



Diverse Issues

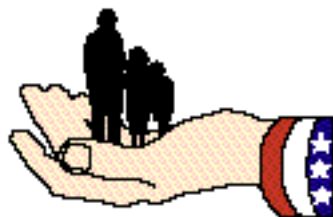
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Diversity in People: Families in the State of Poverty

Most people have opinions and beliefs about the poor. The following are a few commonly held beliefs:

- People are poor because they don't want to work.
- Women on welfare keep having more children to get more welfare.
- Most people are trapped in poverty, with generation after generation living in poverty.



Although commonly held, each of these beliefs is a myth. Here are the facts:

- Almost half of all poor people work. Their wages account for nearly half of all the income for their families (O'Haire, 1996).
- Women on welfare have fewer children and a lower birth rate than women in the general population (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1996).
- People move in and out of poverty every year. Only 12% of the poor remain in poverty for five or more consecutive years (O'Haire, 1996).

In 1996, federal welfare reform legislation was enacted. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF, replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children. TANF provides minimal subsidies to parents and children for up to two years consecutively, five years in a person's lifetime.

The goal of this new legislation was to move families from welfare to work, from dependency to self-sufficiency. How have poor families fared? By September 2000, the number of people on welfare had fallen by nearly 60 percent to fewer than 5.8 million people, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. These numbers represent a large reduction in the welfare roles, which peaked in 1994 at nearly 14.3 million people. Most recipients are single mothers and their children. Based on these figures, political leaders of all parties were quick to declare welfare reform a resounding success. And according to one report, "In state and local studies, some families report feeling that they are faring better – they have more money than when on welfare, they feel more motivated or feel better about themselves. And some of these specifically credit the welfare law" (Welfare to What? 1998). *(continued on page 2)*

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Unfortunately, however, while some former recipients are better off, others face deepening poverty. It is estimated that between 40% and 50% of those who left welfare did not have a steady job when they left. And many of those who do find employment have jobs that pay less than the federal poverty line.

The National Governor's Association survey found that "most of the jobs held by former recipients pay between \$5.50 and \$7.00 an hour...not enough to raise a family out of poverty" (Welfare to What? 1998). According to the Economic Policy Institute, the majority of former welfare recipients land jobs in day cares, home health services, hospitals, and restaurants (Krebs, 2001). People who enter low-paying, low-skilled jobs tend to remain there over time. And when one considers that additional expenses of child care and transportation costs must come out of meager salaries, the available family income is stretched even further. Therefore, while work is up among former welfare recipients, economic conditions for many families have worsened.

Some of those in the most desperate situations are falling even further behind. While the overall child poverty rate is decreasing, the numbers of children in extreme poverty (below half the federal poverty line) edged up. This occurred even as welfare rolls fell. Increasing numbers of former welfare recipients struggle daily with lack of food, housing, or health care. In fact, one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999).

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (1998), in the median state, a minimum wage worker would have to work 87 hours each week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at 30% of his or her income, which is the federal definition of affordable housing. For example, nationally, fair market rent for a two-bedroom unit averages \$585.00 a month. A family living on a full-time minimum wage job makes \$893.00 a month. This means the family would need to

spend two-thirds of their income on rent. At the same time, in many communities, subsidized public housing and affordable housing are becoming scarcer.

Generally speaking, those who could go to work have gone to work. Those who yet remain on welfare are likely to be those with significant barriers to work: low levels of education, limited or no work experience, a disabled child at home, domestic violence issues, severe learning disabilities, mental health problems, and substance abuse. These characteristics limit their ability to get and keep employment.

In order to move families out of poverty, not just off the welfare caseload; many families will need additional support.

- Make sure families are aware of the help that is available to them. Many former welfare recipients do not understand or are not told about benefits that they are eligible to receive. Food stamps, "transitional Medicaid, and Medicaid coverage for children are

benefits that could help to keep a family afloat, but which often go untapped.

- Available and affordable childcare can present a major burden for low-income parents. Child care can easily cost one quarter to 30% of a parent's income, particularly if low-



paying jobs require evening, weekend, and extended hours. And in some areas, there is simply a shortage of child care providers to meet the increased need due to parents moving from welfare to work. Assistance in attaining and keeping adequate childcare could make the difference between keeping and losing a job.

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- Education and training are requirements for escaping poverty. Work experience alone is not enough. Investment in education and training can have substantial payoffs in the



job market. Depending on an individual recipient's skill levels, between 200 and 900 hours of education and training can help recipients gain between \$5,000 and \$10,000 of annual income (Women Employed Institute, 2000).

- Make an effort to inform families about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). This benefit can add up to \$3,800 a year to a low-wage earner's household income, yet many families do not get this credit because they do not know about it.
- Finally, treat people who are struggling with dignity, understanding, and respect. Shabby treatment can have a negative impact on the self-esteem. Low self-esteem can reduce motivation needed to handle the challenges with which one is faced.

Sources:

Krebs, J. (2001). *Welfare Rolls Drop Despite Economic Woes*. *Centre Daily Times* (April 12) p. B1.

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Promoting Education And Training For Welfare Recipients. (2000, March). *Women Employed Institute*.

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Welfare Myths: Facts or Fiction. Exploring the Truth About Welfare. (1996). *Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law*.

Welfare to What: Early Findings on Family Hardship and Well-Being. (1998). *Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund and National Coalition for the Homeless*.

Diversity Resource: Games From Long Ago & Far Away

As you begin to plan for summer camps and other fun indoor and outdoor activities for youth, consider incorporating *Games From Long Ago & Far Away: Ready-to-Use Multicultural PE Activities for Elementary Students*.

This book, authored by Thomas J. Carr, contains over 328 games from places around the world like Brazil, India, Australia, Nigeria, Japan, Israel, and Great Britain. It also includes games from early times in Ancient Greece and Colonial America to the present. These games from around the world encourage children's appreciation of other cultures through active physical participation.

Basic information about each game is provided: country and continent of origin, an interesting fact about the game or country, equipment needed, object of the game, and related games and activities in the book.

The publisher is Parker Publishing Company. This book can be purchased through Prentice Hall Direct by visiting the Website: <http://www.phdirect.com>.

Multilingual Food & Nutrition Video Resources

Multilingual Food & Nutrition Videos are available from the Cooperative Extension Services of New Mexico State University. Many titles are available in English, Spanish, and Navajo. Topics include nutrition and health, food safety, food preparation, foods and culture, and children's food education.

Faculty and professional staff with New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension produced these products. They combine the subject matter expertise of Extension specialists and faculty with the media expertise of the Leading Object team. The cost of most videos is \$19.95 or less. To order a catalog, call (888) 750-4156 or visit the Website at www.leadingobject.com.

Diversity In The Workplace: Communicating in Diverse Work Groups

Today much of our work is done in work groups or teams, requiring individuals to communicate more frequently with others. When a group of people come together from different backgrounds and with different expectations, participating and communicating can sometimes be difficult. Paying attention to the diversity of team members can increase the leader's effectiveness. The following are just some factors that may influence communication with others: cultural background, how members view the team leader, different ways in which people process information, personal definition of "active participation," and preferred style of receiving feedback.

In meetings, for example, some people prefer high interaction and a lot of discussion. Such persons might move quickly from idea to idea, stimulated by emotional expression and lively exchanges. Spontaneous and immediate reactions may come easily. Others need time to think about and analyze a point before responding. Processing and assimilating the information prior to commenting openly is more comfortable. Unfortunately, difference in styles can lead to misunderstanding. The more spontaneous person may perceive the more quiet person as dull and non-participatory. Remember, it is not necessarily how long or how little a person talks in a group; the important goal of the leader is to achieve richness of discussion that taps the background of the diverse work group.

Level of assertiveness varies among workers and can impact the way members relate to each other. Assertiveness can be defined as, "the power we use to make our needs, wants, and desires known to others" (Dupont, 1997). Some people speak in a high, soft voice and look at the ground when talking; others speak loudly, stand straight and look people in the eye when speaking. The

farther apart two people are in assertiveness, the greater is the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Those who are very assertive may have limited respect for those who are unassertive.

Cultural background can influence one's assertiveness level. Some cultures have a much lower assertiveness level than mainstream Americans. These cultures may consider a high level of assertiveness as a sign of disrespect and egotistical behavior. On the other hand, many mainstream Americans may see a lack of assertion as passivity or weakness. To interact effectively with others, it may be helpful to adjust your own behavior to meet the level of the other person.

How members view their relationship with someone in a leadership role can impact the nature of communication between two people. People from cultural backgrounds that value hierarchical relationships may be more likely to believe that the appropriate role for employees is to take orders, do the work, and wait to hear from the supervisor about their performance. Others assume a more egalitarian relationship with the supervisor and feel comfortable to raise questions and make suggestions about the work assignment.

Communicating feedback in diverse groups can be particularly challenging. Both leaders and team members have a preferred style for giving and receiving feedback. Traditional, or top-down, feedback consists of someone in a higher ranked position giving feedback to someone in a lower ranked position. The major responsibility lies with the leader. The receiver plays a more passive role in the process. Some people may prefer the traditional format and are comfortable with top-down feedback. This may be truer for team members whose backgrounds are in cultures that value hierarchical relationships.

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Diverse Activity: Getting Started With Respect

This is a good activity for a new group that will be discussing controversial subjects. It can be adapted to fit most age groups, including youth and adults.

Ask everyone to find someone in the room who they do not know. Instruct them to introduce themselves to that person, and spend five to ten minutes



talking about respect. What does it mean for you to show respect, and what does it mean for you to be shown respect? After the allotted time, ask participants to return to their seats, and open the discussion. What ideas did people come up with?

Common responses include the “Golden Rule,” looking somebody in the eyes, being honest, and appreciating somebody’s ideas even when you do not agree with them. It is important to mention that respect is a crucial ingredient in any discussion, but especially in a discussion of often-controversial issues regarding multicultural issues. The point is to learn from our differences – to understand each other’s understanding. The point is **NOT** to agree. Another important part of respect is knowing each other’s names, and how to pronounce them. Also, respect includes keeping the conversation in the group. This type of community building, and the safety which people feel with it, can make or break an attempt to facilitate discussions on multicultural issues.

This activity touches many bases. First, it starts the crucial path toward building a community of respect. This is the first step in maintaining a constructive exchange regarding issues such as sexism, physical challenges, and differences in religious beliefs. At the most basic level, participants meet someone they did not know, and

exchange ideas with that person. Second, the community is built through an understanding of how the group perceives respect, and how they negotiate its meaning. Third, the similarities and differences in participants’ ideas about respect begin to show the first signs of similarities and differences within the group on a larger level.

Source: *Multicultural Pavilion*. Created and maintained by Paul Gorski.

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/activities/activity1.html>

Visit this site for many other diversity activities.



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Others prefer a more collaborative approach to feedback. More interactive discussion invites greater participation of both parties in the process. Mainstream American culture tends to value a more collaborative approach to feedback. To maximize effectiveness, the team leader must determine his or her comfort level when providing feedback, as well as the comfort level of each team member receiving the feedback.

The effective team leader of diverse groups will make a conscious effort to consider the similarities and differences of the individuals on his or her team. Although differences present challenges, the rewards for considering these differences in preference, behavior, and background can have tremendous rewards.

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Dupont, K. (1997). *Handling diversity in the workplace: Communication is key*. IA: American Media Publishing.

Kuga, L.A. (1996). *Communicating in a diverse workplace*. CA: Richard Change Associates, Inc.

Diversity Around the State: The Many Faces of Diversity



The Many Faces of Diversity, a one-day conference for child care providers and early childhood educators was held at Wilmington Area High School in New Wilmington, PA. The conference was co-sponsored by Lawrence and Mercer County Cooperative Extension and Child Care Information Services. The goal of this Better Kid Care conference was to show that diversity goes beyond race and culture so that adults in early childhood settings are more aware of all differences as they plan programs.

One hundred and thirty child care providers participated in this conference. Mary Reames, M.Ed. presented the keynote speech entitled, **One Size Does NOT Fit ALL**. She emphasized that research has shown that students need different ways to learn. "Our one size-fits-all delivery has failed them. As teachers, we must listen carefully to our students. They are telling us what they need."

Titles of other workshops included:

- You and Me: Different But The Same
- Early Childhood Education and the Male Perspective
- Adapting Activities for All Ages, Stages and Abilities
- Opening the Doors to Diversity
- Let's Come to Our Senses!
- Intergenerational Experiences for Preschoolers
- Take A Walk in My Shoes

Overall, participants left the conference with an expanded definition of diversity and hands-on activities to use with child care staff and the children in their care. Some of the specific comments included:

"I feel this is one of the best training sessions I've attended...because of our children moving into a more global environment."

"...excellent. All new teachers should take a serious diversity training before entering a classroom!"

"You may look different from someone but have similar values."

"First impressions are often wrong."

"I plan to encourage students to see, discuss and accept differences among each other."

"I will be more aware of peoples disabilities or handicaps and attempt to be more creative in assisting others to reach their potential."

Thank you to Frasier Zahniser, Family Living/4-H Youth Development Agent for sharing this program.

"Diversity training is like hearing a good sermon on Sunday. You must practice it during the week."

Faye Rice

Diversity Around the State: Lackawana County Diversity Coalition Initiates Diversity Speaker Series

COMMUNITY SPEAKER SERIES

WELL RECEIVED

*Submitted by Karen Thomas,
Youth Development/4-H, Family Living
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The Lackawana County Diversity Coalition initiated a free speaker series this spring to increase community awareness and understanding of diverse issues. Nearly 100 people attended the first two sessions.

Abe Plotkin, Diversity Coalition member, launched the series in February with his presentation, "The Holocaust: A Lesson In Remembrance."



Mr. Plotkin, a witness of the Holocaust, related his experiences as a battalion cryptographer and message center of the 284 field

artillery battalion attached to General Patton's third army. While on the way to their objective in 1945, the battalion witnessed the brutality of the Nazis during the holocaust. Plotkin interviewed some of the survivors and took photographs to document the atrocity of the Nazi camps. Mr. Plotkin shared his experiences with the aid of those pictures and told of his efforts to help rehabilitate the liberated refugees after the war.

March's program featured Professor Frank Little Bear of the Cree Nation. Professor Little Bear appeared in his Native American regalia and spoke of the customs and history of the Native American culture prior to 1492. His interactive



presentation included dance and music, which was met with much enthusiasm, especially from the youngsters. His fun and interesting presentation provided a unique understanding of the Native American culture and customs.

Dr. Lois Waters, Director of Social Equity for Shippensburg University, presented the third program in the series, "What Does Diversity Mean?" Wednesday, April 18th at the Children's Library. Dr. Waters explored the meaning of diversity, how it affects us, and how people deal with differences. She also discussed stereotypes and offered ideas and suggestions about how communities can begin to break down barriers.

An invitation

Let's Learn From Each Other

Oftentimes, we can learn alot from the experiences of others.

If you have had a diversity-related experience that others could benefit from, please share it with us. Send your stories to the editor.

Diversity Calendar

May 2001

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

- 3rd National Day of Prayer – U.S.
- 5th Cinco de Mayo – A day for American citizens of Mexican heritage to celebrate their ancestry.
- 13th Mother's Day – U.S.
- 22nd Declaration of the Bab – Commemorates when the Bab, the prophet-herald of the Baha'i faith, foretold that he was the herald of a new and greater messenger of God.
- 24th Ascension Day – Christian celebration of Jesus Christ's ascent into heaven.
- 25th African Liberation Day – Celebrates the progress of liberation for all African nations.
- 27th Shavuot – Jewish day celebrating the revelation of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai.
- 29th Ascension of Baha'u'llah – Celebrates the anniversary of the death of the prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith.
- 30th Memorial Day – A day to remember U.S. heroes and loved ones who have died.

June 2001

Gay and Lesbian Pride Month

- 3rd Pentecost – Christian – Celebrates the Holy Spirit's descent unto the 12 apostles.
- 6th D-Day -- U.S.— Celebrates the landing of U.S troops in Normandy, the beginning of the end of World War II.
- 8th Red Earth Native American Cultural Festival – One of the worlds largest intertribal gatherings in Oklahoma.
- 10th Race Unity Day – Sponsored by the Baha'i, designed to promote understanding and racial harmony.
- 10th Trinity Sunday – Christian – Celebrates the belief that God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are one.

June 2001 - (Continued)

- 14th Flag Day – Anniversary of the U.S. flag, adopted in 1777.
- 17th Father's Day
- 19th Juneteenth – African – American celebrates the declaration of freedom for all slaves.
- 24th San Juan Day – Puerto Rican – Celebrates the birth of St. John the Baptist.
- 28th Stonewall Rebellion – U.S. - Celebrates the protest by gays and lesbians against police harassment in New York City.

July 2001

- 4th Independence Day – U.S.— Celebrates the signing of the Declaration of Independence by the 13 Colonies.
- 5th AsalhaPuja – Buddhist – Celebrates the first sermon of Buddha and the setting of the Wheel of Truth into the world.
- 8th Martyrdom of the Bab - Baha'i – Commemorates the arrest, torture, imprisonment and execution of the Bab in 1850.
- 13th O-Bon – Japan – Also known as Feast of Fortune, a time to remember one's ancestors.
- 14th Bastille Day – France – Celebrates the event that started the French Revolution.
- 23rd Birth of Haile Selassie I. — Commemorates the birth of the former Emperor of Ethiopia in 1892.
- 24th Pioneer Day – Mormon – Honors the U.S. pioneers that crossed the plains and settled in Utah in 1847.
- 26th Anniversary of the Signing of the A.D.A. – The Americans With Disabilities Act

Source: Professional Development Group, Inc.



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