

# Empowering Generational Change

The Saint Vincent de Paul Society of the Greater Attleboro District is a grassroots, volunteer-based, direct-aid organization that helps people in need get back on their feet. We provide short-term financial, material, and emotional support and work person-to-person through advocacy, education and referral efforts to break cycles of poverty, empower people and promote self-sufficiency.

## Myths about poverty in the world's wealthiest nation

Myths and misunderstandings fuel stereotypes that negatively impact those living in poverty in the U.S. Here are just a few of many related to U.S. poverty:

**Myth:** Even if you're poor in the U.S. you're doing pretty well.

**The Reality:** The U.S. ranks near the bottom of the world's wealthiest countries in how well it cares for its children in poverty. Out of 24 nations, the U.S. ranked between 19th and 23rd in critical areas of health, education, and material well-being. (*UNICEF, 2010*)

**Myth:** No one goes hungry in America.

**The Reality:** One in six Americans lives in a household that is "food insecure," meaning that in any given month, they will be out of money, out of food, and forced to miss meals or seek assistance to feed themselves. Nationally, more than 50 million Americans were food insecure in 2011—a 39 percent increase from 2007. Among the hungry are nearly 17 million children. (*U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 2012*)

**Myth: Poverty has little lasting impact on children.**

**The Reality:** Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being. Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor physical and mental health. Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young and/or experience deep and persistent poverty. **(National Center for Children in Poverty, 2012)**

**Myth: Few U.S. children are homeless**

**The Reality:** More than 1.6 million of the nation's children go to sleep without a home each year. Homeless children experience a lack of safety, comfort, privacy, reassuring routines, adequate health care, uninterrupted schooling, sustaining relationships, and a sense of community. These factors combine to create a life-altering experience that inflicts profound and lasting scars. **(National Center on Family Homelessness, 2012)**

**Myth: All U.S. children have equal opportunities to succeed in school.**

**The Reality:**

- Children born poor, at low birth weight, without health coverage, and who start school not ready to learn often fall behind and drop out.
- Teachers in high poverty schools are more likely to have less experience, less training, and fewer advanced degrees than teachers in low poverty schools.
- 22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared with six percent of those who have never been poor.
- 32 percent of students who spent more than half of their childhoods in poverty do not graduate.

**(Children's Defense Fund, 2010; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012)**

**Myth:** People who are poor are lazy.

**Fact:** More than 10.5 million people in poverty formed the "working poor" in the U.S. in 2010, meaning they were in the labor force for at least 27 weeks. (*U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012*)

**Myth:** Those living in poverty just want to stay there.

**Fact:** Millions of Americans move in and out of poverty over a lifetime. More than half the U.S. population will live in poverty at some point before age 65. (*Urban Institute, 2010*)

**Sources:**

- <http://www.povertyusa.org/get-involved/#act>
- Notes for Neighbors: <http://www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development>
- <http://www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/povertyusa/upload/poverty-awareness-month-calendar.pdf>