



summer 2009

Finding Solutions Newsletter

VOLUME 14 Number 2



DATA ABOUT RISING POVERTY EXPECTED IN SEPTEMBER: RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO TEACH ABOUT RECESSIONS' TOLL IN STATES AND COMMUNITIES...

By Deborah Weinstein

This September, we will learn more about how many people are poor in the United States. The news is not likely to be good. The surveys to be released by the U.S. Census Bureau will cover 2008, the year in which the recession started.

Even when times were supposed to be good, poverty rose (from 11.3 percent to 12.5 percent, an increase of nearly 5.7 million people from 2000 to 2007). With joblessness climbing steadily throughout 2008, most analysts expect a steeper rise in poverty than we have seen in some time.

Annual surveys published by the Census Bureau can help students learn a great deal about the extent of poverty in their community and state, and how that compares to the nation as a whole. They can learn how many children or old people are poor, how poverty differs by race or immigrant status, or by city or suburb. Teachers wanting to use this data can get help from the Coalition on Human Needs (www.chn.org), which provides training through a free webinar and timely emailed analyses when the data is published.

Teachers using the Census surveys to increase their students' understanding of poverty will recognize what the data leaves out: a real sense of the hardships poor families face. Other information about how much it costs to provide basic necessities like food and housing can help students grasp more concretely what it would be like to live in a family in which the refrigerator is sometimes empty and sometimes there isn't enough heat in the winter months. Knowing how many are poor is very important, but only when that knowledge is accompanied by an understanding of the costs poverty imposes on the families and communities in its grip.

National, State, and Local Data. This year, the Census Bureau will release its data in two parts. On September 10, it will publish national poverty, income, and health insurance data for 2008. On September 22, it will release details by state, and down to localities with populations of 65,000 or more. In both releases, comparisons to previous years will be available

About this issue...

Deborah Weinstein leads off this issue (pg1) explaining what statistics about hunger and poverty really mean. Her article is one to save and refer to time and time again. We are happy to report that this article is only the first, as Debbie has agreed to continue to educate us.

It has been a long time since we attended a hunger banquet. We were thrilled to have Kate Sim (Pg4) share her experiences about conducting a hunger banquet at her school. Another thing that makes this article so engrossing is learning about Sim and the effect the event had on her. While the class was learning, so was she.

Meghan Hunt (Pg5) reviews "Beyond the Fence: A Journey to the Roots of the Migration Crisis" written by Dori Stone of Food First. According to Hunt, the book "is an excellent teaching tool for the globally aware classroom." It comes with a DVD and workbook.

Craig Weisner (Pg6) co-founder of Reach and Teach returns to our pages describing an experience with an audience he felt would not be receptive to his message. He learned never to pre-judge who you are speaking with.

The final article (Pg7) brings you up to date on how Jane and I are spending this summer. "A New Teacher Guide and Other Goodies" contains very important information regarding the new Teacher Guide and website. This all is being done as KIDS is preparing to move to New York City. Please note our new contact information on the bottom of page 2. This move will take place on October 1st.

Enjoy.

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for most topics. The data released on September 22 comes from a large sample, and so provides a wealth of state and local information, such as years of schooling and how that relates to poverty levels, the proportion of a poor or near-poor family's income that goes for rent, or the number of people with disabilities. Students will be able to see, if current longstanding patterns hold, that children are very disproportionately poor, with the greatest poverty among the youngest children.

Each year, the Census Bureau establishes poverty thresholds by family size. For 2008, a family of four is considered poor if its income is less than \$22,017; for a family of three, an income below \$17,165 is defined as poor. The data show more than just the number or proportion of people below those levels. They also show how many are extremely poor (living below half the poverty threshold), and how much below the threshold average poor families live. For example, in 2007 (when the poverty threshold for a family of four was \$21,203), poor families actually lived with incomes averaging \$8,523 *less* than the threshold. For poor families headed by a single mother, income averaged fully \$9,059 less than the poverty line.

How does that compare with what it takes to make ends meet? The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides estimates of the cost of food. For June 2009, their estimate of the cost of the cheapest food budget for a family with mother, father, and two children (aged 6-8 years and 9-11 years) is just over \$7,000 a year. (Find these estimates at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCost-Home.htm>.) Fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is defined for states and localities by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; the National Low Income Housing Coalition has compiled these figures (at <http://www.nlihc.org/oor/oor2009/oor2009pub.pdf>). For 2009, the national average fair market rent was \$928 per month, or \$11,136 a year. Just those two items alone add up to \$18,136. In 2007, a family living at the average depth of poverty would have an income of only \$12,680 – not enough to cover the cost of a cheap food budget and fair market rent, without even taking into consideration the cost of heat, transportation, electricity, phone, clothing, or child care. What does such a family do? Well, they live in a far cheaper apart-

ment, or perhaps double up with another family. They spend less on food than is considered healthy, maybe supplementing their diet with items from community food pantries or by borrowing from friends or relatives. They go without.

What it Means to be Poor. Families who cannot always afford nutritious food are called “food insecure.” Researchers looking at health and developmental outcomes for infants and toddlers in food insecure households have found that they are more likely to be sick or hospitalized and more likely to suffer developmental problems. (See findings from the research project Children’s HealthWatch, at http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/upload/resource/LowLevelFoodInsecurityBrief5_09.pdf.) Poor children living in inadequate housing (cold, subject to mold, etc.) are more likely to experience chronic health problems such as asthma. These problems combine to make it more likely that some poor children will be less able to concentrate in school and are out sick more; they will be more likely to fall behind and eventually drop out. While of course many poor children overcome all these barriers, having so much to overcome means that a greater proportion of poor children will do badly in school than children who lead more privileged lives. Poverty in childhood can have lifelong consequences.

Helping Students to See the Extent of Poverty. When the national data comes out on September 10, teachers can help their students find out whether poverty has grown from 2007 to 2008 and over longer periods. They can learn about the differences in poverty rates for two-parent families and single-parent families, and about poverty rates for children. They can see much higher poverty rates among African Americans and Hispanics as compared to whites. They can see whether the poor are more deeply poor, and whether the number or proportion of children living below half the poverty line has risen or declined over the past year. To get a preview of the kind of data that will be released on September 10, take a look at last year’s report: ***Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007*** (at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p60-235.pdf>). On the 22nd, the release of state and local American Community Survey data will provide information about poverty, income, and related topics for states, counties, and cities or towns with populations over 65,000. If students live in an affluent

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KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE[®] FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER

A PROGRAM OF WHY

Published by:

Jane Finn Levine, Ed.D. and Larry Levine

140 East 72nd Street, #14B

New York, NY 10021

(212) 861-0911, FAX (212)-452-1587,

email: kids@kidscanmakeadifference.org,

<http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org>

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community, they can see how different incomes and poverty levels are where they live as compared to poorer communities near them. Students can learn to search for profiles of their community or others online. They can find the places in their state or nationwide with the highest or lowest poverty levels. They can see whether the poor in some communities or states have greater access to programs like food stamps or income assistance programs than in other communities. Although the survey data does not explain why these differences occur, it should cause students to question why some areas are less likely to provide help to the poor.

To give examples of the kind of information that will be available on September 22, students can go to www.census.gov and create tables that compare all the places in Connecticut (or any other state) for such characteristics as poverty rate or level of education. Using the 2007 data available now, they will find that in the town of South Windsor, CT, only 1.5 percent of people were poor, but that in the city of Hartford, 31.5 percent of the people were poor. They will learn that 28 percent of the people in the city of Bridgeport had less than a high school education, but that in Ridgefield, only 2.2 percent had so little education. To give a sense of the pressures on many Connecticut families, they can see nearly half of tenants pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent (nearly 47 percent in 2007 statewide, but only 27 percent pay such a big proportion in Newington, while more than 55 percent pay more than 30 percent in New Haven).

Training for Teachers. Teachers who want training about how to get at the Census data can sign up for the Coalition on Human Needs webinar, tentatively set for sometime in September. For more information, email Deborah Weinstein at dweinstein@chn.org or sign up to receive emails from the Coalition on Human Needs (at <http://www.chn.org/>

[signUp.jsp](#)), so you will be notified about this and future online training sessions. The webinar will be posted on the Coalition's website (www.chn.org) for those who cannot participate in the live presentation.

Poverty is Not Inevitable. If poverty rises when unemployment rises, steps to increase the number of jobs available to low-income people should reduce poverty. If many families are paying very high proportions of their income on rent or food, they can be helped with rent vouchers or nutrition assistance. Students should come away from a look at poverty in their state sobered by its extent and its impact on children. But they should also be helped to see that government and private sector actions can reduce poverty and hardship. In making comparisons between affluent and poor communities, students should get the sense that our nation can afford to lift families out of poverty. While there are many policies that work to reduce poverty, a first step that students can discuss is whether there should be a national commitment to cut poverty in half in ten years. Such a commitment would require policymakers to assess the effectiveness of jobs, nutrition, housing, income assistance, and other initiatives, and to improve upon those measures in order to meet the goal. President Obama voiced support for this kind of commitment during the election campaign, and has also committed to ending childhood hunger by 2015. Students who are interested in learning more about setting the nation on a path towards substantial poverty reduction can go to the website of the Half in Ten Campaign (www.halfinten.org). Learning about poverty is important. But kids wanting to make a difference will know that what they learn should impel them to act. At any age, concerned individuals can educate others about urgent needs, can communicate with public officials, and volunteer to ease hardship.

Deborah Weinstein is Executive Director of Coalition on Human Needs. She may be contacted at dweinstein@chn.org

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THE DAY KATE STARVED ALL OF US...

By Kate Sim

They were upset –no, they were furious. Most students had walked in, thinking that it would be the usual formal dinner, a weekly event at the Webb Schools where all boarders dine together formally. But it was October 16th, the World Food Day, and what awaited the hungry students was not the typical meal. Amidst the confusion, I went to the podium and greeted everyone, “Welcome to our very first hunger banquet.”

This was the very first Global Citizen Corps (GCC) event in my school. A teacher had nominated me to become a



GCC leader a year before. The website described GCC as an initiative of Mercy Corps that is composed of youth determined to fight global poverty. What stood out to me the most was a slogan: “action

+ awareness = impact.” I had been in a search for an organization like this. I was hearing about poverty and its victims from news and school, and I wanted to do something about it. GCC seemed to be perfect for the job. When I became a GCC leader, I also applied for a Leadership Summit, a week-long program in New York City where I would interact with staffs and other leaders and learn about various aspects of global poverty. I wanted an in-depth understanding of what exactly poverty was. During the Summit, I found myself in a state of constant awe. I was ashamed at how little I knew and mesmerized that there were fifty other young people who cared. There, I learned that poor distribution of food caused hunger, that lack of education caused AIDS pandemic and elongation of poverty, but I also returned with a conviction that I had the power to create impact.

And that impact, I believed, would come from exposure. Through the Summit, I developed my own philosophy. It was one thing to know about poverty and it was another thing to experience it. So, on World Food Day, it only made sense to experience hunger. Not everyone, though, agreed with me and from the podium, I could feel the tension.

The entire dining hall was divided in half to represent maldistribution of food. When students entered the class, they received two cards: a blue card for “high-class” and a red

card for “lower-class.” The “high-class” group would receive typical, American middle-class dinner (i.e. grilled chicken, vegetables, bread, dessert) delivered by student waiters. The “lower-class” group would wait in line for a less extravagant meal that included a cup of powdered milk, a biscuit, cornmeal, and beans. Once the students found out, the room was soon juxtaposed with relief and rage. Some students who received red cards began sneaking “better” food while those with blue cards volunteered to try “poorer” meal. During the dinner, I could feel sharp glares drilling my back with resentment and inimicality. With difficulty, I shielded my back with nonchalance for I knew that the hostile response was the “impact” Global Citizen Corps had created. Hunger banquet was an “action” and the students’ experience from it would be an “awareness.” Whether they decide to cherish the experience or not, it would become a memorable event, fraught with a mélange of feelings: adversity, perplexity, sympathy. It was up to the individuals to evaluate their experiences and develop their own perceptions –and that would be the “impact” GCC would create.

The school year has ended but people are still talking about “the day Kate starved all of us.” Some ameliorated the time of tension with humor, but the majority reminisces with appreciation –even the ones who had stabbed my back with lethal glares. It’s moments like these that remind me that one doesn’t have to be Gandhi to “be the change.” Global Citizen Corps and I made a change in the minds of fellow students, and among those, some will deliver the change to others, and on and on. With enough action and awareness, these people will continue to create impact, and one day, as GCC envisions, no child will sleep hungry.

Every 3.6 seconds a person dies of hunger
75% of them are children

Kate Sim is a second-year Global Citizen Corps leader. She may be contacted at jskatesim@yahoo.com. For more information about Global Citizen Corps, please visit www.globalcitizencorps.org



BEYOND THE FENCE: TEACHING THE COMPLEX ISSUES OF US-MEXICO MIGRATION...

By Meghan Hunt

BOOK REVIEW

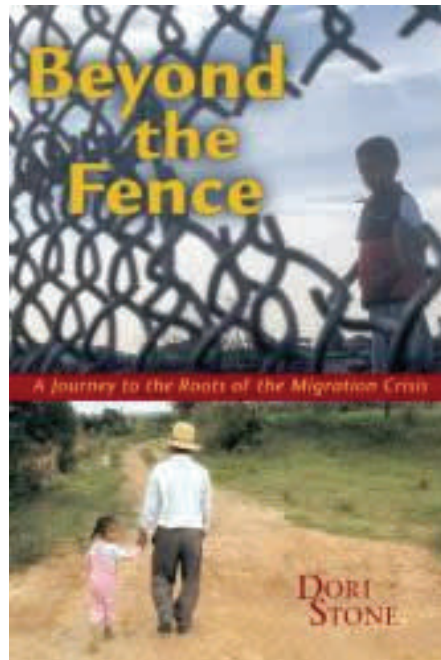
“We begin our trip at the US-Mexican border, a busy corridor between countries, a region where thousands of migrants have come to labor in fields and factories on both sides of the fence...” *Beyond the Fence*, written by Food First’s Dori Stone, takes us on a journey that descends from the US into the agricultural centers of Mexico, a trans-border effort to identify the root causes of hunger and migration in the region.

Of particular interest to students is how the book takes us “beyond” the workers themselves to the effect that global migration has on families and communities on both sides of the border. “I came to the US because buyers lowered the price of cotton—we could no longer recoup our costs,” says Francisco Javier García, a migrant farm worker interviewed in the book. “But the price here is to be far from my family, from my wife.” Farming communities all across Mexico are witnessing this phenomenon as they send nearly their entire male population to work in the United States. This not only breaks up families but also puts a higher burden on the remaining relatives who must care for the young and the farm work at home. Edelmira Noya Nájera, a community leader in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, describes how her mother always was the one who took her to school, to birthday parties—to everything in the community—because her dad was frequently away in the US. “When the father returns, that child has already detached from him,” she says, pointing to the social costs of this system.

Even the families who go together to the cities or the US face problems. In El Paso, we learn that 300,000 of the city’s 700,000 residents are living below the poverty level, most of

whom are Mexican women and children. Primo Sánchez, a corn grower in Tlaxcala, Mexico, says he turned down opportunities to go to the United States because he worried his children would lose their identity or feel ashamed of their agricultural background or native tongue.

Rather than leave his family or have them migrate with him, Sánchez and other farmers across Mexico work to make farming a viable livelihood in their own communities. Over the last thirty years, thousands of families working in the Campesino a Campesino movement have rebuilt their soil, increased food production, and created for themselves a more secure livelihood. Farmer cooperatives like Cooperativa Campesina in Oaxaca organize their ranches to collectively sell their produce and determine fairer prices. Their actions not only help them make a better living but help them keep their families together.



Told with personal interviews and pictures accompanied by fact boxes that explain the issues behind the stories, *Beyond the Fence: A Journey to the Roots of the Migration Crisis* is an excellent teaching tool for the globally aware classroom. To help teachers navigate this complex subject, Food First also offers a companion twenty-minute documentary

entitled *Caminos—The Immigrant’s Trail*. The DVD comes complete with a detailed study guide on the subject, including information on the history of US-Mexico migration, a breakdown of various bilateral agreements, alternatives to migration, pre- and post-viewing questions for classroom discussion, and much more.

Meghan Hunt is a student of International Development Studies at UC Berkeley.

The book is available for \$16.95 on the Food First website (<http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2386>) and the DVD/study guide is available for \$20, also on the website (<http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2248>).



JUST WHEN YOU FEEL THAT BEING THERE DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE...

By Craig Wiesner

Any time we pack our Prius full of Reach And Teach products we wonder what kind of reception we'll get when we arrive. We do about a dozen conferences and festivals a year, one of our favorites being the Home Schooling Conference in Northern California.

About four years ago we got a call from the organizer of that event inviting us to have a booth and to present. "Home Schooling?" I asked incredulously. "Have you really looked at our web site?" We're a peace and social justice learning company, somewhat left of center, and sadly, my own prejudice was kicking in when I heard the phrase "home schooling."

"Yes," she said "you'd be perfect for our parents and kids."

She was right. This group of hundreds of home schoolers was also somewhat left of center politically and spiritually and our presence was very well received.

When we arrived at the 2008 conference for our latest visit we expected things to be pretty tough though, given the economic meltdown. For the first three hours our booth was open, things were dismal. I was beginning to question whether we'd sell a single item, as if that was the only thing that mattered.

Then, a woman came up to our booth and said "You've got to watch this DVD." It was her done by her daughter, who had attended a workshop we had given the year before. "You got her so fired up last year that she wrote a play about peacemaking."

The presentation the previous year was about using literature

to spark children's passion for peacemaking and social justice, and how to put together a service learning opportunity that not only makes a real impact on an issue but also helps improve learning in multiple subjects. Resources we promote during workshops on that subject included the *Complete Guide to Service Learning*, a *Kids Guide to Social Action*, the *Doggy Dung Disaster and Other True Stories*, the *Carpet Boy's Gift, It Takes a Kid*, and of course *Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference*.

We popped the DVD the mom had given us into a little portable player and watched. It was incredible! Her teen daughter had not only written a fully-scored and choreographed musical, but she had gotten a bunch of kids together and they had performed the play in local schools.

As we were watching the DVD, another mom came by. Her youngster had gone home after the previous year's conference and had launched a campaign to get recycling bins installed at the local train station. Persistence and petitions worked and Amtrak put the bins in within a few months. Mom was so impressed that she started working on community organizing projects. "We can't wait for this year's presentation! What have you got that's new for us?" Mom asked.

So, whether we sold anything or not didn't matter any more, and of course when you let go of something that shouldn't matter much, life takes care of itself. We had a great weekend and our Prius was much lighter on the way home.

Craig Wiesner is co-founder of Reach And Teach, the peace and social justice learning company. He may be reached at craig@reachandteach.com.



KIDS IS ON THE MOVE!

**See the bottom of Page 2 for contact information
Effective October 1, 2009**



A NEW TEACHER GUIDE AND OTHER GOODIES...

By Larry Levine

For most of us, summertime is happy time. You have time to relax and spend time with your family and friends. Perhaps even throw something tasty on the grill, slip on comfortable shoes, put your feet up, and sip a cool iced tea while reading a favorite book.

At KIDS, we tried to do those things but life kept happening. We decided that this summer there were a few things that we needed to get done, and hopefully by the time you read this newsletter we will be well on the road to completing the tasks.

Our wish list for KIDS included the following:

- **Summer Newsletter-** We ran into some unexpected roadblocks and for awhile it appeared that there would be no summer newsletter this year. Not one... not two... but three articles that were promised did not materialize. I guess the authors spent too much time sitting in the backyard on a comfortable chair sipping a libation instead of being in a lonely writer's garret hunched over the keyboard.
- **Teacher Guide-** By the time you read this newsletter, the new edition of *Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference* should be in the hands of the printer. Here again, we discovered that the world had changed dramatically since we published the last edition in 2005. This new edition will be the **last printed edition** of the guide. It will incorporate all new statistics and resources, plus revisions of some lesson plans to reflect changes that have taken place. From hereon in, all changes to statistics and resources will be made on-line and new lessons and revised lesson plans will also be posted on the website. This will simplify your life, as well as be cost effective. The reason for this change is that the lesson plans have remained basically the same since the guide was first published, but statistics and resources change constantly. **We expect the new guide to be available late August or early September, so please check our website for further information.** Oh yes, one other bell and whistle has been added. The Guide will be available on our site in a one-time download for those of you who prefer having it stored on your PC or MAC. This version will be priced below the printed version allowing you to save money. Not bad in this economy.
- **Website-** At about the same time as the Guide is ready for distribution, our newly designed website will be unveiled. We think you will find the site more inviting and very easy to navigate. Please let us know what you think. Many new features have been added including:
 - Video showing the program in action.
 - Class room initiatives-an easy cross-reference tool for you to use to see what others have done in their classrooms.
 - Updated hunger facts
 - Updated hunger quiz
 - And many other features.

If you have time this summer, I would suggest reading (or re-reading) John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath." If you don't have time, then rent the DVD made in 1940 starring Henry Fonda. Pay particular attention to the scene where Tom Joad returns from jail and meets Preacher. They in turn go to the deserted Joad farm and run into Mulley, who tells them what has happened. It is the most gripping and heart wrenching scene. Now fast forward to 2009, and relate that period of time to present day. To heighten your experience, you might listen to The Weavers sing "The Banks Are Made of Marble" and finish up with Bruce Springsteen's, The Ghost of Tom Joad.

That's my idea of how to spend a beautiful summer afternoon.

Go in Peace, and let's all make a difference!

KIDS TEACHER GUIDE AVAILABLE

Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference by Stephanie Kempf.

Uplifting, engaging, interactive and challenging lessons for middle and high school students on the root causes of and solutions to domestic and international hunger. Examines colonialism, contemporary development projects, the media, famine vs. chronic hunger, the working poor and more, as well as valuable ideas for how kids can make a difference in their community, and in the world around them.

Price... Check website for price. Includes free one year subscription to the KIDS Newsletter!

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University*



A Program of World Hunger Year

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The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.