



Youth Launch Leaders

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Researchers have learned so much about the effects of scarcity on the human brain. Scarcity—of time, money, food, health—serves to focus the mind on dealing almost exclusively on that which is scarce, leaving little or no “intellectual bandwidth” for anything else. That means no emotional, physical or mental energy is available to tend to other equally or maybe even more important activities like meeting the emotional and physical needs of children.

When parents are so focused on meeting the needs created by poverty, they do not have enough of themselves left to provide emotional support for their children. Things like patience, caring, playing with and reading to them fall by the wayside. Thus, the family’s poverty creates an even greater scarcity for the children. They not only live in poverty, but they suffer a poverty of their parents’ attention.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE) by CDC-Kaiser Permanente identified ten categories of childhood trauma that increase the likelihood of serious problems in adulthood. The categories include things like alcoholism, drug abuse, and depression. Also included are emotional and physical neglect, which are commonly experienced by those in poverty.

Thus, poverty creates more poverty. Just the stress of growing up in a poor family can be toxic to the growing brain. On average, children in poverty have lower IQ scores than their wealthier peers. The stress of poverty on the developing brain means the child cannot achieve his or her full potential. Sadly, both school work and peer relationships suffer. Adequate income would solve so many of these problems, but those who work with youth often cannot provide that.

While many of these issues effecting children in poverty cannot be eliminated easily, there are things that you can do when working with these youth. On the following page are tips for serving youth in poverty.



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ber and a researcher on
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Tips for working with Youth in Poverty



Show youth in poverty that you believe they have potential—

Find something positive to say and encourage them to build on that.

Create opportunities for mentoring -

Work to make connections between youth in poverty and those who can mentor and increase opportunities.

Learn how to communicate best—

people in poverty tend to get information verbally. Use basic communication skills and focus on the big picture.

Recognize motivational

differences— there may be lower personal value placed on education. Look for different motivators such as family benefit or future earnings potential.

Create opportunities for

community service— Get to know the children you work with to find their spark and connect them with members of the community who share similar interests.

