

## Grades 5 – 6

## Myth Busters

## Students will

- explore personal and cultural perceptions of poverty
- contribute and work constructively in groups
- apply critical thinking skills to defend a position

## Preparations

- Attach five inflated balloons to the board.
- Photocopy and cut into five strips the *Common Perceptions of People Who are Experiencing Poverty*.
- Have tape and a thumb tack (for bursting balloons) on hand.
- Photocopy a set of each *Myth Busters Handout* according to the number of students in each group.
- Provide markers and chart paper for each group.

## Instructions

1. Ask students to share words and phrases that first come to mind when they think of people experiencing poverty. Encourage students to be honest, emphasizing there are no right or wrong answers. Record student responses on the board or chart paper. Ask: What do you notice about the responses on the list? In most cases, students will notice a negative bias in their answers. Mark the negative responses with a star. Ask: Where do our views and knowledge of people experiencing poverty come from?
2. Share with students that a recent report<sup>1</sup> revealed some common perceptions that Canadians have about people who are poor. Read out loud the statement on each of the five strips of paper, asking students to show a thumbs-up if they think the statement is true and a thumbs-down if they think it is false. Tape each statement beside one of the balloons.
3. Tell students that in the next activity, they will be *Myth Busters*, working in groups to investigate whether these perceptions about families experiencing poverty in Canada are true or myths that need busting. *Explain that a myth is a popular idea or belief that has yet to be verified. Students may concur that all the statements are likely false;*

*but ask what evidence they have to support their claim and discuss the importance of having evidence to defend one's position.*

4. Divide students into five groups. Give each group a different *Myth Busters Handout* (a copy of the same handout for each group member), chart paper and markers. For larger classes you can assign more than one group to the same handout.
5. Instruct groups to read their handouts and determine how many of the five statements can be busted by the story or information on their handout. Ask students to record on chart paper the evidence that supports their decisions.
  - Have groups present their decisions and evidence to the class. Mark an "X" beside a statement every time a group provides evidence to bust it as a myth; a "check" if the evidence supports the statement. Review each statement and decide as a class if it's a busted myth. Invite students to burst a balloon for every myth busted. **Optional:** *Have extra balloons ready to burst if students can bust any of their own statements using information from the handouts.*

## Discussion

- What did you learn from this activity? What surprised you?
- Based on the stories in the handouts, what positive words and phrases could we add to balance our initial list of descriptors about people who are poor (*point to students' first thoughts*)?
- How can we avoid forming only negative ideas about people experiencing poverty? How might we respond to negative statements about people who are poor? What can we say or do?
- How do negative attitudes towards people experiencing poverty influence our behaviour towards them or affect the way we try to solve the problems of poverty?
- What actions can we take to address the problems of poverty in our school or community (i.e. help those struggling to meet basic needs, like food, clothing and shelter) while preserving the dignity of those who are poor? *For example, discuss the problem of stigma related to the school lunch program described in handout #2. How can such programs operate so hungry students are not embarrassed to get a free meal?*

**Myth Busters****Common Perceptions of People Experiencing Poverty<sup>1</sup>**

People living in poverty are too lazy to work.

People experiencing poverty enjoy getting free hand-outs.

Most people experiencing poverty are homeless.

We don't see many people who are "truly poor" in wealthy countries like Canada.

Children experiencing poverty don't do well in school.

## Sources:

<sup>1</sup>*The Dignity Project* (The Salvation Army in Canada, 2011). Retrieved from <http://www.salvationarmy.ca/2011/03/01/salvation-army-launches-the-dignity-project-to-educate-activate-public-support/>

"Myths about Canada's poor endure" (CTV, 2011). Retrieved from <http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20110301/dignity-project-110301/>

*One Night Out: Fact Book Canada* (Free the Children, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/youth/campaigns/onenightout/docs/One%20Night%20Out%20Fact%20Book.pdf>

*Living Below the Line* (World Vision Canada, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.worldvision.ca/GetInvolved/Responding-Churches/Documents/Living-Below-the-Line-2009.pdf>

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## Myth Busters

### Handout I



#### Mary's Story\*

Mary smiles bravely as she listens to the other students chatter about the gifts they've received over the Christmas holidays. She's hoping they won't bother to ask her what she got. Because she's outgoing the other kids don't recognize the proud face she wears while they talk of skiing, lavish meals and travels to warmer places. Mary doesn't say a word. She just listens and smiles.

Growing up with very little in a wealthy Canadian town makes it hard not to be conscious of what everyone else has and what she doesn't. Mary is embarrassed when they have to go to the food bank for their groceries. She sees a shadow behind her mother's smile whenever the volunteers drop off bags of used clothing. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between care and pity in the charity of others.

But Mary is always glad for the clothes. The few trendy outfits she finds in the bags means she can dress like the other kids. In school Mary is outgoing and well liked. The other kids seek her help with assignments and follow her lead during group work. At the end of the day when the other kids go home to their piano lessons and sports activities, Mary just smiles. It's the same smile she wears now while listening to their stories of Christmas vacation. She thinks about hiking through the woods with her family and building blanket forts with her siblings, trying hard to mask the frustration of growing up without in a land of plenty.

\*Based on "Poor in the Land of Plenty" (Laura Sofen, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/poor-land-plenty>

#### Did you know...?

- Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet one out of every nine children lives in poverty. We tend to associate poverty with images of underweight and starving children in developing countries. But poverty is not confined to countries overseas. In some areas of Canada as many as one in four children lives in a family struggling to meet everyday needs like food, shelter and clothing.
- Some families have a place to live but find it difficult to pay the bills. Some people do not have jobs, or have lost their jobs. Many families have at least one parent who works full time, but because their jobs don't pay well, they struggle to pay for food, shelter and clothing. The high price of housing and rising food prices also makes it hard for families who are struggling.
- Poverty is sometimes hard to "see" in Canada. There are many people experiencing poverty who don't "look" poor because they work, or go to school and dress like everyone else.
- It's important to keep in mind that just as there are many differences among all Canadians, there is also diversity among Canadians who experience poverty. Each person has his or her own experiences and story to tell.

Sources:

*Living Below the Line* (World Vision Canada, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.worldvision.ca/GetInvolved/Responding-Churches/Documents/Living-Below-the-Line-2009.pdf>

*The Children Left Behind* (UNICEF, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.ca/portal/SmartDefault.aspx?at=2676#AcloserlookatCanadaschildren>

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## Myth Busters

### Handout 2



#### Bill's Story\*

Billy's stomach growled and he was glad for the noise on the school bus. Before leaving for work his mom had put out the last two slices of bread and an apple for his lunch. He ate the bread for breakfast not wanting to be teased by the other kids at lunch for having only plain bread. It was easier to say he'd forgotten his lunch. He saved the apple for recess.

Since his mom wasn't getting paid until next week, Billy knew they'd have to visit the food bank tonight. He was fearful someone from school would see him going into the building. Last week someone from class saw his friend Sue going into the food bank and told a bunch of kids at school that Sue's family is poor and lives on hand-outs. Sue was really embarrassed.

At school Billy decided to skip the free breakfast in the cafeteria. Last year the teachers noticed that too many students were coming to school hungry and started a breakfast program. Any student can get a free breakfast, even those who've eaten at home. After what happened to Sue, going to the breakfast program suddenly felt like going to the food bank. Billy's stomach growled as he headed down the hall.

\*Based on:

*Listen to the Children: Voices of Children Living in Poverty in the City of Edmonton* (Quality of Life Commission, 2000) Retrieved from <http://www.albertaqualityoflife.ca/listoch.pdf>

#### Did You Know...?

- According to a news report by the [BBC](#), many students in Wales (a developed country in the United Kingdom) would rather go hungry than get a free meal at school. It was reported that children living in poverty would rather forgo a free meal than risk being made fun of by their peers.
- All children need nutritious food in order to survive and live a healthy life. Rising food prices are making it even more difficult for many Canadian families to feed their children. In 2010 the number of Canadians using food banks reached its highest level on record.
- Only a small percentage of people using food banks are homeless (6%). About half of all people who go to food banks are families with children (51%), but a large percentage of food bank users are children and youth under the age of 18 (38%).
- Many people are nervous or embarrassed about using food banks. They don't want people to assume they are too lazy or unmotivated to find jobs to feed themselves. In reality many people who go to food banks have recently lost their jobs, or they are working but their jobs don't pay well enough for them to feed their families without assistance.

Sources:

"Pupils snub free school meals over poverty stigma" (BBC News, February 2, 2011) Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12340564>

*Sharing Our Stories: Food Banks Helping Canadians* (Food Banks Canada, 2009). Retrieved from [http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/Food%20Banks%20Canada\\_Sharing%20our%20Stories\\_2009-FINAL.pdf](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/Food%20Banks%20Canada_Sharing%20our%20Stories_2009-FINAL.pdf)

"Food Bank Use in Canada Hits Highest Level on Record" (CTV News, November 16, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20101116/food-bank-use-highest-yet-101116/20101116?hub=BritishColumbiaHome>

Hunger Counts (Food Banks Canada, 2010) Retrieved from [http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/HungerCount2010\\_web.pdf](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/documents/HungerCount2010_web.pdf)

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## Myth Busters

### Handout 3



#### Jena's Story\*

My mom works two jobs. During the day she goes to work in a store and some nights she works in a restaurant. Even with all the long hours she works, it's hard to make the food last from pay cheque to pay cheque.

My older sister looks after us when mom is working. She gets really nervous when she has to babysit us at night. She goes around and locks all the doors and windows. I know she tries to stay up until mom gets home because I find her asleep on the couch most mornings.

I love mornings best. Mom is always really tired, but she gets up to eat breakfast with us. It's the only time I get to see her during the week. On weekends when she doesn't work, we let her sleep in. Sometimes on her day off we'll borrow my uncle's car and drive to the beach or go visit my grandma. But most of the time, my mom works.

Sometimes I get angry that my mom works so much and never volunteers in my class like some of the other moms. But last month when I outgrew my old shoes and she had to work extra hours to buy me a new pair, I felt bad that she had to work so hard.

\*Based on:

*Listen to the Children: Voices of Children Living in Poverty in the City of Edmonton* (Quality of Life Commission, 2000) Retrieved from <http://www.albertaqualityoflife.ca/listoch.pdf>

#### Did You Know...?

- In Canada it is often assumed that the way to get out of poverty is to get a job. There is a misconception that all people who are experiencing poverty are lazy and if they would only get jobs they would get out of poverty.
- In reality, many Canadian children who live in poverty live in families with at least one parent who has a job. In some provinces almost half of all children who experience poverty have at least one parent who works full time all year.
- If people have jobs, why do they struggle to meet their basic needs? Even though Canada is considered one of the richest countries in the world, many jobs in Canada do not pay very well. This means that even those parents who work full time all year may not earn enough money to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing for their families.
- About 17% of people who are homeless have jobs, but they don't earn enough income to pay the high cost of shelter in Canada. Many people work long hours, sometimes at more than one job, and still struggle to feed, clothe and shelter their families because they earn low wages.

Sources:

*One Night Out* (Free the Children, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/youth/campaigns/onenightout/docs/One%20Night%20Out%20Fact%20Book.pdf>

2009 Child Poverty Report Card (Campaign 2000, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.campaign2000.ca/reportCards/national/2009EnglishC2000NationalReportCard.pdf>

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## Myth Busters

### Handout 4



#### Kate's Story\*

It was late when Kate finally settled down to do her homework. Her father had just returned from work and was helping her mother put her younger siblings to bed. It was their first night in yet another shelter – this time the basement of a church – and her younger brother and sister were nervous about sleeping in another unfamiliar place. Kate had spent the evening playing with them and helping them do their homework. Moving from shelter to shelter was hard on the entire family. Kate was hopeful that with her father's new job they'd soon have their own place again.

Sitting against the head of the bed, Kate quickly read the assigned chapter of the novel the class was studying. Then, glancing over the homework assignment, she realized she would need a dictionary. Today's assignment: a list of ten vocabulary words from the novel to define. Great – no dictionary and no Internet.

Hearing Kate's big sigh, her father sat down beside her and skimmed the homework assignment. Together they went over the list of vocabulary words and wrote as many of their own definitions as they could. Kate was already dreading what her teacher would say the next morning when she showed up in class with her incomplete homework.

Based on:

\*"Getting Educated about Homeless Students" (*Teaching Tolerance*, 2010) Retrieved from <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/getting-educated-about-homeless-students>

#### Did You Know...?

- Although poverty has a negative influence on how well children do in school, it's a misconception that children who are poor just don't try hard enough in school. Here's what one student had to say:

*It's hard to focus on school when you are worrying about survival — things like how to get home from school safely and how we're going to eat that night. . . . I had to start working when I was 10. My whole life focus was not on learning. It was staying alive. I had 2 or 3 jobs, from cutting grass to cleaning buildings. That was not saving for a bicycle but to help my parents pay for rent and food. The bills don't stop coming in because you're poor. They have to get paid. I couldn't sit back and complain. But having to get up the next morning to go to school was hard.\*\**

- Many factors influence how well children do in school. Not getting enough sleep or nutritious food lowers children's energy level. This makes it difficult for children to focus on school work. Some parents struggle to provide their children with resources like books, computers and materials for completing homework and projects.
- In Canada there are thousands of families who do not have a place to call home. They may live out of their cars, with friends, in temporary shelters or on the streets. Many are homeless because they've lost their jobs and need a place to stay while they search for work. Children who are homeless may not have a safe place to play or learn.

\*\**Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America* (Arloc, 1997). Retrieved from [http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/c56e308f49bfeb7885256abc0071ec9a/3C88A9C2530E5AE485256CC50068B95B/\\$file/povertyfactsheet6.pdf?openelement](http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/c56e308f49bfeb7885256abc0071ec9a/3C88A9C2530E5AE485256CC50068B95B/$file/povertyfactsheet6.pdf?openelement)

Sources:

*One Night Out* (Free the Children) Retrieved from <http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/youth/campaigns/onenightout/docs/One%20Night%20Out%20Fact%20Book.pdf>

*Living Below the Line* (World Vision Canada, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.worldvision.ca/GetInvolved/Responding-Churches/Documents/Living-Below-the-Line-2009.pdf>

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## Myth Busters

### Handout 5



#### Adam's Story\*

Normal used to mean having my own room and three meals a day. Normal was hanging out at my place with my friends after school. It meant getting new clothes for school and a hot lunch on Wednesdays. But that was before my mom lost her job.

For a while, normal meant sharing a bedroom – no door – with my entire family. But I was lucky because we didn't have to sleep out in the main room where too many people bunked together with no walls between them. And I was lucky because we were not sleeping in the rain and cold. Normal meant not having a choice in what I'd eat for dinner, if I was lucky enough to get dinner.

Now my mom has found a new job. Now, normal is living in our own place again and having indoor shoes for school that fit. Normal means that I'm serving others at the community kitchen rather than waiting in the line up to be served.

\*Based on:  
 "Resurrection" (Paul, 2002) in *City of Refuge: A Voice from the Streets*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.sanctuarytoronto.ca/city\\_of\\_refuge/SCnews0206.pdf](http://www.sanctuarytoronto.ca/city_of_refuge/SCnews0206.pdf)

#### Did You Know...?

- Homelessness is often associated with living on the streets, but it's also about not having a stable place to live. People who are homeless include those who live on the streets as well as those who live in friends' homes, cars, abandoned buildings or community shelters.
- There are many reasons why people become homeless. Some young people run away from bad home situations and become homeless. Some people lose their homes to floods, fires or hurricanes. Still others might lose their jobs and can no longer afford to pay for their own place to live. Every person who is homeless has their own story to tell, but they share one thing in common: they lack access to a safe and secure shelter.
- In Canada, most people who experience poverty are not homeless. Only a small percentage of people who are struggling to meet their basic needs are actually homeless. Even so, there are thousands of Canadian families with children who do not have a safe and secure home. Without a home people do not have a place to store their possessions, to cook and to prepare for school or work.
- There are homeless people who have jobs, but they don't earn enough money to pay for rent. Many people who are homeless spend their days looking for work. Not having a fixed address or phone number makes it hard to find a job. Without an address you can't receive mail, and without a phone prospective employers can't contact you.

Sources:  
*One Night Out* (Free the Children) Retrieved from  
<http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/youth/campaigns/onenightout/docs/One%20Night%20Out%20Fact%20Book.pdf>

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