

# History of the Poverty Simulation

The Community Action Poverty Simulation© was developed to help raise awareness about different aspects of poverty that can lead to a discussion about the potential for change in local communities.

The Poverty Simulation has a long history beginning in the 1970s by Reform Organization of Welfare (or ROWEL). They were made up of members of the religious community in St. Louis to advocate for the poor by working for legislative and administrative changes in the welfare system. The “welfare simulation” was designed to demonstrate the difficulty of living on an extremely narrow welfare-based budget.

It was developed by mom’s on welfare to help others understand the barriers and challenges they faced. They wanted to help people to understand their situations. People who had never been in their situation.

This is what you as volunteers get to do also. You’re helping to educate the participates today.

Missouri CAN (formerly MACA) purchased the copyright back in 2002 from the original ROWEL group and revised the kit to reflect the families that have been served by Community Action. It was revised again in 2007 with the addition of a homeless shelter and inter-faith services and then once more in 2012 with the addition of the community health center.

There’s a new 2022 version, but ours is the 2012 with some 2016 updates.

The Poverty Simulation has been proven to be an effective tool for building empathy in participants. It uses the adult experiential learning model to move people from having a concrete experience, to reflective observation in the debrief, to conceptualizing their experience/thinking about how this experience can relate to real life, and then moving people to active experimentation/how this can affect their life/how or what they want to change.

## **Trigger Warning:**

While the poverty simulation is not a game, it’s a simulation. If you have experienced poverty, or some of these situations before it may trigger an emotional response. It’s okay if you need to step out for a minute. (Most volunteer stations have a closed sign you can put on your table). Feel free to take care of yourself and we hope you can rejoin us.