

# Eye-opening experience

Crisis Control Ministry offers Poverty Simulation at Caleb's Creek Elementary School

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Lifestyles Editor

On Wednesday, Crisis Control Ministry (CCM) visited with teachers and staff at Caleb's Creek Elementary School (CCES) to offer a Poverty Simulation to give teachers an insight into what life is like for families living in pov-

erty.

Bill Blackburn, director of training for CCM's Personal Development Program, said they have put on 55 of these events in Forsyth County since 2013. He said while they mainly offer them to churches and schools, they

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have done a few for businesses and the Clemmons YMCA.

According to CCM's Poverty Simulation brochure, the two-hour event is designed to help participants understand what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family trying to survive from month to month. The objective is to sensitize participants to the realities faced by low-income people.

"We have five more scheduled for this year," Blackburn said, noting that they use CCM and community volunteers to help with the event.

Blackburn explained that the two-hour event is broken up into four weeks and each session is 15 minutes, Monday through Friday.

"It's a fast-paced simulation," he said. "The volunteers sit at resource tables around the room."

Blackburn mentioned that resources include things like employers, social services agency, doc-

tors' offices, school, quick cash worker, banker/loan collector, supercenter clerk, mortgage/rent collector, pawnbroker, police office and others. While the resources are placed around the room, the family groups are placed in the middle of the room, where the individuals in each family are assigned a role and scenario that a typical family might have, such as a family member that may be disabled or one that cannot speak English. Within these roles, families must attempt to provide basic necessities and shelter during their 15-minutes, during which time they experience the many challenges that struggling families living pay check to pay check face.

"During the first and second week, it's usually pretty quiet, but by the third and fourth week, people get frustrated. They start getting angry and start stealing," Blackburn shared. "When we do a debrief at the end of the four (simulated) weeks, people really start to show their emotions."

Several of the simulation families shared what it



The "Xanthos" family

was like to take part in the simulation. The Yarrow and Xanthos families were given the same family dynamic and scenario.

The "Yarrow family" included Yuri, 52, (Vickie Ladd), Yolanda, 9, (Deeann Kidd), Yohan, 7, (Brian Rudel), and Yomelda, 50, (Shelby Ijames).

Similarly, the "Xanthos family" included Anthony, 52, (Elizabeth Darrah), Zelde, 50, (Ashton Kelly), Zoe, 9, (Phillip Williams), and Xerxes, 7, (Gina Hill), who gave herself the nickname of "X-Man," to completely take on her role as a young boy.

In both families, the grandfather has no high school diploma, is a diabetic and has mobility problems; therefore, he is unable to work and receives disability. The grandmother has a high school diploma and works full-time as a cashier, but has very limited English. The granddaughter and grandson both attend grade school, while the granddaughter helps her grandfather in the community. The grandson was diagnosed with ADHD and is a handful for the grandparents.

The family profile read that each family lives in a small home, and they are

paying off a first and second mortgage. Grandma is working full-time while grandpa is disabled and staying at home with the grandchildren who came to live with them six months ago when their daughter was incarcerated for drug use. The house needs several repairs and insulations to help reduce their monthly utility bill and make it more comfortable.

They only have one reliable vehicle of which they are still paying off a loan. The grandparents have insurance through the grandmother's work, but the children have no insurance coverage. Due to the grandson's recent diagnosis of ADHD and the associated problems, the family's expenses have increased. The father has no contact with the children and cannot be located. During the third week of the simulation, the Realville Public School was closed for holiday.

During the simulation, the Yarrow family was visiting the community action agency to see if they could get some type of assistance.

"We are asking for assistance because we didn't qualify for anything with Social Security," Ijames said.

Ladd added, "My (wife) still works and makes too

much money, but we don't have enough to pay the bills, so we are applying for food stamps."

Ladd said the experience was enlightening.

"It's eye opening because you don't realize all the details that go into getting what you need and the time constraint," she said. "Even though this was just a simulation, it was stressful."

Ijames explained that while going through the simulation, her granddaughter had to miss school so the grandfather could go to the Social Security office, and even after going through a whole (simulation) day, they didn't get any assistance.

Rudel said going through the simulation made him realize that when they, as teachers, call home to a parent/guardian about misbehaviors, that it's probably the least of their worries, as they are fighting to make ends meet. If the child is suspended, it just adds more stress because the parent either has to miss work to stay home with the child or the child has to stay home alone.

Williams, from the Xanthos family, said going through the simulation was all too familiar as he grew up in this type of situation. He added that while some people may change the way they teach after going through the simulation, he has always interacted with his students with a certain amount of empathy knowing they may be living in a similar situation.

Kelly said she really enjoyed having the chance to experience the poverty simulation.

"It's beneficial," she said. "We sometimes get wrapped up in teaching and this is a reminder that there is more than just school work that kids

are worried about. This is all fake and we're getting stressed about it. We take a lot of things for granted."

Graham Rights, one of the event volunteers, has participated in 36 of the 55 simulations, during which time Rights has been in charge of the pawn shop, which was renamed "Diamond Graham's Pawn Shop" for him.

CCM Executive Director Margaret Elliott explained that he was assigned to the role the first time he volunteered with the Poverty Simulation.

"It's funny to see a retired Moravian minister get into this role," she said.

Rights, who is still a Moravian bishop and does visitation for Home Moravian Church, is a member of CCM's Board of Directors. He shared why he enjoys volunteering for the Poverty Simulation.

"I think it is a very important experience. Everybody needs to be aware of the circumstances people in our community face and this does a very good job of getting that across," he said, adding that the discussion at the end of the simulation is always good, as they hear how it affected people. "Some talk about how they are going to change the way they do things."

To offer the program, there must be 40-80 participants high school age or older. The cost is \$10 per participant, which helps offset the program cost. Blackburn noted that there are scholarships available for schools.

If interested in having CCM's Poverty Simulation program at your school, church or business, contact Blackburn at 336-724-7875 ext. 1020 or bblackburn@crisiscontrol.org.



Vickie Ladd