

WHAT'S THE TRUTH ABOUT HUNGER?

This is an introductory and short lesson especially recommended for use prior to the Massachusetts 4-H Cares About Community Food Drive.

Lesson Overview: Many people have incorrect ideas about hunger and poverty. The attached surveys, first developed by the Food Bank of Western Mass, are a good way to dispel myths and get conversation started.

Objective: Members will be able to answer questions about hunger and it's roots.

Materials: Survey sheets (age specific sheets are included), pencils or markers

Procedure:

Make copies of the survey sheets for the appropriate ages and give them to each member to complete.

Discuss the correct answers (provided) with the club as a whole and ask why members chose the answers they did. Please note that the answer sheet contains quite a bit of data, which need not be included in its entirety! The data is supplied strictly to give comparisons and enhance awareness of poverty.



Survey Sheet for Juniors & Seniors



True or False? First, decide whether you think the following statements are true or false. Then, discuss your answers. Are there any questions about which your group disagreed? Why?

1. The Massachusetts poverty rate in 2007 was less than it was in 1999. _____
2. Most people who are poor could work, but don't. _____
3. People who receive food stamps or public assistance often "cheat" the system. _____
4. Caucasians make up the largest group living in poverty. _____
5. People can use welfare for more than 2 years. _____
6. The maximum monthly allotment of food stamps is \$97.00 per person. _____
7. Most impoverished households are headed by a single woman. _____
8. The cost of housing has impact on why people are hungry. _____
9. There is a direct relationship between education and earnings. _____
10. For able-bodied Americans, there is no reason to be unemployed. _____

HUNGER SURVEY ANSWER KEY FOR JUNIORS & SENIORS

Question:

1. False. The poverty rate in Mass. in 2007 was 10% , which is significantly higher than in 1999 when it was 6.7%.

2. False. Most people who are poor could work, but don't.

As a result of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), commonly called welfare reform, established eligibility for benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF program. Poor, able-bodied parents must work 20 hours a week, if their children are school age, in order to receive benefits and cash assistance. If these adults are unable to find paying work, they are required to perform 30 hours per week community service in order to maintain their benefit payments.

Since 1996, there have been some changes and cash assistance has been mostly for child-only cases where no parent and no work requirement is involved and to child care for the few families on enrolled. Meanwhile, welfare spending is dwarfed by what is now spending on other supplemental assistance programs, such as food stamps and Medicaid. The regulations and benefits vary in each state. Some states allow for training and educational programs to be substituted for paid work hours. Other states help recipients build their assets while still receiving public assistance.

3. False. Most people who receive food stamps and public assistance often “cheat” the system.

Given the statistics above, most people who receive public assistance should not be expected to have the money they need for food. However, you may hear arguments about other ways people could get the food they need, or how some people “cheat” in a variety of ways: from taking more than they need to, selling the emergency food they get, or simply lying to get food stamps. There are rigorous programs in place to limit overpayment and fraud.

The food stamp application in Massachusetts is a long and tedious process. There is growing research to support findings that welfare programs “cheat” recipients as well, through erroneously denied exemptions, or not offering proper assistance in applying for waivers, especially in cases of domestic violence, or providing translation services.

4. True. Caucasians make up the largest group living in poverty.

2000 census data shows the following poverty rates: 8% Caucasian, 21% Hispanic, and 22% Black. There are more white people overall in the U.S. population, so the smaller percentage is still a majority; however, the numbers need to be examined in context. The disproportionate amount of poverty in the non-white sectors of the population raises issues of racism and economic injustice that need to be more closely examined.

5. True. People can use welfare for more than 2 years.

Federal law sets a 5-year lifetime limit on public assistance (welfare). In the U.S. the poor population is dynamic; low income people often move in and out of poverty and about 5% of the total population is considered chronically poor. There is no clear data on the effect of PRWORA on these trends.

In Massachusetts, assistance is limited to 24 months within a 60 month period. In other words, there is a 2 year maximum in Massachusetts.

6. True. The average monthly allotment for food stamps in MA in 2008 was \$97 and \$184 per household.

As with welfare benefits, an able-bodied adult must fulfill work requirements in order to receive food stamps. 90% of those people receiving food stamps state that the benefits last 2.4 weeks or less. The majority of those who do get food stamps are children.

Despite myths to the contrary, research indicates that families on food stamps spend

their food dollars more wisely than the average family. They succumb less often to the lure of fatty, sugary food and beverages than non-food stamp families. (Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 1993)

7. True. Most impoverished households are headed by a single woman.

Households headed by a woman are often referred to as single parent households, though a man could also be the single parent. In 2000 roughly 3 million poor families were headed by women. In 2009, 77% (156,776) of children in poor families live with a single parent.

8. True. The cost of housing in the U.S. has impact on why people are hungry.

Across the country a person has to earn an average of \$14.66 per hour, which is three times the federal minimum wage of \$5.85 as of 6/24/07 to afford to rent a modest two bedroom home. The gap between income and housing costs continues to increase, pushing family budgets to the limits.

In Massachusetts a minimum wage earner (\$8.00 per hour as of 1/01/08 in MA) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$350. In fact, this wage earner would have to work 125 hours a week to afford to rent a two-bedroom unit.

9. True. There is a direct relationship between education and earnings.

In 2009, 51% (32,559) of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in poor families. 35% (95,897) of children whose parents have a high school degree, but no college education, live in poor families. 7% (73,866) of children whose parents have some college or more live in poor families.

Education is commonly considered to be a solution to poverty. Across the nation, in 2002, the poverty rate for individuals without a high school diploma was 22% compared to a rate of 3% for those with at least a bachelor's degree.

There are no guarantees that an education will prevent hunger; however, the higher the educational level completed, the better the options for earning.

The statistics for both the U.S. and Massachusetts indicate the following: poverty rates for married couple families in which one person held a bachelor's degree is close to 1%. Single mothers with poor educational attainment have a poverty rate of 48% in the U.S. and 55% in Massachusetts.

10. False. For able-bodied Americans, there is no reason to be unemployed.

Discrimination plays a role when a poor person applies for a job.

There are millions of functionally illiterate adults who can't read or write well enough to work in many jobs.

For families with young children there are additional concerns. Entry-level pay per hour in many jobs is less than or equal to the amount for childcare for one child, making it impractical for both parents to work or for many single parents to work. Many times there are not available openings in daycare programs.

Economically speaking, the federal government actually counts on a certain percentage of unemployment. If people are afraid they might lose their job to someone who needs a job, they are less likely to ask for more pay. If the pay rate stays low, prices stay low and there is no inflation, which is helpful to people overall.



Survey sheet for Cloverbuds



True or False? First, decide whether you think the following statements are true or false. Then, in small groups, discuss your answers. Are there any questions about which your group disagreed? Why?

1. There are no hungry people in the United States.
2. Only people who are homeless are hungry.
3. There is enough food to feed everyone in the world.
4. The U.S. government spends more than half of its money helping poor people in other countries.
5. People who are hungry are lazy and don't want to work.
6. Kids can't do anything to help end hunger.
7. Poverty (being poor) isn't as big a problem today as it was 10 years ago.
8. There are more hungry people in big cities than in rural areas in the United States.
9. Most of the people who get food from organizations that help hungry people in Massachusetts are children.
10. Natural disasters like floods and earthquakes are the biggest cause of hunger.

HUNGER SURVEY for Cloverbuds Answer Key

Question:

1. False. There are 31 million people in the United States who can't always get enough food to eat. More than 12 million of them are children under age 17. That's enough kids to fill 200 football stadiums!
2. False. Many people who are not homeless are hungry. Sometimes, when people have jobs that do not pay a lot of money, it's hard to pay rent, phone bills, buy gas, and clothes for the kids, and still have enough money left over for food. Often, food is seen as something people can probably survive a day or two without when money is tight.
3. True. Researchers have proved that there is more than enough food grown in the world to feed everyone. The problem is not that there isn't enough food, but that some people do not have access to it. They may not have enough money to buy certain expensive foods from the supermarket, or they might live in countries where it is very difficult to grow healthy food.
4. False. In 2000, the U.S. government spent less than 1 percent of its budget on foreign aid that helps poor people.
5. False. Many people who are hungry are people who shouldn't be expected to work, like children, elderly, and disabled people. Many others are working but have jobs that do not pay enough. Only a small percentage of the people who could work, do not.
6. False. Kids have a lot of power to help end hunger! First, you can find out everything you can about hunger in your community and around the world. Then, you can organize a food drive, raise money for a local organization that helps hungry people, write letters to your local newspaper about hunger, or teach people in your school and community about the problem and what they can do about it!
7. True and False. 10 years ago, about 13.1% of Americans were poor. In 1999, 11.8% of the population was poor in the United States. However, the problems of hunger and poverty are not going away even when our country's economy is doing well.
8. False. Hunger is a problem for adults and children in large and small cities, as well as in small towns and rural areas. While more people live in cities and hunger is more visible in these urban centers, there are people facing hunger in every Massachusetts community and nearly every community nationwide.
9. False. A little more than half of the people who get food from organizations that help hungry people in Massachusetts are working adults ages 19-55 years old. Many people who do work still need help making ends meet each month. However, 9% are over 55 years old, and 43% are under age 19. One important reason children and elderly are hungry has to do with access to resources. Very young people and very old people cannot work and so they sometimes do not have much money to buy food. The U.S. government gives money to senior citizens, called social security, but for some it is not enough to pay the bills, like heating, and still have enough money for food.
10. False. It is true that natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes cause a lot of problems, especially in poor countries that do not have the money to help people rebuild their homes and businesses. And a natural disaster like a drought can cause famine, a very serious kind of hunger that affects a whole region or country. Most of the time, though, hunger is caused by poverty.