



Fact Sheet 6: Understanding Poverty and how to assist

Poverty can be defined as *'the extent to which an individual goes without resources and not just financial resources'*.

People who live in poverty often live by a unique set of rules which results in different patterns of thought, expectations and social interactions that look different to what we consider "normal".

Organisations whose clients live in poverty, will offer greater service and achieve better results with small changes in attitude, communication and non-judgemental understanding.

The Reality

In Australia, the poverty line equates to **living on less than \$400 a week for a single adult or \$841 for a couple** with two children.

MORE than 2.5 million Australians are living below the poverty line meaning they do not have an acceptable standard of living and go without the bare necessities: housing, work, education, health care and community services.

More than one in three children living in sole parent households are in poverty. One in three Australian elderly live in poverty.

Local data

Low income: The median personal and household income in both the Campaspe and Murray Shires was below the Victorian and Australian average.

Low income and welfare dependent families: Campaspe has a higher proportion of families with children that were low income and welfare-dependent than the Victorian average.

Centrelink benefits: Campaspe had a higher proportion of residents receiving the following Centrelink benefits (compared to the Victorian average):

- Age Pension
- Carer Payment
- Newstart Allowance
- Disability Support Pension
- Health Care Card Holders
- Parenting Payments

Unemployment: In 2012 the unemployment rate of Campaspe and Murray was 5.4% and 5.6% respectively.

Social Housing: Compared to Victoria (12%), Campaspe had a higher proportion (20%) of rented dwellings that were owned by state government housing authorities or housing co-operatives, community or church groups.

Rent Assistance allowance: Compared to Victoria (6.2%), there was a greater proportion of Campaspe residents (7.5%) aged 15 years and over who received Rent Assistance. Murray has 24.4% of households in dwellings receiving rent assistance, while NSW average is 16.3%.

Statistics on income distribution reflect the inequality present in Australia: the top 20% of income earners receive 50% of total income in Australia, while the bottom 20% earn a mere 5%.

Causes of poverty

Some poverty is generational, some situational (as a result of changed life circumstances). Poverty may be caused by one or a combination of the following factors:

- Individual behaviours – dependence on welfare, crime, single parenthood, family breakups, work ethic, addiction, mental illness, disability;
- Human and social capital in the community - availability of jobs, levels of payment, skill sets, childcare availabilities, city and regional planning, educational opportunities;
- Exploitation – Drug trade, refugees, cash advance lenders, gambling, underpayment;
- Political / Economic structures – job loss, taxation patterns, economic disparity, de-industrialisation, globalization.

What signs to look out for?

- Unpaid accounts
- Missed appointments, unreliability and often late
- Disregard for timeframes, protocols, process
- Lower educational and employment experiences
- Families complicated by multiple relationships and / or dysfunction.

How to assist people in our community experiencing poverty

- Lead the way in changing perceptions by educating staff
- Building mutual respect
- Relationships are valued, ask about family, listen, remember and show interest
- Do not assume the person understands the “normal” way of doing things
- Discuss coping options, goals and strategies calmly and non-judgmentally
- Lay clear sensible boundaries around unacceptable behaviours
- Consider payment plans
- Consider timeframes for appointments in regard to public transport options, be flexible
- Poverty may be a temporary setback or a lifetime of disadvantage, don't judge
- There are agencies in our community who assist without charge; can you refer them somewhere for help?
- Australians value the concept of a “fair go”
- Hope, goals and opportunities are valuable concepts to encourage and promote.