

“MAKING CHOICES” ACTIVITY—FACILITATOR’S SCRIPT



United Way
of Montgomery,
Radford and Floyd

REQUIREMENTS

- Participants: No minimum or maximum
- Time: approx. 20 minutes

MATERIALS

- Poverty Exercise “Game Board”
- Smarties candy (1 per participant)
- Video (if applicable)
- Poverty Statistics handout/UWMRF pledge form handout

OPENING

Welcome and distribute handouts and candy. Participants should not open or eat candy.

I want to offer you the opportunity to experience the tough choices of a member of a family living in poverty here in our New River Valley community. In the NRV, 19% of children live in poverty¹ and 4,369 families in our community live below the poverty line.² The federal government defines the poverty threshold as an annual income of **\$24,600 for a family of 4**.³ According to the MIT's Living Wage Calculator, a family of four must earn a combined household “living wage” of **\$62,400** a year, or **\$15.09 per hour** working full time, to afford basic necessities (housing, food, childcare, transportation, taxes, etc.).⁴ Current minimum wage is **\$7.25 per hour**.

BEGIN THE ACTIVITY

DESCRIBE THE “GAME BOARD” IN FRONT OF THEM

- There are categories on the left side of the page that are life necessities for individuals and families. You’ll see various
- choices for each category in columns A, C, and C.
- As you go from left to right through each column, there is a “monetary” requirement shown for each choice.
- Your currency for this exercise is Smarties candy. The 15-piece candy budget represents the poverty threshold of \$24,600 in annual household income for a family of 4. That is \$2,050 a month or about \$500 a week.
- You will assume the role of a parent in a household of 4. You are married and both parents work. You have 2 children, a 6 year old daughter and an 11 year old son.
- You must make a choice for each category and do not skip categories.
- You have 5 minutes to make choices. Begin now. (Facilitator should wrap up this section of the activity quickly).

DEBRIEF

Facilitate a discussion around feelings, thoughts, and statistics. Use any of all questions listed.

- How did you feel about making these decisions?
- What did you give up?
- How did your priorities change based on the limited resources?

HOUSING

- How many were lucky enough to live in a 3 bedroom house?
 - How many have their children sharing a room?
- Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom unit in the Montgomery County area is \$880 per month.⁵ For a single parent to afford that rent at minimum wage, the parent would have to work 79 hours per week. Families who spend 30% or more of their income on housing are considered cost burdened and may have more difficulty affording basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.⁶

HEALTHCARE

- How many only have healthcare for themselves or none at all?
- What happens when a child gets sick? Do you have extra spending cash?

6.7% of Montgomery County residents do not have health insurance (under age 65).⁷ 10.7% of VA residents are uninsured (under age of 65) meaning there are 747,000 uninsured Virginians.⁸

¹ <http://nrvc.org/datadashboard/health.html>

² <http://nrvc.org/datadashboard/economic.html#poverty>

³ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

⁴ <http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/55121>

⁵ https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2018_code/2018summary.odn

⁶ <http://nlihc.org/library/wagecalc>

⁷ <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/montgomery-county-va/#health>

FOOD

- How many chose and maintained the choice for 3 meals a day? 1 meal?
- What types of meals do you think folks who live this way typically eat? Is it healthy food?
- What do you think about the ability to learn and focus of a 6 year old who only gets 1 meal a day?

According to Feed America, Montgomery County has one of the largest percentages of food insecurity in Southwest Virginia at 14.2%. Additionally, a study conducted by Virginia Tech found that over 8% of Montgomery County residents live in a food desert (almost 8,000 people), 15.85% of Radford residents live in a food desert (2,600), and 27.84% of Floyd residents live in a food desert (over 4,000 residents).⁹ A food desert is defined as an area where at least a third of residents are more than a mile away from a grocery store with more than 20% living below the poverty line.¹⁰

TRANSPORTATION

- In this simulation, how many of you own a car? Taking public transportation? Walking or biking?
- Do you think the choice you made regarding transportation affects the ability to shop for food or go to work?

SPENDING MONEY

- Does anyone have children these ages?
- What things does an average 11 year old ask for on a shopping trip? At the grocery store? On a field trip?
- Did anyone have spending money leftover for these purchases?
- This simulation doesn't include savings. If you don't have spending money left over, how can you save?

Families with no savings face a major financial crisis if they experience the slightest setback (reduction in work hours, car repairs, unexpected medical bills, etc.). Over one third of VA residents don't have enough savings to survive at basic poverty level for 3 months if they lose their income.¹¹

(OPTIONAL SIMULATION VARIABLE)

Now your family has experienced a hardship (either parents loses his/her job, a child has a serious illness, etc.). Take 5 candies from your budget. Now try to shift your priorities.

SIMULATION WRAP UP

- Instruct participants that they are free to eat the Smarties or dispose of them.
- Ask participants what surprised them, what they learned, and what they will take away from the simulation.
- The statistics:
 - 4,369 families in the NRV live below the poverty line.
 - 19% of children in our community live in poverty.
 - 1 in 10 people in our community do not read above an 8th grade level.¹²
 - Children living in poverty are 13 times less likely to graduate from high school.¹³
 - Low income children know 50% fewer words by age 3 than their peers from high-income families.¹⁴
 - Students who drop out from school will not be qualified for 90% of available jobs.
 - On average, a high school graduate will earn \$260,000 more than a drop out.¹⁵ Adults with bachelors degrees or higher earn a median income that is more 73% higher than their peers with high school diplomas.¹⁶

THE "ASK"

United Way of Montgomery, Radford and Floyd believes that everyone in our community should have the chance to succeed. However, there are complex conditions in our community that create barriers to success. Poverty is a huge barrier, and United Way is focused on breaking the cycle of poverty in the New River Valley. We can't do this alone. We need your help to break down barriers and help empower our community. We invite you to partner with us:

- Give your TIME as a volunteer
- Give your VOICE to be our advocate and support issues that are important to you
- Give your MONEY to investment in our community

⁸ <http://www.vhcf.org/data/profile-of-the-uninsured/>

⁹ Food Deserts in Virginia. January 2014. Recommendations from the Food Desert Task Force.

¹⁰ Data from FRAC and Guilford County Health Department

¹¹ <http://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/reports#report-state-profile/va>

¹² <http://www.lvnrv.org/>

¹³ http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/04/the_disquieting_side_effect_of.html

¹⁴ <http://www.wbez.org/series/front-center/falling-behind-kindergarten-30-million-word-gap-100063>

¹⁵ <http://www.statisticbrain.com/high-school-dropout-statistics>

¹⁶ <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/educational-attainment/>