

Rebecca Schuck

JCN Poverty Simulation

During the poverty simulation, I was assigned the part of a twenty-year-old woman who lives at home with her father, her elementary-aged brother, and her baby. Luckily, the father and I both had jobs, though mine was only part time as I was also attending college. In the first week, I diligently dropped the baby off and went to school, but I soon realized that this was not sustainable. My father spent his time at work and waiting in line to cash his check, so we needed someone to pay the utilities, get groceries, and so on. Without giving it a second thought, I dropped out of school. The simulation ended, and we were in a pretty good place, especially compared to our peers. We had eaten for every week except for the first one, our family was together, we had a roof over our heads, and we had a steady income. And yet, I had dropped out of school, our children were taken once, and I had snuck my child into work. Moreover, I was exhausted, as I had been running the whole time and constantly thinking of the next thing I needed to do.

We constantly hear about how living under the poverty line puts one at a much higher risk for challenges in nearly all aspects of one's life. And while before I could try to imagine what that was like, I now feel as though I have a deeper (though far from comprehensive) understanding of these stressors and how they affect everything. That I did not think twice about dropping out of college was shocking. I was in survival mode and it was incredibly stressful. Moreover, to my dismay one of the "kids" spoke afterwards about how during the school day, all she could think about was whether or not her parents were able to get food for the week. She felt that she would have been much more useful outside of school.

In Occupational Therapy, when the patient is supposedly not working towards his/her goals, we label them as "non-compliant" and they are released from services. One of our professors speaks passionately against this. He says that if we are doing our jobs, then no one should be non-compliant. And after going through this simulation, I full heartedly embrace this sentiment. It is so easy for me to look at my client from my perspective and think about how annoying it is that they are not following through – that I'm trying to help them and why aren't

they accepting this help? But during this simulation, I almost never was thinking only about myself and my health, and I certainly did not have time to do anything more than what I already was doing. Now, if my client is “non-compliant”, I think it will raise more of a red flag that I’m not understanding what’s going on in their lives, not the other way around.