The Culture of Poverty: understanding and successfully working with poor clients

Sponsored by:
The California Association of Food Banks
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Developed and Presented by:
Charles (Buzz) Blick, M.Ed.
Principal, Changeforward Consulting and Training
Vashon, Washington

A Little Quiz...

Could You Survive in Poverty?
Put a check mark beside those items you know how to do.
1. I know which churches and sections of town have the best rummage sales.
2. I know which rummage sales have "bag sales" and when.
3. I know which grocery stores' garbage bins can be accessed for thrown away food.
4. I know how to get someone out of jail.
5. I know how to physically fight and can defend myself physically.
6. I know how to get a gun even if I have a police record.
7. I know how to keep my clothes from being stolen at the laundromat.
8. I know what problems to look for in a used car.
9. I know how to live without a checking account.
10. I know how to live without electricity and without a phone.
11. I know how to use a knife as scissors.
12. I can entertain a group of friends with my personality and my stories.
13. I know what to do when I don't have money to pay the bills.
14. I know how to move in one-half day.
15. I know how to feed 8 people for 5 days on $25.
16. I know how to get and use food stamps.
17. I know where the free medical clinics are.
18. I am very good at trading and bartering.
19. I can live without a car.

Types of Resources
- Financial
- Emotional
- Mental
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Support Systems
- Relationships/Role Models
- Knowledge of Hidden Rules
- Coping Strategies

COULD YOU SURVIVE IN WEALTH?
Put a check by each item that you know how to do.
1. I can read a menu in French, English, and another language.
2. I have several favorite restaurants in different countries of the world.
3. During the holidays, I know how to hire a decorator to identify the appropriate themes and items with which to decorate the house.
4. I know who my preferred financial advisor, legal service, designer, domestic employment service, and hairdresser are.
5. I have at least two residences which are staffed and maintained.
6. I know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty from my domestic staff.
7. I have at least two or three "screws" that keep people from me that I do not wish to see.
8. I fly in my own plane, the company plane, or the Concorde.
9. I know how to enroll my children in the preferred private schools.
10. I know how to host the parties that "key" people attend.
11. I am on the boards of at least two charities.
12. I know the hidden rules of the Junior League.
13. I have an artist that I support or buy his/her work.
14. I know how to read a corporate financial statement and analyze my own financial statements.
Common Characteristics of Generational Poverty

- Background noise
- Importance of personality
- Importance of entertainment
- Importance of relationships
- Matriarchal structure
- Oral-language tradition
- Survival orientation
- Identity tied to lover/fighter role for men
- Identity tied to rescuer/martyr role for women
- Importance of non-verbal/kinesthetic communications

Common Characteristics (continued)

- Ownership of people
- Negative orientation
- Punishment = penance and forgiveness, not change (see next slide)
- Belief in fate
- Polarized thinking
- Mating dance
- Time = the present, flexible and not measured, linked to emotions rather than length
- Sense of humor valued
- Lack of order/organization
- Lives in the moment – does not consider future ramifications
- Addictions and family dysfunction “anchor” poverty

Poverty, Addictions and Family Dysfunction

- Obsessive Drinking and Driving
- Chronic STDs/Infections
- Parental Mental Health Issues
- Parental Substance Abuse
- Parental Criminal Justice Involvement
- Parental Homelessness
- Parental Domestic Violence
- Parental Incarceration
- Parental Relocation
- Parental Separation and Divorce
- Parental Premarital and/or Teenage Childbirth
- Parental Early Marriage
- Parental Suicide
- Parental Marital Separation
- Parental Divorce
- Parental Separation
- Parental Dissolution
- Parental Mating
- Parental Marriage
- Parental Cohabitation
- Parental Birth
- Parental Conception
- Parental Fertility
- Parental Infertility
- Parental Reproduction
- Parental Childbirth
- Parental Pregnancy
- Parental Reproductive
- Parental Maternal
- Parental Paternal
- Parental Genetic
- Parental Medical
- Parental Psychological
- Parental Social
- Parental Emotional
- Parental Physical
- Parental Educational
- Parental...
Implications for Helping Professionals

- Individuals leave poverty for one of four reasons:
  - A goal or vision of something they want;
  - Escaping a very painful situation;
  - A sponsor, mentor or role model who shows another way;
  - A specific talent or ability that provides an opportunity for them.
- Being in poverty is rarely about lack of intelligence or potential ability
- Many individuals are in poverty because they don't perceive a choice and/or they have no one to teach them the hidden rules or provide resources.
- Social institutions and helping professionals are potential resources for learning the rules of the middle class.

References and Resources

- National Poverty Center, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, The University of Michigan.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington D.C.
- Witter’s Dog, a 2010 American Independent drama film, an adaptation of Eunice Woodruff's 2006 novel of the same name.

Rapport, Relationships and Resiliency

- Connect with information and know-how.
- Provide temporary relief from emotional, mental, financial and/or time constraints.
- Build rapport and influence – verbally and non-verbally
- Build resiliency and help mitigate risk factors in the environment.
- Teach behavioral, emotional and cognitive skills.
- Create meaningful roles and community connections:
  - Building youth-community assets
  - Inclusive community planning