

Step inside poverty.

Feel it, see it, live it ...understand it.



Understanding the day-to-day reality of poverty is important for everyone involved in fighting poverty – from policymakers to service providers. **MISSOURI'S COMMUNITY ACTION POVERTY SIMULATION (CAPS)** is a unique tool that helps people begin to understand what life is like with a shortage of money and an abundance of stress.

During a simulation, participants role-play the lives of low-income families, including single parents, people with disabilities, and senior citizens on Social Security. The task of each family is to provide for food, shelter and other basic necessities during four, 15-minute “weeks.” Families interact with community resources.

Although it uses “play” money, fictional scenarios and time limits, **CAPS** is not a game. It's a simulation that enables participants to view poverty from different angles and then to discuss the potential for change within local communities. It's designed to sensitize those who frequently deal with low-income families and to create a broader awareness among policymakers and community leaders.

You are Stella, age 85, and widowed. You are in reasonably good health, but require arthritis medicine not covered by Medicare/Medicaid. You live in the downstairs of your own, two-story home. You took in two renters last year, and they left unexpectedly without paying and left your place in some disrepair. You use public transportation to get around, but are fearful of going out by yourself. You are paying off a loan for furnace repair. Your only income is \$552 a month in SSI. You have received information from a friend that your local community action agency may be able to help with your utility bills.

20 resource people and space of at least 3,000 square feet and takes 2 1/2 to 3 hours to complete.

Who might participate in your poverty simulation? Local human service agency personnel; church staff, volunteers and clergy; school faculty and staff; high school and college students; community leaders and volunteers; government officials and policymakers; employers; law enforcement officials; family practice residency program physicians and many others.

■ “This welfare simulation dramatically demonstrates how much time and energy many families have to give just to survive from day to day.”

—CAPS participant

■ “I don't feel anyone can have complete understanding of poverty unless they have been there, and the simulation certainly raised my awareness of what people have to deal with. The sense of helplessness and frustration was quite real, even though I knew it wasn't.”

—CAPS participant

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CAPS is a copyrighted learning tool made available by the Missouri Association for Community Action (MACA) after purchasing the rights from the ROWEL welfare reform organization. MACA updated the poverty simulation and is now offering it to organizations wanting to promote a greater understanding of poverty.

A simulation requires between 40 and 86 participants, approximately

You are a family of four, the Zuppts and their two grandchildren, living in a small home with a first and second mortgage. Grandma was working full-time until her daughter went to jail and the two grandchildren came to live with them. She is now working part-time so she can be home with the grandchildren after school. The house needs several repairs and insulation to help reduce the monthly utility bill and make it more comfortable. You have one reliable vehicle on which you are still paying off a loan. The grandmother and grandfather have health insurance through his work, but the children have none. Due to the grandson's recent diagnosis of ADHD, your family expenses have increased. Together, you bring home \$1,726 a month after taxes.