the volunteer service providers; comments about your ability to cope in the State of Poverty during this “month;” previous experiences or special information or facts which may have that could

reinforce the realities of living in poverty; how it feels to be living in poverty during this simulation, and whether or not there was a perceptible change of attitude on the part of the participants during the simulation. Before leaving the simulation, please make sure to check your pockets, bags and person to ensure you do not leave with any simulation props.

After the Simulation:

After completing the simulation, your instructor may ask you to write a short reflection assignment based on a series of questions. Please follow the specific requirements of your course instructor.

*This assignment will be completed individually and will only be read by faculty. Write a one to two page (must be at least 1 page in length) single-spaced reflective paper. This is not a formal paper (e.g., you may use LOL, :, :(, etc.) so you can have fun with this assignment. Please reflect on your experience at the poverty simulation by answering the following questions:*

*What?*

- What role did you play during the poverty simulation? What issues were addressed in your assigned role?

*So What?*

- Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest as a result of the poverty simulation?
- How is your experience different from what you expected?
- What did you like/dislike about the experience?
- What did you learn about living in poverty?

*Now What?*

- What learning occurred for you in this experience?
- How can you apply this learning?
- What would you like to learn more about, related to your role and issues you faced in your role?

Additionally, if you are interested in becoming more involved in making a difference in your community and working to end poverty, here are some tips of what you can do:

1. Commit. Decide to commit yourself to making a difference in the war on poverty. Think of the situations that you experienced during the simulation and the feelings that they brought out in you. Make a promise to yourself that you are going to take action to make a difference in the lives of those people who experience poverty not just for an hour, but every day.
2. Educate others. The first step in helping end poverty is talking about poverty. Tell your family and friends about your experience with the Community Action Poverty Simulation. As you learn more, develop a presentation about poverty to give to organizations in your community or students in a local

school. Contact Alabama Possible (<http://alabamapossible.org/>) to learn more about this option: info@alabamapossible.org or 205.939.1408.

3. Volunteer. Poverty is everywhere, including the city or town where you live. Find out what organizations are helping people in poverty. Find out what you can do to help, and do it. To volunteer, consider contacting of the following organizations:
  - Alabama Possible's Blueprint College Access Program (<https://blueprintsalabama.wordpress.com/>)
  - UAB Office of Service Learning (<http://www.uab.edu/servicelearning/>)
  - Hands On Birmingham (<http://www.handsonbirmingham.org/>)
4. Write. You can write letters to alert government officials, newspaper editors, local business leaders, producers of local television news, etc. about the knowledge you have gained about the causes of poverty and what can be done locally or nationally to eliminate it. Writing letters demonstrates that when people with a common purpose combine their skills and energies, the results are magnified. If we can get government officials and members of the media talking about poverty, we have a better chance at winning support for policies and programs that can improve the lives of the low-income. For information on how to contact your state legislators, look on the State of Alabama website at: <http://capwiz.com/state-al/home/>.
5. Socialize. Make it a habit to meet with people of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Have you ever noticed that all of your friends and social contacts are from the same economic class? If so, make a point to meet with those who don't necessarily have as much as you and your family do. By socializing with people at different economic levels, you will develop sensitivity to their needs and learn to relate to them as people just like yourself.