

Myths and Facts about Poverty in Maine

If people had economic human rights, the right to a job, food, permanent housing, healthcare, education etc. we could end poverty in this country, it could help our society value the work of every person. The next ten myths are commonly held:

1. Lose your job

Myth: Most people are only unemployed for a short period and can usually get another job when they need one.

Fact: The current unemployment rate in Maine is 8.6% but does not include thousands who have been out of work for months or years and given up. For those without a high school diploma, the rate is about 60% higher.

2. Become Homeless

Myth: there are plenty of shelter vouchers for someone who needs a place to live.

Fact: Maine has 975 shelter beds, but last year over 7,000 people were homeless for some part of the year. In Portland, women and men are sleeping in chairs and in closets, because the city's policy is not to deny a "bed" to anyone. In other cities, people sleep under bridges and wherever they can because shelter space is inadequate and people are turned away.

3. Get a living wage job

Myth: Anyone making more than the poverty level can get by in Maine.

Fact: Even people making twice the poverty level can't get by. Living wage jobs average \$16.94/hour (for one adult and one child, Maine Center for Economic Policy figure), more than twice what the minimum wage is. Poverty won't end until every person earns a living wage or its equivalent in benefits.

4. No Health Insurance

Myth: Our health insurance system works for almost everyone.

Fact: About 46 million people in the U.S have no health insurance whatsoever, and another 25 million more are underinsured, paying high premiums for inadequate or just catastrophic coverage. People with no insurance delay or ignore problems until they wind up in the emergency room, causing a big drain on state finances and worsening their own health.

5. Spinning your wheels

Myth: Anyone can make it in the U.S. if they just work hard enough. If you fail, you're lazy and it's your own fault.

Fact: If you're born poor or working class, it's hard to get out. You get constant messages telling you that you're not as smart, skilled, etc., even though it's really the system that's at fault. Most poor/working class people resign themselves to their economic fate, and, countrywide, the percentage of those moving from one class to another is very small.

6. Car breaks down

Myth: There is public transportation so anyone can get around in Maine.

Fact: Some of Maine's largest cities have affordable convenient buses. However, most other parts of Maine only offer "on-demand" vans or regional transportation services. These are available for medical appointments only. You can't keep a job if you can't get to it.

7. Cancer, medical trauma

Myth: we have a great health care system.

Fact: Unless you have a gold standard health care policy, there can be long waits, lack of choice, high co-pays, and limitations in care.

Inability to pay medical bills is the largest cause of bankruptcies.

8. Bad toothache

Myth: Dental care is available to anyone in Maine

Fact: Low cost dental care is almost non-existent in Maine.

There are only a few clinics that take anyone, whether or not they can pay. Some are just for kids, some just for Maine Care recipients, some have long waiting lines. Bad teeth is almost an epidemic among low income Mainers. If a tooth gets infected, it becomes a medical problem and taxpayers have to spend thousands instead of \$100 or less for prevention.

9. Lose Childcare

Myth: Any parent who needs childcare can find it in Maine.

Fact: There are almost 2400 childcare facilities in Maine for many parents, vouchers for low-income parents are few and far between. In Mid coast Maine the waiting list is 1-2 years. Few facilities are accessible to parents working second or late shifts.

10. Get Job Training

Myth: At least community colleges are affordable to anyone in Maine.

Fact: The current yearly cost for a degree program at a Maine community college is about \$5000 plus equipment, not including housing, food, health etc.

The above information kindly provided by No Class of Maine.

Homeless families get no rest

By Pat LaMarche

I met two new homeless people the other day. That isn't very surprising considering homelessness is my bag. Ever since I was a little girl my mom taught us that fighting hunger and homelessness was our job as sentient beings.

For eight years, back when I had a little more self control, I would fast one day a week and give the money I might have spent on food to some hunger fighting charity or homeless shelter. I figured trying to fall asleep hungry one night a week was the least I could do to better understand a world where so many die for want of meager necessities. Food, shelter, medicine, clean water — you name it — there are thousands of people who will die today for no other reason than not enough of us care or act on our caring.

I'm no different from you except for the fact that because of my preoccupation with poverty issues, I pretty much know when I meet homeless people. You probably met several yourself this week and just didn't know that they were homeless. Heck, you might even work with some.

According to a U.S. Conference of Mayors 2007 report of homeless families with children, 17.4 percent had an employed head of household. So chances are that the mom who just waited on you in the breakfast diner has no home, and her children have no home to wait for her in while she works.

That's an impressive statistic, but it's even more daunting when you personally know someone living with that burden. Last week, I was eating breakfast with a friend who runs a homeless shelter and our waitress was one of her clients. The waitress acted like she didn't know either of us. We figured that she didn't want my friend tipping me off to her condition. We played along, but I already knew her story because I had been there when she came for help. And what a story it is. She has four boys. The oldest boy is about 11. The two youngest are twins. One of the twins has leukemia.

Take a waitress, some little kids, a catastrophic healthcare issue, no paid leave and add them all together and you get a homeless family.

If this woman's sad state of affairs is keeping the rest of the country up at night, it doesn't really show. Every member of Congress, in addition to having travel and meal allowances as well as health and disability benefits should be required to live her life for a month — we can call it "job training." With our economy creating new homeless people every day, maybe our representatives should learn to represent us.

But she's not who I'm talking about; I already knew her and I said I met two new homeless people.

The new ones weren't veterans either, although the odds would be pretty good that they might have been. After all, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans puts the number of veterans on the street at 195,827. Considering the Department of Veterans Affairs only funds 7,700 beds for them it's quite likely that I met two of the 188,127 others. But no, they weren't veterans.

See, they were too young to be veterans — not surprisingly because the National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that families make up one third of our country's homeless population — so the odds were pretty good that they're homeless kids.

But they weren't just any homeless kids. No, they're homeless newborn twins. I got to meet them about two and a half hours after their birth.

The kids are healthy: a little over four pounds each and able to breathe on their own. Their mom doesn't use drugs or get drunk. She's tried to take good care of herself and her 20-month old son but she lost her job in February and the kids' dad died unexpectedly in March. Bad luck all around you might say. And anyway, she's not the typical homeless person. But that's my point: there isn't one.

When the doctor came in the room and told her she could take the babies home all I could think was, "Too bad she doesn't have one." Pat LaMarche of Yarmouth is the author of "Left Out In America: The State of Homelessness in the United States." She may be reached at PatLaMarche@hotmail.com.

Would you like to help h.o.m.e. continue our 39-year-long work with the rural poor?

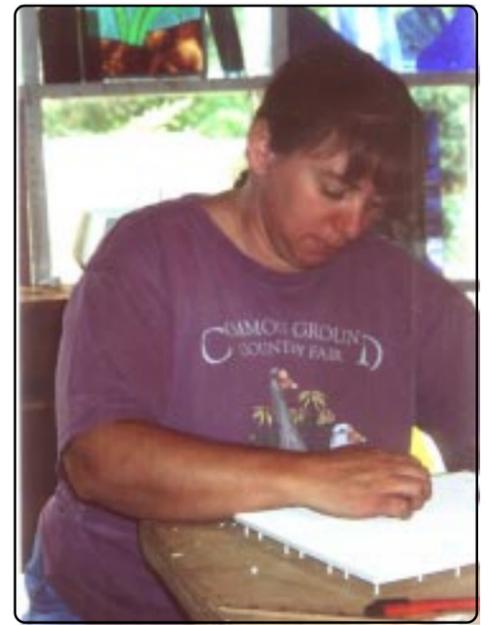
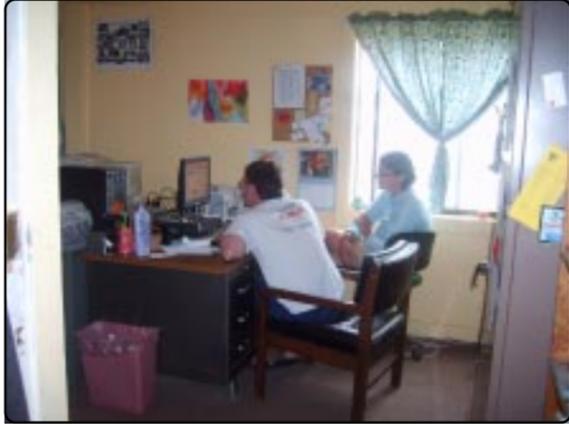
Join our Mailing List!

Please mail information to H.O.M.E. Inc,
P.O. Box 10, Orland, Maine 04472

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____

H.O.M.E. is part of the International Emmaus Movement
"Serve First Those Who Suffer Most"





Reflections

Untitled

Greg - Volunteer - St Bridget's CT

We arrive as a group
 a collection of ideas
 like seeds in a pot
 We leave - after
 food, conversation
 and the sharing of ideas
 and midnight concertos
 borne from our exhaustion.
 We leave - in a flurry
 driven by new winds,
 having left some new thing planted.

*Why don't Buddhists vacuum in the corners?
 Because they have no attachments*

**Somebody
 anonymous**

Somebody did a golden deed,
 Somebody proved a friend in
 need.
 Somebody said I'm glad to give,
 Somebody said that's how I live.
 To be of service to your fellow
 man
 Is great comfort to those who can.
 Making the load somewhat lighter
 And the outlook somewhat
 brighter.
 To all our volunteers we wish to
 say,
 Enjoy good health and happiness
 every day.

When the sun rises, I go to work.
 When the sun goes down I take my rest,
 I dig the well from which I drink,
 I farm the soil which yields my food,
 I share creation, Kings can do no more.
 - Chinese Proverb, 2500 B.C.

“ Because Jesus is the Redeemer, no one
 can any longer save by killing or kill to
 save. Life alone, life given, not life
 extracted from others, can save a persons
 life.
 - French Reformed Pastor,
 Andre Trocme



H.O.M.E.

By Twila Greene

H.O.M.E. is where the heart is.
 At least that's what they say
 But home is so much more than that
 We live it day by day
 A hustle and a bustle
 there's always something on.
 From day to day from hour to hour
 from twilight until dawn.
 We feed the hungry cloth the poor
 The homeless and the ill
 There's always action here at H.O.M.E.
 According to God's will.
 We struggle on and do our best
 But things are often tough
 The harvest ripe the workers few
 The cash - never enough.
 With times so hard and so much grief.
 We try to carry through
 But often we are so straight out
 There's always more to do.
 So right along with heart and head
 We use our hands and pray
 That we can help to make the world
a better place to stay.

A Zen student walks up to a hot dog
 vendor and says,
 “ Make me one with everything.”



Photo by Joseph Staples

How to Build a Community

Turn off your TV.
 Leave your house, know your neighbors,
 greet people, look up when you are
 walking, sit on your stoop, plant flowers,
 use your library, play together, buy form
 local merchants, share what you have,
 help a lost dog, take children to a park,
 honor elders, support neighborhood
 schools, fix it even if you didn't break it,
 have pot lucks, garden together, pick up
 litter, read stories aloud, dance in the
 street, talk to the mail carrier, listen to
 the birds, put up a swing, help carry
 something heavy, barter for your goods,
 start a tradition, ask a question, hire
 young people for odd jobs, organize a
 block party, bake extra and share, ask for
 help when you need it, open your shades,
 sing together, share your skills, take back
 the night, turn up the music, turn down
 the music, listen before you react to
 anger, mediate a conflict, seek to
 understand, learn from new and
 uncomfortable angles, know that no one
 is silent though many are not heard -
 work to change this.

**Chinese worker's poem captures factory
 life**

The Factory Girl
 From the damp, dirty hallway,
 From the long lines of the cafeteria,
 From the rumble of the machines and
 the unbearable factory noise,
 The daylight drifts by, the starlight drifts
 by.
 Forever crying on the production line,
 The factory girls endure exhaustion and
 hardship.
 Every peaceful, lonely night,
 The factory girl is bursting with longing
 for her village
 And she can hear the sweet call of the
 mountain goat.
 She dreams about the soft, warm bend
 of her mother's arm,
 And she can smell the sweetness of the
 old, secluded garden.
 -Nanfei

Start by doing what's necessary; then do
 what's possible;
 and suddenly you are doing the
 impossible.
 - St Francis of Assisi