

helping PEOPLE help THEMSELVES

break the cycle of poverty

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CCHD TAKES THE POVERTY PULSE OF THE UNITED STATES

"It's a feeling of being powerless by yourself; of living from day to day; of being treated without respect. It's working till you hurt and always coming up short."

"It's being forgotten, almost invisible to almost everybody. It's being looked down on, regardless of reason."

These are real words from people living in poverty in America. During January, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development promotes the observance of Poverty in America Awareness Month. This is a time to remind Americans that poverty still exists in our country and to educate everyone about ways we can permanently break the cycle of poverty.

In preparation for the 2003 observance of Poverty Awareness Month, CCHD conducted a national public opinion poll to track attitudes and awareness related to poverty in America. This year's "poverty pulse" revealed some important issues and concerns.

The general public substantially underestimates the problem of poverty in the United States. Half of the participants would not even venture a guess as to how many Americans lived in poverty. Of those who did, most guessed that poverty affects around 1 million people in the United States; two-thirds thought that not more than 5 million Americans are burdened by this problem. But the fact is that poverty in America is growing. The latest U.S. Census figures released in



Photo by Barbara Stephenson

JOURNALISTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY HEAR FIRSTHAND THE CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES. THE CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT LED THE GROUP ON A *BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY* TOUR THROUGH NEW MEXICO—THE POOREST STATE IN THE NATION. HERE THEY LISTEN TO A FAMILY WHOSE NINE MEMBERS LIVE IN ONE TRAILER IN THE VILLAGE OF MONTANA VISTA. COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUCCESSFULLY LOBBIED FOR THE INSTALLATION OF WATER LINES AND ARE NOW SEEKING ACCESS TO NATURAL GAS.

September 2002 show a total of 32.9 million Americans now live in poverty—1.3 million more than the number reported for the previous year.

Lack of knowledge about the actual dimensions of poverty is no surprise to poor people themselves. A 54-year-old man living in the state of Washington said, "You become invisible to government and business and get no representation. Most people treat you [as] less than human." A 70-year-old woman shared that being poor is "being unseen and unheard."

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend of CCHD:

By now many of our personal resolutions, made during the New Year holiday, may have fallen by the wayside. Our plans to improve our lives in one way or another often fade in the renewed rush of the year's activities.

What never fades is the gospel call and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's resolve to help poor and low-income people break the cycle of poverty that traps them and their communities. To begin the year, we released a survey of a cross-section of our country regarding their opinions about poverty in America. This issue highlights what our neighbors are thinking about poverty.

One thing we learned is that poverty is closely identified with homelessness by a large number of Americans, even though only about 6 million out of 33 million poor people in America are actually homeless. One person who knows a great deal about this reality is Angela Lariviere, whom CCHD honored with its 2002 New Leadership Award. I hope you enjoy reading her story.

I deeply appreciate your ongoing support of CCHD's work—through your parish collection and with contributions throughout the year. Be assured of my grateful prayers. May the Lord bless you for your solidarity with our low-income sisters and brothers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Rev. Robert J. Vitello
Executive Director

WHERE'S MY MONEY GOING?

All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD's anti-poverty mission. CCHD funds are divided as follows: 87% of CCHD funds are assigned to CCHD's core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, and education programs; 6% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal effort; 7% is assigned to administrative costs. We thank you for continuing to empower low-income people through your ongoing support for CCHD.

WHAT IS CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed more than \$260 million to more than 4,000 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective and so that CCHD's investment will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between the poor and non-poor.

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POVERTY PULSE *continued from page 1*

There is a “disconnect” in relation to levels of concern about poverty in the United States. When asked to identify the biggest problems facing U.S. society, only 3% identified poverty directly. Yet nearly one-quarter mentioned “the economy” among our most serious problems. When asked specifically if poverty was a problem in the United States, 89% of respondents said that they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned about poverty in America. And 40% said that they currently know someone living in poverty; more than a third reported that they once had lived in poverty, and half said that they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned that they might be poor at some point in life.

The perception about the amount of income actually needed to cover basic needs differs greatly from the official government-defined poverty level. Most people say that to cover basic needs, a family of four should have an income of \$35,000 per year. The federal government says that the same family is not officially poor unless its total household income is less than \$18,100. The fact is that families with a single wage-earner working full-time at minimum-wage do not even come close to the federal poverty threshold.

Low-income people described to us their inability cover basic needs. A Missouri woman spoke about “struggling to pay bills, constant disconnection notices, not having money to wash and purchase work clothing because bills and household needs have to come first.” Another woman from the same state described “living from check to check.” She insisted that “people don’t like the poor.”

People have a wide range of opinions about the cause of poverty in America. The largest number of respondents (19%) saw lack of education as the single most significant cause. Personal laziness, lack of initiative, or lack of motivation was identified as the principal cause of poverty by 16% of respondents. Lack of access to employment opportunities was cited as the most significant cause of poverty by 14% of survey participants; and 10% of those surveyed cited lack of work or access only to low-wage employment as a primary cause.

Those living in poverty are well aware of these diverse perceptions about why they are poor. A Missouri woman told us, “Society tends to believe that if people are poor it is their fault . . . poor children are not treated as well in school because the teachers seem to feel they are a waste of time anyway.” A 28-year-old New York man said, “Poor is a person that has a bad education

and for that he or she can’t create a successful business to . . . [provide for] their own incomes. When the people have the capacity to make their own money—without stealing it or asking for it—they are wealthy.” A 52-year-old Kansas woman living in a household of four with an income of less than \$8,860 described “feeling like you always owe everyone either an apology or an explanation or both.”

Americans recognize the need for both governmental and non-governmental action to solve poverty. Forty-three percent of Americans say that the government should fix poverty, and 41% say that poverty needs to be addressed by everyone in the country. When people living in poverty are asked about how best to put a permanent end to poverty in the United States, only 19% believe that it will be done with more government assistance, while 38% believe that more community-based self-help organizations, such as those supported by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, are needed for this purpose.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty in the United States and educating Americans about the causes of poverty and its effective solutions. Your support, in your parish collection and with contributions sent throughout the year, helps those struggling to break the cycle of poverty find permanent solutions for themselves and their communities.

To learn more about poverty in America, visit www.povertyusa.org. See how CCHD is working to break the cycle of poverty and build community at www.usccb.org/cchd.

INVEST IN PEOPLE HELPING THEMSELVES

You can donate your time, talent, and treasure to CCHD in many ways. Our annual parish collection is the Sunday before Thanksgiving in most parishes. You can support the work of CCHD with a cash or check donation. You can also support CCHD with a stock donation or a matching gift from your employer. Consider a lasting legacy to help people help themselves—remember CCHD in your estate planning.

For more information about CCHD, contact Mary Mencarini Campbell at 202-541-3365/mcampbell@usccb.org.

HOMELESS ADVOCATE HONORED

Angela Lariviere, 30, who as a child learned the hard realities of homelessness, has spent the past four years developing self-help and empowerment projects that directly benefit Ohio's 35,000 homeless children and their education. In recognition of her work, she was honored as the 2002 recipient of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, a national Catholic award presented annually to recognize young Catholics who have taken leadership roles in fighting poverty and injustice.

"I grew up in several homeless situations my entire life, moving 39 times, attending 13 different schools," said Lariviere, "and I thought I was isolated. When I came [to Ohio] as an AmeriCorps coordinator, I really had a hard time adapting to the idea that there are 35,000 kids going through the same exact experiences that I had, and it's 15 years later. Looking at kids who can't do their homework because they don't have paper and pencils, I realized that there had to be something we could do to meet those basic needs. We need to empower the kids so that they can advocate for their own needs before they lose hope." She founded the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP), which organizes the community of homeless children and trains them in ways to advocate for new laws and policies. YEP teaches children that they can effect change.

BRAKE THE CYCLE

This summer the Catholic Campaign for Human Development is sponsoring a bicycle trip across America—from San Francisco, Calif., to Washington, D.C.—to draw attention to poverty in the United States. A group of twenty core riders will cross thirteen states between June 1 and August 1, 2003. The team will stop in dioceses and parishes along the route and will provide educational programs about the urgent problem of poverty in the United States. Are they coming to your community? Want to be a core rider?



Would you like to participate in a solidarity ride? Can you support a low-income rider? Visit www.brakethecycle.com to learn more.

"These kids are normal kids," Lariviere said. "They want to go to school and live normal lives. They don't want to be singled out. But they continuously face communities that have misconceptions about homeless people. Most don't know that homeless families make up 40% of the overall homeless population. And the fastest growing segment of the homeless population is children under five."



Photo by Barbara Stephenson

Over the past two years, YEP has surveyed more than 700 homeless youth to identify the issues facing them and to design the YEP program. YEP worked with Ohio legislators to pass the first state law that protects the rights of a homeless child to an education. Lariviere shared, "Schools don't always understand that federal law says that you have to be admitted to school if you're homeless, and that the child has the right to remain in school, to stay in their school of origin, or in the school closest to their new location. The problem often arises when schools require proof of address, and other information that a lot of homeless families don't have. So, when a school denies access to a homeless student and the issue takes weeks to resolve, the child may not be able to catch up and will then have to repeat the grade. Two years ago, graduation was not accessible for many homeless students. Because of our work, it is now a reality for them and will be for thousands more like them."

YEP kids have been successful in gaining increased funding for education programs for homeless children; creating a statewide plan with Head Start to provide better services to homeless children; working with the Ohio Department of Development to change state shelter policies that discriminate against teenage boys; gaining seats for youth representatives on several homeless and housing coalitions; and creating a partnership within the United Nations so that YEP can provide input to policies affecting homeless youth internationally. The outlook for homeless children, at least in Ohio, is getting better.