

THE POVERTY CHALLENGE

Toolkit

V1.1



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THE POVERTY CHALLENGE

The Poverty Challenge originated in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, in 2009.

Over time we have made significant changes and refinements. As we plan our fifth Poverty Challenge, we offer our FREE Poverty Challenge Toolkit to any group that would like to replicate this highly successful event.

The Poverty Challenge is an extremely powerful educational experience and we invite you to create your own.

Make modifications to meet your needs, and share your experiences with us at www.thepovertychallenge.org

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is like a punishment for a crime you didn't commit

Eli Khamarov, *Lives of the Cognoscenti*

The Poverty Challenge is a day-long event for approximately 120 high school students, 12 teachers and 90-100 volunteers. It is held in a large building with an auditorium and many rooms that can be transformed into offices. A university or college building not in use on the day of The Challenge is ideal. The participating students and teachers are each given a profile of someone living in poverty in Kingston. The volunteers are trained to play the roles of employees of social service agencies and are set up in realistic-looking offices. Over two rounds of a simulation activity the participants attempt to solve personal challenges by visiting the service agencies staffed by the volunteers.

Students participating in The Challenge often find it hard to believe that many of their problems seem insurmountable, but the scenarios they face are real, based on extensive research.

The most powerful part of the day occurs just after lunch when each person following a particular profile is introduced to the real Kingstonian living in poverty, The Poverty Expert whose challenges they have been attempting to solve.

The afternoon is spent in “Think Tanks” in which students brainstorm improvements to our social safety nets.

The Poverty Challenge has five main objectives:

- 1 To raise awareness in high school students about the realities of poverty:** This day-long simulation allows students to experience something of what it is like to live in poverty, learn what agencies exist to assist people living with too little, and realise how challenging it is to navigate through these systems.
- 2 To raise awareness in adult volunteers about the realities of poverty and the social assistance system:** The adult volunteers at the Poverty Challenge experience the same challenges as the students, but from the other side of the table, as they fill the role of case-workers and social service providers.
- 3 To provide an authentic and empowering opportunity for low-income Kingstonians to share their stories:** The simulations in the Poverty Challenge are built around the real-life circumstances of Kingston community members. We worked hard to ensure that these participants were able to take part in the day and that in some small way, their frustrations and concerns were validated by the conference attendees.
- 4 To build community:** This event involves the time and commitment of over 230 people. Annually we are able to enhance the understanding and empathy of the high school students, their teachers, and the adult volunteers who participate. It is our belief that armed with this understanding, we are all better citizens, neighbours and friends.
- 5 To increase participation in poverty reduction activities:** By creating an understanding of poverty issues and empathy for people living with less, we hope that students and volunteers will engage more in poverty reduction activities.



Photographs of The Poverty Challenge in 2010. You can see more photos at www.thepovertychallenge.org

This toolkit is designed to provide the resources to run an event like The Poverty Challenge in your own community. It is divided into three main sections: an **Introduction**, with a brief background and overview of The Challenge schedule, a **Long Term Planning** section that describes the work necessary in the months leading up to running a Poverty Challenge, and an **Event in Detail** section that describes each specific component of the Challenge. This toolkit also contains an extensive Appendix, with blank versions of the many documents that were created or modified for use during the simulation and as part of planning the day

If you have an energetic group of people who want to increase public awareness of poverty issues and generate some momentum in your community, this model could be for you. Creating a Poverty Challenge takes serious commitment and lots of time from many dedicated volunteers, but the end product can be a transformative experience for the Poverty Experts, teachers, volunteers, and especially the student participants.

Schedule of the Day

These two pages show the schedule of The Poverty Challenge from the perspective of a student or teacher participant, with some notes on the activities of volunteers and facilitators as well. A detailed version of this schedule, as well as individual schedules for each type of participant, are included in the Appendix.

Registration and Orientation	7:30 am	Committee members staff registration desk Food set up in lobby	
	8:00 am	Teachers, students, volunteers and facilitators arrive Registration in lobby	40 min
	8:10 am	Orientation for volunteers begins	20 min
	8:15 am	Meeting of facilitators begins	15 min
	8:40 am	Introductory meeting: all convene in auditorium	
		Participants welcomed, speaker introduced	2 min
		Keynote speech, thanks	5 min
		Event explained	5 min
		Multiple choice i-Clicker quiz on poverty	3 min
		<i>Volunteers stay in auditorium for “Wealth Squares” and “Describe the Poor” activities. Profiles are introduced, then volunteers immediately set up agency rooms at 9:45 a.m.</i>	
	<i>Participants and facilitators go to home group rooms</i>		
Home and Profile Group Meetings	9:00 am	Home group meeting #1: Participants meet with facilitators	
		Introductions	5 min
		Wealth Squares	8 min
		Describe the Poor	7 min
		Roles Distributed	5 min
	9:25 am	Participants move from home groups to profile groups	5 min
	9:30 am	Profile group meetings (for example: all the Sallys meet)	
	Time to study roles with help from leaders	15 min	
	Role-playing explained, encouraged		
	Props distributed (dolls, dogs, etc.)		
	Money and bus tickets distributed		
	Agency locations identified in registration packages		
	<i>Participants and facilitators must vacate rooms by 9:45. Volunteers take 5 minutes to set up agency rooms</i>		

Poverty Challenge	9:50 am	Round 1 (Bell sounds to signify beginning and end.)	25 min
	10:20 am	Pick up round #2 Challenges in profile group room	10 min
	10:30 am	Simulation Round 2 <i>Volunteers have five minutes to pack up agency offices at end of round</i>	30 min
	11:05 am	Home Group Meeting #2 Participants report how their character fared. What similarities did characters share? What generalizations can be made about helping the poor?	20 min
Lunch	11:30 am	Lunch in lobby Participants have an opportunity to use Speakers' Corner, and/or write on a Graffiti Wall. (Fasten wallpaper borders, reversed, on a wall.) <i>Poverty Experts arrive, and are accompanied to rooms Meanwhile, volunteers attend a debriefing meeting and revisit the Describe the Poor Exercise. They are thanked for their participation, asked to evaluate the event, and then depart.</i>	25 min
	12:00 pm	Participants meet in profile room Participants meet the Poverty Expert whose role they played during the simulation, asking questions and making observations. Participants share their frustrations and insights.	20 min
The Reveal	12:30 pm	Participants convene in auditorium, sitting in school groups	
		Recognition of contribution of Poverty Experts	2 min
		Revisit Describe the Poor exercise, using posters	6 min
		Revisit i-Clicker exercise: real statistics revealed	4 min
		Introduction to the Student Think Tank	5 min
Debrief and Think Tank	1:00 pm	Think Tank Students in profile groups work on proactive solutions to one problem and create a poster to share with the large group <i>Meanwhile, teachers participate in a teacher discussion group</i>	55 min
	2:00 pm	Teachers and students meet to debrief in their school groups	20 min
End of Day	2:25	Concluding meeting: all convene in auditorium	
		Sharing of Think Tank concepts	40 min
		Thank you to donors and sponsors	3 min
		Evaluation of event via i-Clicker	4 min
		Invitation to visit website, Speakers' Corner	3 min
	3:50	Final Opportunity to use Speakers' Corner and/or Graffiti Wall	
4:00	Buses Depart		

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Beginning one year before the day of the Challenge

Before committing to present a Poverty Challenge, the following questions should be answered affirmatively: Is there a need for this event? Will there be a lot of enthusiasm for a Poverty Challenge in your school board or other organization? Can you find enough people to organize the event? Is there a person with a lot of time to be the chief coordinator? Will it be possible to find sufficient Poverty Experts and volunteers? Will funds be available?

One Year Before:

- What is your vision? Who will be the audience, when will your Challenge take place, where?
- Create a committee. You will need people to be responsible for:
 - o Venue and food (snacks for the participants who have neglected to bring a lunch)
 - o Fundraising and bookkeeping
 - o Promotion: graphics and brochures; publicity
 - o Tech expert: website
 - o Poverty Expert Coordinator
 - o School Contact Coordinator: recruitment of participants, registration
 - o Facilitator Coordinator (Search for retired teachers, social workers, excellent teacher candidates)
 - o Volunteer Coordinator (Volunteers play the roles of the agency employees)
 - o Think Tank Coordinator
 - o Researcher of agency policies
 - o Materials coordinator (photocopying and assembling materials)
 - o Meeting Coordinator: agendas, minutes, cookies...

(See APPENDIX for a complete job description for each role.)
- Determine your source of funding (See APPENDIX for a sample budget)

Nine Months Before:

- Find 10 – 12 Poverty Experts; interview each; create profiles.
- Begin research to align Poverty Experts' experiences with social service agencies and their policies.
- Secure funding.
- Secure the venue.
- Determine the method of registration and deadlines.

Three to Six Months Before:

- Depending on the audience, send out registration packages with a registration deadline of 3 weeks before the event.

Three Months Before:

- Seek facilitators to lead small group sessions throughout the day.
- Seek volunteers to play the roles of agency employees.
- Complete research.
- Create Poverty Expert Profiles. (See APPENDIX for sample profiles.)
- Create scripts for agency employees, to be used by the volunteers. (See APPENDIX for samples.)

One Month Before:

- Send out media releases.
- Engage a photographer.
- Confirm the rooms at the venue.
- Confirm food.

Three Weeks Before:

- Register participants.
- Assign participants to roles and create home groups. (See APPENDIX for tips on how to do this.)
- Post profiles on website for participants to study in advance but do not inform participants which role they will be given.

Two Weeks Before:

- Confirm volunteers; assign to agencies. (See APPENDIX for tips on how to do this.)
- Email scripts to volunteers.

1 Week Before:

- Print all necessary documents; assemble profile and agency packages
- Create registration packages for participants, volunteers playing agency employees and facilitators.
- Make signs for venue (parking, washroom, registration...)

EVENT IN DETAIL

Beginning the night before The Poverty Challenge

This section reveals how The Poverty Challenge rolls out over the course of the day.

Two simulation rounds, three plenary sessions, and several small group meetings create optimum learning opportunities about urban poverty.

The most powerful part of The Poverty Challenge occurs when student and teacher participants meet their Poverty Expert: the real person living in poverty whose life experiences have inspired the profile which participants have followed in the simulation rounds.

In the afternoon, students consolidate their knowledge. In Think Tanks, they brainstorm, defend, select and elaborate on a solution to improve the delivery of services to those living in poverty.

The Evening Before

Gather the organizing team at the site of the event the evening before the big day. Having cleared it with the building's owner, set up registration tables, the Speakers' Corner, the Graffiti Wall, food stations (without the food), mock agency offices and group meeting rooms. Affix all signage necessary for the day to come, and go home full of hopes and expectations for a successful Poverty Challenge.

**Goals:**

To prepare all necessary resources and rooms for the next day. Volunteers and committee members must arrive on the morning of The Challenge ready to hit the ground running.

**Venue:**

Before arranging each room during the set-up phase, draw a diagram of how the room was set up to begin with, so that during the take-down stage, rooms can be put back the way they were.

Registration, Refreshments

Gather early on the day of the event to do a last scan of the building, and put any finishing touches on rooms. At 8:00 a.m. volunteers, facilitators, and students begin to arrive. Ensure that refreshments are available.



Goals:

To quickly and effectively provide volunteers, facilitators, and students with the information that they need to participate in The Poverty Challenge, and to direct them to the place where they will begin this experience.

Participants should have brought a lunch with them; tell them where they can store their lunches and coats.

Use three registration tables, one for volunteers and one for facilitators, where they pick up their information packages and are directed to their respective orientation sessions. The third table is for teachers, who pick up a bundle of registration envelopes for their students and bring them to their first location, the introductory session in the auditorium.

Tables are set up with breakfast snacks, which are available for students, teachers, facilitators and volunteers until 8:40 a.m.

A brief orientation session for volunteers begins at 8:10 a.m. in the auditorium, in which volunteers are welcomed and briefed on the overview of the day. A similar meeting of facilitators begins at 8:10 a.m. in another location.

By 8:40 a.m. everyone is seated in the auditorium together, with registration package in hand, ready for the introductory meeting.

Introductory Meeting

This session is a key part of the day in that it is the first real contact with the participants and volunteers. It is critical to inspire and engage them right from the start, and keep the day moving according to the schedule. The introductory meeting has three main components: introductory remarks by a moderator, a true or false quiz using i-Clickers, (the answers to which are revealed in the final session) and the keynote speaker.

In the Kingston Poverty Challenge, our keynote speaker is a young single mom, in the students' own age bracket, who has lived on her own in poverty for a number of years. She is also a Poverty Expert whose experiences were used to create a profile.



Goals:

- To provide functional introductory information.
- To gather baseline data on participants' knowledge of poverty issues.
- To challenge students' stereotypes through the introduction of a keynote speaker who is their own age, compelling, and living in poverty.
- To instill a desire to learn more and fully participate in the exceptional experience of The Poverty Challenge.



People:

Moderator: Ideally, the moderator is dynamic and quick-thinking, has a strong understanding of poverty issues, and is a member of the organizing committee.

Keynote Speaker: Ideally this person is in the age-range of the students, comfortable with public speaking, and highly dependable. A person on the organizing committee should help him or her prepare for this activity. Our keynote speaker was attending a high school for adults when we first met her; you might look for a speaker in a similar facility.

i-Clicker technician: This person must be very comfortable with this technology, and have everything set up ahead of time.

i-Clicker distributors and gatherers: These people will be at the doors, handing the units out to students, and reminding them that they must be returned when leaving the auditorium.

**Items:**

Computer and i-Clickers: Set up your true or false test in the i-Clicker system.

Media projector and screen: As each question is asked and answered by the participants, show the results. Remember that the correct answers are revealed in the final session.

Sound system: It is critical to have a good sound system for this section.

**Be Aware:**

Keeping to the schedule is essential. If students need to be back at their schools in time for buses, you must follow strict timelines.

**Venue:**

Auditorium with a lectern, a good microphone and sound system, a media projector, and i-Clicker technology. In Kingston, we were very fortunate to have free access to most of the Faculty of Education facilities at Queen's University, in Duncan McArthur Hall.

Identify sections in the auditorium, indicating where school groups should sit, in part to ensure that students don't all sit at the back of the room. Leave the front row empty so that in the final gathering, the Poverty Experts' spaces are reserved.

Introductory remarks: The moderator welcomes everyone and sets the tone for the day: inspiring, encouraging, yet warning of hard work ahead. Housekeeping notes include: where the washrooms are located, the schedule in brief for the day, the importance of staying on-task and the availability of an on-site counsellor should a participant feel upset.

Quiz: Create a Power Point quiz to be used with i-Clickers posing statements that can be judged true or false, such as “Most poor people don't work,” “Those living in poverty lack budgeting skills,” “The welfare system is rife with cheating.” (See a sample in the APPENDIX. Should you decide to use this quiz, update the data. These figures are from late 2009.) If you do not use i-Clickers, determine another way of keeping track of participants' answers. In Kingston, we provide participants with small notebooks for use during the day, and they wrote their answers there. (In the final session of the day, administer this test again, and display both the original answers and the correct answers. The goal is to reveal some of the stereotypes we have regarding those living in poverty.)

Keynote speaker: Critical points your keynote speaker should include are: a brief synopsis of his or her life (if possible with an emphasis on how s/he is like your participants, with the same hopes and dreams); encouragement to the students to give themselves over to the process and really let the event change them; and appreciation for the students' participation in this important day.

The moderator ends the opening gathering by directing students to their first small group session.

Home Group Meeting #1

Students gather in their Home Groups, each group led by a facilitator. Guide them through two warm-up activities, Wealth Squares and Describe the Poor, to introduce them to key concepts about wealth distribution in our country, and the stereotypes that many people have of those living with less.



Goals:

To engage participants with thought-provoking activities.

To help them to recognize the stereotypes and negative impressions we have about the poor.

To ensure that everyone understands the tasks ahead, and knows where to find a counsellor, bathrooms, and snacks.



People:

Facilitators: approximately one for every 10 or 12 participants AND at least as many as there are Poverty Experts and profiles. It is critical to have experienced and confident leaders in this role. Train the facilitators in advance so that they clearly understand what is expected of them: to facilitate learning rather than overtly teach.

Photographer: to photograph a typical Describe the Poor Chart for projection on large screen in final session.

Floaters: If you have enough people, it's great to have a couple of extra assistants available throughout the day, who can wander the halls, deliver extra supplies, and observe participants during Rounds 1 and 2. Walkie talkies or cell phones could be used to contact floaters.



Items:

For each home group:

1 sheet of chart paper, tape and markers

2 pieces scrap paper per group member

10 double sheets of newspaper

Guidebook for Facilitator (already provided in training)



Be Aware:

If a student is now living or has lived in poverty, some of the activities might bring challenging feelings to the surface; always be mindful that there's a chance that someone in the group may need support.

Stay on schedule.

Encourage full participation: if you observe any students not engaging, help them connect.

Allow the students to come to their own conclusions.



Venue:

Use a circle of chairs, and activity space to the side for the Wealth Squares.

If some group meeting rooms have to double as agency offices, set them up so that they can easily be converted back and forth.

Welcome your home group, facilitate introductions and answer questions about the day's events. The first activity is **Describe the Poor**. (See the script for Describe the Poor in the Facilitator's Guide in the APPENDIX.) Give each person two pieces of scrap paper, and ask them to write down two words or phrases that *they have heard*, not necessarily that they themselves use, to describe people living in poverty: one on each slip of paper. Then direct them to crumple up each piece of paper and toss it into a pile in the centre of the group. Mix up the crumpled papers, and then ask each participant to pick up two. Go around the group twice, with each participant reading the word(s) in turn. Write each word or phrase on chart paper with the words Poverty Stereotypes in the middle. Do not show any judgement. "Lazy," "Criminals," "Drug addicts," and other disparaging adjectives will fill the sheet.



Next is **Wealth Squares**. (See the script for Wealth Squares in the Facilitator's Guide in the APPENDIX.) Lay ten double sheets of newspaper in a line on the floor, narrow edges touching. Choose 10 players and place each person on a square of paper; put males to the left and women to the right. Say that each of the 10 single pages represents 10% of Canada's wealth and that each person in the group of 10 represents 10% of Canada's population.

Now ask them to spread themselves across the sheets, using the proportions that they think reflect wealth distribution in our country, with the rich end being to the left. If as a group they think that 10% of the population owned 20% of the country's wealth, then one out of their group of ten must occupy two squares, and so on.

Next tell the participants the actual distribution of wealth, and help them place themselves into the very large or very limited amount of space that they "own". This very physical activity assists the students to literally feel the inequity of wealth distribution.

Finally, **Review the schedule of activities for the remaining part of the morning.** Direct each participant to look at the information on the outside of his or her registration envelope to see what particular profile he or she has been assigned. Explain that each has a different profile, identified by a different name (a Molly, a David, a Grace, etc.), and that each will move to their Profile Groups next, the room number for each to be found on the registration envelope.

For example, one participant will learn that he or she will be in the role of Molly, and will soon join all the other Mollys in a Profile Group to learn more about this role and the challenges to be attempted. Instruct all participants to return to this Home Group for debriefing after Rounds 1 and 2 are complete. Lunch will follow, and after lunch the participants will convene in their Profile Groups for the afternoon activities.



Profile Group Meeting #1



Students regroup by joining all others assigned the same “role:” all the Mollys, all the Steves, all the Xenas are together in separate rooms. The facilitator helps them to really understand their profile, and the problems they must attempt to solve. During this section, role-playing is explained and encouraged, props are distributed (dogs, dolls) and the students review the list of agency locations in their registration packages.



Goals:

To encourage students to explore their roles, identify with their character and, as much as possible, become that person for the rest of the morning.

To ensure that the students are heading into The Challenge with all the information and motivation they need.



People:

Facilitators

Floaters



Items:

A copy of page one of the same profile for everyone in the group.

Envelopes for all in the group containing variable amounts of play money and bus tickets.

Cheques for those profiles which require them, such as Grace (in the Kingston Poverty Challenge.)

Props: Dolls represent children, and stuffed animals represent a beloved pet who is taken everywhere by the character. Someone without child care must be with their children at all times; someone who lives on the street has no home in which to leave a pet. Also, the props remind participants of this variable when they visit agencies. For instance, if someone is negotiating child custody with the Children’s Aid Society, s/he might actually be handed a doll if successful, or have one taken away if not. Most agencies prohibit dogs, and their owners must find a way to look after their pets while they seek help.


Venue:

The Profile Group Meetings are held in the same rooms with the same set-up as the Home Group meetings.

For the Facilitator: You are responsible for leading a Profile Group as well as a Home Group. This means that you will know only one of the members of this new group: the person in your Home Group who was assigned the profile on which you are now focusing. All the other participants will be new, those from all the other Home Groups who have also been assigned this profile.

Give everyone page 1 of the profile, which contains information about this person's life experience, and his or her current situation. Go over this carefully to make sure that all participants understand the person's history and the immediate problems to be solved in Round 1. For example, the Mollys might need to secure housing, negotiate with Children's Aid and settle a dispute with Ontario Works. Draw attention to the descriptions of the person's personality and demeanour; encourage role playing by demonstrating how these traits would be revealed in an encounter with an agency employee. Hand out props, if appropriate, and distribute the envelopes of money and bus tickets. Explain that surrendering a bus ticket at an agency office results in preferred seating and a shorter wait time. Those without bus tickets are presumed to have walked and have a longer wait time to be served at an office. Show them how to locate the agency offices and tell them to seek help at Confusion Corner. Wish them luck and tell them to return to this room after Round 1.



Training of Volunteers and Agency Office Set Up

At the same time as students and teachers are in their home group and profile sessions, volunteers meet with a facilitator to participate in Wealth Squares and Describe the Poor, and to be introduced to the Poverty Expert profiles. Volunteers are led through a demonstration of how to use the materials in their packages to stage a realistic interaction with a client who comes to their office. During the last 5 minutes of this time, volunteers move to their agency rooms to set up their offices.



Goals:

To engage volunteers with thought-provoking activities which will remind them of the stereotypes and negative impressions that we have about the poor and the unequal distribution of wealth in Canada.

To present the profiles to the volunteers to prepare them for the clients who they will meet.

To answer volunteers' questions.

To introduce volunteers who will be working in the same agency to one another.

To ready the agency rooms for Round 1 of the Poverty Challenge.



People:

Facilitator (who has been the Volunteer Coordinator)



Items:

Extra instructions for those volunteers who did not print theirs online and bring them to the session.

1 sheet of chart paper, tape and markers.

Enough bits of scrap paper for 2 pieces per volunteer (Pens are in the registration envelopes.)

10 double sheets of newspaper.



Venue:

Use the auditorium for this event; the volunteers remain in this room after the Introductory Meeting.

Simulation: Round 1



In the first round, the participants are given 25 minutes to solve three challenges, in character, using the information on page 1 of their character profile. Simulated service agency offices are set up throughout the building, with volunteers playing the roles of agency staff. The halls and offices are buzzing with anxious participants seeking solutions from agency employees. This part of the day is the core of the learning experience of The Poverty Challenge.



Goals:

To create a realistic though condensed experience of what it is like to live in poverty.

To convey to participants and volunteers how frustrating our social service systems can be.

To inform participants and volunteers about how agencies often work in isolation from each other.

To help students recognize that problem-solving and many other skills are needed to live with less.



People:

Facilitators: During Round 1, the facilitators circulate through the hallways, observing participants and perhaps asking how they are doing. If a student says he or she has completed all tasks, ask about income, housing, and how much food there is. Probably he or she has resolved one issue, but ignored others. Direct frustrated students to Confusion Corner, where a Poverty Challenge organizing committee member will provide advice.

Counsellors: Ensure that one or two counsellors (Adolescent Care Workers, retired teachers with guidance experience) are on-site. In four years, there has been no request for help at the Kingston Poverty Challenges, but it is important to be prepared.

Bell Ringer: This person rings a bell to give students the five minute warning that a round of the Challenge is about to finish, then a final warning when the round is done. The five minute warning serves two purposes: it keeps the event running on time and makes students very aware of the importance of keeping on task. It also ramped up the level of tension, which gave participants a sense of urgency.

Confusion Corner: This is where students come when they are stymied by their challenges. Staff this with one or two people who are very informed about the profiles and the agencies to which they are linked. As well, participants who may need counseling may present themselves here, and they need to be connected with on-site support.

Agency Employees: The agencies you represent will depend on the profiles you are using and the number of participants visiting each agency. Agencies with fewer expected clients will have two employees. Busier agencies, like Ontario Works and the housing office, have more. Do not overstaff agencies because clients usually must wait to be served. Also, the volunteers acting as employees should get a realistic sense of how busy they would be. (See tips for staffing agencies in the APPENDIX.)



Items:

Volunteers' instructions and suggested scripts. (See APPENDIX.)

Play money and bus tickets: Some agencies may provide these to clients.

A list of all agencies and their room numbers to be placed in all registration envelopes.

Signs for each agency to be placed on the door.

An envelope in which to collect bus tickets at the door of the agency or at the desk of each volunteer employee.

Agency Paperwork: Depending on the nature of the agency, you will need some sort of paperwork. Be fastidious in having up-to-date and genuine forms from real agencies to reflect the level of complexity real employees and clients must deal with. Be sure in your planning time to allow for the procurement of valid documents.

Props: Some agencies may require props. For example at the Children's Aid Society, if a client regains or loses custody of a child, a doll should be given or taken away.



Venue:

A large building filled with classrooms, connected by a maze of hallways and elevators. Each room houses a different agency.

Agencies have clearly marked signs. Inside are tables at which are seated the employees, with chairs facing for clients. There is a waiting area in each office as well. Busier agencies are housed in larger rooms with more employees.

Using their agency room lists and map, participants head off to find the relevant agencies that might assist them in solving their problems. At each stop, however, it becomes clear that things are often not as simple as they seem, and that sometimes additional steps are necessary. For example, those needing a birth certificate require documentation and money, both of which they lack. They must quickly figure out where to go to for assistance in securing what they need.

Trained volunteers work as employees at each mock agency, prepared to deal with each profile individually, and well versed on their agencies' policies and abilities. The employees are given little information about the profiles, and no information about the other agencies. While this causes some frustration for volunteers who feel they often cannot help the clients, this accurately reflects the way in which many of our social service agencies operate in separate silos. In general, employees are efficient and officious, dealing with each client quickly and moving on to the next person.



Do not place volunteers who work at a particular agency in their real lives at that agency for The Challenge. They may get caught up in minutia and disrupt the flow and/or become defensive if the script does not present the agency in a favourable light even though you have ensured that real agency policies are presented.



Remember to collect bus tickets at each office. When clients surrender a bus ticket, they get faster service, because they have arrived earlier than someone who had to walk. Those who do not have a bus ticket will be seated in a separate area and have to wait longer.



Ring a bell to signify 5 remaining minutes and then the end of Round 1.



Profile Group Meeting #2

After 25 minutes of Round 1, participants reconvene in their profile groups, and are asked how well they fared. Most are frustrated, having not accomplished all of their tasks. A second profile page with Round 2 challenges is distributed to everyone. Advise participants to tackle these first and if time remains, to go back to complete unfinished Round 1 challenges.



Goals:

- To reassure participants that they are not alone in their frustration.
- To distribute Round 2 challenges.
- To monitor students to ensure that anyone requiring counseling receives it.



People:

- Facilitators
- Floater



Items:

- Page 2 of the profile, containing Round 2 challenges, one copy for each participant.

Students and teachers return to their Profile Groups for a 10 minute debriefing with their profile group members and facilitator. In turn, ask participants how they fared in Round 1; they will feel reassured that others in their group experienced the same problems. Distribute Round 2 challenges, and tell the participants that this round is 30 minutes long. At the end, they are to go to their Home Group rooms, where they began the small group work.

Simulation Round 2

Participants' resolve is tested during the second part of the Challenge, as participants are ever more aware that they have limited time to solve complex problems. The level of stress increases for both students and volunteers as the clock ticks down. When the bell rings signifying the end of round 2, students and volunteers will often be quite frustrated at the lack of progress that is actually possible.



Goals:

- To continue to create a realistic though condensed experience of what it is like to live in poverty.
- To generate the feelings in students and volunteers of how frustrating our social service systems can be.
- To inform students and volunteers about how agencies often work in isolation from each other.
- To help students expand on their recognition of the problem-solving and other skills needed to live with less.
- To dispel prior notions about "the poor".

Round 2 follows the same method as round one, with new challenges created for each of the profiles.

Having been through one round already, some participants are feeling more comfortable with the tasks and are ready for round 2 of the Challenge, while others feel a bit panicked by the prospect. Some students are more capable during the second round because they have shared and gained information, and the level of compassion between participants increases. By the end of this 30 minute round, most students are exhausted and keenly aware of just how challenging it is to try to navigate through the system.

Home Group Meeting #2

Once more the participants meet in their Home Groups to share their experiences and observations. The value of these Home Group debriefings is that participants gain insight into the other poverty profiles and begin to see some common threads facing those living in poverty. The facilitators collect play money, bus tickets, cheques and props, then outline the schedule for the rest of the day.



Goals:

- To encourage students to share their roles, identify with their character.
- To allow them to recognize that while they may have faced obstacles in their profile roles, others have similar and perhaps more daunting challenges.
- To create a sense of community in the group, enabling them to see similarities between the roles, and giving them an opportunity to pass along any solutions or tips if they so choose.
- To provide a safe environment in which students can vent their feelings.
- To provide a forum in which students recognize that there are common life situations which result in poverty.



People:

- Facilitators
- Floater



Venue:

This room has probably been used as an agency office, and as the home group is moving in, volunteers are dismantling the agency. Discourage volunteers from participating in this session if they are still in the room.

Participants are with their original group and each member has played out a different profile. Ask them to demonstrate their role-playing skills by introducing themselves in character and explaining any props they may have (a stuffed dog, a doll). Have them report to the group the issues they faced and how they progressed. Ask what similarities they observe in the characters' situations and if they have developed new generalizations about the poor. How significant is luck? This can be a powerful session, so watch for any students who may need extra attention. Remind participants that these problems are faced by real people and that agency policies have been fairly represented. Ask them what they have learned about our social safety nets. Collect props, unused money, and bus tickets and bring these to the materials desk in the registration area.

Direct students to pick up their homemade lunches and go to the luncheon area. Lunch is only 25 minutes. Encourage them to use Speakers' Corner and the Graffiti Wall.

Lunch Break

Provide a 25 minute lunch break, and make available some food for students who have forgotten to bring a lunch. During lunch, facilitators move among the groups of participants, encouraging them to talk about their morning and share their comments and observations by writing on the graffiti wall and/or by being videotaped at Speakers' Corner.



Goals:

To recharge the energy of students, teachers and volunteers, and give them the opportunity to decompress and reflect.

To allow for the exchange of information and ideas between participants and volunteers.

To provide time for students to use the Speakers' Corner, or write on the Graffiti Wall.



People:

Food Planner: a person who makes sure that the food is in the right place at the right time.

Facilitator: (who eats his or her lunch quickly!) and then encourages people to use Speakers' Corner and the Graffiti Wall.

Speakers' Corner Videographer: who shoots Speakers' Corner video clips using a digital camera, and then posts them to YouTube.

Bell ringer: to signify the end of lunch.



Items:

Food that can be sitting out for long periods of time without spoiling such as apples, cheese, muffins, tea biscuits, and granola bars.

Picnic coolers in which to keep perishables such as cream, milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Nut free foods.

Signs that indicate you have done your best not to have any nuts in the food, but that it may contain them nonetheless.

Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, juice and water.
 Serviettes, preferably non-bleached, and highly biodegradable.
 Cutlery as necessary.



Be Aware:

Think about the food you order ahead of time and avoid overpackaging and waste. (Opt for cheese that is cut up, instead of individually wrapped cheese slices).

There should be someone to check on the food frequently, to be sure it is looking tidy, and so that if anything runs out, it can be replenished.

Arrange ahead of time to have an agency where you can take leftover food at the end of the day if you have any.

Ensure that lunch ends on time.



Venue:

Food presentation areas must be clearly visible, yet slightly out of the way.

It's good to have food near the Graffiti Wall and the Speakers' Corner, so that they are an obvious part of the event.

In advance, inform teachers that they and their students must bring their own lunches. They are not permitted to leave the site to buy lunch, or to order food in for their group, because there is not enough time.

Having said that... make sure to provide food so that participants who forgot their lunches could have muffins, some cheese, fruit, or veggies and dip. During the event, everyone is encouraged to grab a snack, and the food is available for all.

Profile Group Meeting #3

Students gather in their Profile Groups where they will be introduced to the real life person whose experiences have formed the basis of the profile: the Poverty Expert who is the real Molly or Max. This is a time for students to express how they felt to the Poverty Expert and ask questions about his or her challenges.



Goals:

To provide a safe environment in which the students and Poverty Experts may vent their feelings.

To provide an opportunity for students to ask a real Poverty Expert about his or her situation, the system and anything else they choose.

To provide an opportunity for Poverty Experts to talk about their situation, the system and anything else they choose; to give them an opportunity to clarify what poverty is like, and share their feelings.

To begin to explore root causes of poverty, and the ways in which "the system" could be improved.

To provide a more realistic impression of what people who live in poverty are like, and to cast aside the stereotypes many of us hold.



People:

Facilitator, Floaters

Poverty Experts: One Poverty Expert is present in each group. He or she will have been briefed ahead of time to know what to expect. If your profiles include a couple, consider combining these two profile groups at this time only.



Items:

Taxi chits, provided in advance to the Poverty Experts to transport them to and from the event.

Honoraria for Poverty Experts.



Be Aware:

If a student is actually living in poverty, or has previously, some of the activities might bring challenging feelings to the surface. It may be important for facilitators to gently introduce the concept of confidentiality (What's said in the group stays in the group.)

Poverty Experts have all kinds of barriers and challenges, and some of these may be apparent during this session. Poverty Experts with mental health issues or addictions may be particularly nervous or anxious. Pair these with really strong facilitators who have been advised of this situation.

A bond can develop between a Poverty Expert and the profile group. It is important that if any group members feel the urge to do something to help, their efforts be channeled into poverty reduction activities in general, and not in raising money to give to an individual.

Be very careful to ban cameras or tape recorders in the rooms at this point. It is critical that the students and Poverty Experts feel completely free to express whatever they want, without recording devices in the room that might limit that openness.

This period of time is for the students and the Poverty Expert to speak with one another, led by the facilitator. Do not permit others to join this session.

It is important to immediately introduce the new member of the group, the Poverty Expert who is the real Molly or Max, whose experiences form the basis of the profile. In this way, participants will not be embarrassed by blurting out unfortunate comments about the profiled life.

This is likely to be a powerful moment at The Challenge for both participants and Poverty Experts. The Poverty Expert will talk a bit about himself or herself and then be open to questions. This session is an opportunity for students to talk to someone who has lived or is still living in poverty and ask questions of someone who knows the real answers. Many of our participants have come to the event with preconceived notions, so to have those dispelled by this real person is a very powerful opportunity.

This can be a highly empowering activity for Poverty Experts as well, in that they hear others express their frustrations and irritation with a system that is unable to provide even adequate services to those it is designed to help. Listening to these observations validates a lot of what they feel on a regular basis.

At the end of this session, thank the Poverty Expert and present him or her with an envelope containing a heartfelt thank you note and an honorarium. Cash is preferable, because it is respectful and flexible, but those receiving Ontario Works benefits are expected to report receiving the cash, and that amount could be deducted from their benefits. A gift card does not need to be reported and so that is an alternative.

Auditorium Meeting: All Participants Convene

The students meet their teachers in the lobby and as they enter the auditorium together to once again sit in their school groups, they are given i-Clickers.



The Describe the Poor exercise is revisited. A typical poster created in the morning with words revealing our stereotypical views of those living in poverty is projected on the screen. The Moderator asks the students if they would like to call out some new words that they associate with people living in poverty. Next, students revisit the multiple choice test from earlier in the day and learn the correct answers to the questions. The Poverty Experts, seated in the first row, are individually thanked, and then escorted to their waiting taxis. Finally students are briefed on the Student Think Tank.



Goals:

To revisit the Describe the Poor exercise and the True/False quiz of the morning session to consolidate learning.

To show appreciation for the contribution of the Poverty Experts.

To prepare students for the Think Tank activity by:

raising awareness that different levels of government are responsible for different types of funding and programs;

encouraging students to move beyond focusing on problems and instead to brainstorm creative solutions to problems;

providing an example of a concrete and effective method of interaction with government.



People:

Poverty Experts
Moderator



Items:

Describe the Poor poster from one of the morning Home Group sessions, photographed and projected on the large screen.

Blackboard and chalk or chart paper on stand and marker to record suggested new adjectives to Describe the Poor.

Projector and screen to replay the True/False Quiz of the first session.

i-Clickers and computer with i-Clicker software

Poverty redefined: Ask students to reflect on their experiences today and what they have learned about the skills needed to survive in poverty. Invite them to look at a typical poster from the first group session this morning and replace the old stereotypes by calling out new adjectives. Create another poster with new words which may include “resilient,” “brave,” and “hardworking.”

Multiple choice revisited: Give the same true or false test administered at the beginning of the day, revealing previous responses as recorded by the i-Clickers and then the correct responses.

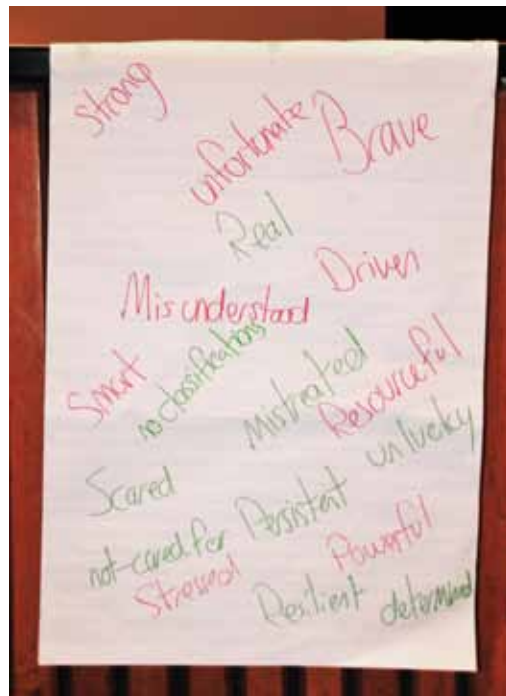
Thanking the Poverty Experts: Individually introduce The Poverty Experts, who are seated in the front row of the auditorium, by their profile name. Thank them sincerely for their essential contribution to this event. This is the end of their participation in The Poverty Challenge. The Poverty Expert Coordinator escorts them to the lobby to catch their taxis home.

Remind students of the presence of an on-site counsellor if any feel the need to talk about something upsetting them.

Student Think Tank: Explain the concept of think tanks, and outline what the students will do next.

Inform students that different levels of government control different issues affecting poverty reduction.

Explain that students will move into their Profile Groups where they will brainstorm innovative solutions to their profile character’s main challenge and determine what level(s) of government could address this issue. At the end of this session, they will have a report with a realistic proposal and also two designated spokespersons to present their idea to the whole group in the final activity.



Profile Group Meeting #3 The Student Think Tank

In their Profile Groups, students focus on a particular challenge faced by their Poverty Expert and then come up with a viable solution to this problem. Also, they must identify which level(s) of government would be responsible for implementing their suggestion. They write their proposal in a particular format on chart paper, which is left in the room after the session so that the technical director can photograph it for later projection in the auditorium. The students select one or two members of their think tank to present their ideas to the final plenary session.



Goals:

To inform the students about which issues are the responsibility of municipal, provincial and federal governments.

To provide students with the opportunity to think creatively and proactively.

To encourage students to believe that the knowledge and insights that they gained today can be channeled into positive social change.



People:

Facilitators for each profile group, as before.



Items:

A chart showing which areas of government are responsible for what programs.

A worksheet stating the particular problem on which this profile group should focus. (This piece will require significant thought and prior research by the organizing subcommittee.) (See APPENDIX.)

A template showing the way in which the think tank results will be presented.

Thin markers and pieces of chart paper on which to write think tank solutions.



Be Aware:

Facilitators may ask some leading questions but not suggest solutions. The students need to have ownership of their proposals.

Inform the students in your Profile Group about which issues are handled at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. Discuss the major issue that relates to their character's situation, such as lack of sufficient nutritious food, lack of housing, lack of childcare, lack of counselling services, or lack of drug addiction services. The silo mentality and structure of many social agencies will likely be recognized.



Divide the profile group into three smaller groups. Direct each small group to sit in a circle around a piece of chart paper on a desk. Use the placemat technique (see APPENDIX) to provide each student with space on the paper. In this space, the students silently and individually brainstorm solutions to the chosen problem. After a short time, ask each to present his or her ideas to rest of the small group which will discuss all suggestions and select the best.

After listening to each of the three small groups share their best idea the profile group chooses one overall best solution by consensus.



Pose particular questions to the group to help them flesh out the details of the chosen proposal.

Have a student write this solution on a new piece of chart paper in a specified format.

Ask them to select two students from the profile group to explain the plan to the entire audience. Determine in advance how much time to allot for each presentation.



Leave the final poster in the room at the end of the session so that it can be photographed for projection on the large screen in the final session.



Volunteer Meeting #2

This meeting runs concurrently with the participants' lunch break. The volunteers meet in a large lecture hall where they revisit the Describe the Poor exercise, are debriefed on their experiences role-playing employees of social service agencies, and evaluate The Poverty Challenge.



Goals:

- To elicit new adjectives to describe those living in poverty
- To provide an opportunity for volunteers to share their experiences as agency employees with one another and an organizer of the conference.
- To provide suggestions about how this aspect of The Poverty Challenge could be improved.
- To encourage volunteers to have hope that the knowledge and insights that they gained today can be channeled into positive social change.
- To gain feedback on the Poverty Challenge by having the volunteers complete the evaluation survey.



People:

Committee Member: Volunteer Facilitator
Assistant



Items:

- Questions for the debriefing of volunteers.
- i-Clickers and a Poverty Challenge evaluation projected on a screen.

The Volunteer Facilitator thanks the volunteers for their essential role in this event. Remind volunteers that the rules and procedures for each agency are based on your most up-to-date research. Revisit the Describe the Poor exercise by reviewing the chart created in the morning session and inviting volunteers to contribute new adjectives to a new chart. Next, debrief the volunteers on their experiences as they role-played agency employees. The Assistant takes notes so that this feedback can be used to improve next year's Poverty Challenge. Ask how they felt in their roles. Then ask how they think the real employees of these agencies feel at the end of each working day. Finally, present The Poverty Challenge evaluation and direct the volunteers to complete it using their i-Clickers. This completes the volunteers' participation in The Poverty Challenge

Meeting of Teachers



While the students are in the Student Think Tanks, the teachers meet as a group with a member of the organizing committee. In this session, the teachers reflect on their experiences as participants in The Poverty Challenge, make suggestions for improvements, and talk about how they could take what was learned today back to their schools.



Goals:

To provide the teachers with an opportunity to get to know one another better, share anti-poverty ideas and perhaps consider working collaboratively on anti-poverty activities.

To provide organizers with feedback and suggestions for improvement of The Challenge.

To provide advice to teachers about how to run their next session, which is a meeting with their students.



People:

Committee Member: School Contact Coordinator
Assistant
Teachers



Items:

List of discussion questions (see APPENDIX)

Ask the teachers to talk about their experiences today: how they felt participating just as their students did in Rounds 1 and 2 of The Challenge, how they think their students are feeling about the event, and how the insights gained today might be taken back to school and shared. Ask for suggestions about how to improve The Poverty Challenge; the assistant takes notes. Then discuss the extent to which urban poverty is or should be part of the curriculum. Share ideas for poverty-reduction actions that could be taken at a school.

Meeting of Teachers and Their Students

Teachers have had little or no time so far to check in with their students, and they do so now. Meeting areas are designated for each school and teachers meet their students there, joined by a facilitator.



Goals:

To provide teachers with the opportunity to learn how their students are feeling and how they are reacting to the event.

To alert a teacher to a student who may be upset.

To discuss how insights gained today might be shared with others back at school.

To discuss poverty reduction strategies that might be organized at school.



People:

Teachers, their students, and a facilitator

In this session, the teachers debrief their students to learn about how they fared during the day, and discuss projects or initiatives related to poverty and poverty reduction that could take place at their schools.

Be sure students understand the difference between band-aid solutions, advocacy, and long-term change. While it's wonderful if participants decide they want to help out at the Food Bank because of this event, they need to understand that that won't really get at the root causes of poverty, and if they want to address those, they'll need to find other ways. Sometimes it's easier to address the symptoms of an issue, rather than the cause. Don't let the participants off the hook after the great work they've done!

Auditorium: Final Meeting

Students and teachers sit in school groups in the auditorium. At this time, the students present the results of their Think Tanks. Each Student Think Tank group has a representative or two come to the stage to present. The moderator thanks the donors and supporters of The Poverty Challenge, and a final evaluation of the event is done with i-Clickers.



Goals:

To review the events of the day and help the students to see how far they have come in such a short period of time.

To ignite in them a passion for poverty reduction.

To recognize again the contribution of our Poverty Experts.

To reinforce our commitment to getting their message to the right people, and having properly formatted versions of their Think Tank solutions posted on our website for them to review.

To encourage students to keep in touch and let us know what they are doing to “make poverty history.”



People:

Moderator: The Moderator must be dynamic and quick-thinking, and have a strong understanding of poverty issues.

i-Clicker technician: You need someone who is very comfortable with this technology, and has everything set up ahead of time.

i-Clicker dispensers and gatherers: These people will be at the doors, handing the i-Clickers out to students, and reminding them that they must be returned when leaving the auditorium.

Data gatherers: Ideally, your i-Clickers will work, and you will need just one data gatherer. If for some reason the i-Clickers don't work, or you choose to use pen and paper evaluations, be sure you have an efficient system in place for distribution and collection.



Items:

2 wireless microphones

i-Clickers

Computer with i-Clicker software and evaluation of TPC

Large screen and projector

This is a jam-packed culminating session led by a dynamic moderator.

Students and teachers gather in the auditorium to hear and see the Student Think Tank presentations. At this session, all The Poverty Challenge puzzle pieces fit into place. Maintain a clear sense of all the elements that need to be re-introduced, keep the audience focused and energize all participants so that when they leave, they feel like they will change the world – and, we hope, act on that feeling!

Think Tank Results: Tell the audience that the Think Tank proposals will be presented in alphabetical order, based on the profile name of each group. For each group, welcome two representatives to the front and provide each with a wireless microphone to give a 90 second explanation of their solution to the particular challenge faced by their Poverty Expert. (NOTE: Work out the length of the presentations based on the number of groups and number of minutes for this part of the session.)

The written proposal has been photographed and is projected on the screen to be read as the students speak. Tell the students that all proposals will be reformatted, posted on The Poverty Challenge website and presented to the appropriate level of government. Any responses received will also be posted on the website.

Evaluation of The Poverty Challenge by Students, Teachers and Facilitators:

Project the evaluation form on the screen. Direct each participant to use the i-Clicker to indicate whether s/he is student, teacher or facilitator and to answer the survey questions. You may decide to post the results on your website; if so, announce this.



Closing remarks: This is very important because it's the last time you will have with your participants. Make your thank yous sincerely yet briefly, quickly review what the participants have been through over the course of the event, congratulate them on a job well done, encourage them to stay in touch (via the website and email) and boost their commitment to poverty reduction activities. Create in the students a real sense of "Yes we can." The whole conference is designed to initiate further action, and this is your last chance to emphasize that, and make it seem cool. Reinforce that this is just the beginning of the process, and the next step is up to them. Be sure they know how to stay in touch if they choose to. Thank everyone for coming, especially the teachers, and if there is time, encourage those who have not yet done so, to use Speakers' Corner and/or the Graffiti Wall.

Debriefing of Facilitators

The facilitators remain in the auditorium after the departure of the students and teachers.

Thank them for their essential role. Then ask them to share their experiences and make suggestions about the organization of The Poverty Challenge.



Goals:

To acknowledge the significance of the role of the facilitator and to thank them for their hard work.

To get feedback on how the group sessions went.

To get feedback on the participation of the Poverty Experts.

To hear what went very well, and what suggestions are offered for the next Poverty Challenge.



People:

Moderator: Facilitator Coordinator

Assistant

Facilitators

As the Moderator's assistant takes notes, the facilitators share joys, frustrations, funny moments and epiphanies. They also offer their insights into the organization of The Poverty Challenge.

Make this meeting short, and suggest that the conversations and celebrations might continue at a local restaurant.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SUGGESTIONS AND FEEDBACK TO THE ORGANIZERS OF THE ORIGINAL POVERTY CHALLENGE:

www.thepovertychallenge.org

APPENDIX

Example documents, templates, etc

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This guide has been produced with the support of the Limestone District School Board