

Practical Ideas on Hunger Relief in West Alabama

There is hunger for ordinary bread, and there is hunger for love, for kindness, for thoughtfulness, and this is the great poverty that makes people suffer so much.

- Mother Teresa

I think that these few words from Mother Teresa sum up almost all the problems on this whole wide world. People all over the world are helping each other to alleviate the adverse effects of many problems prevailing on this planet. As Earl Nightingale says "Happiness comes to those who are moving toward something they want very much to happen. And it almost always involves making someone else happy." Just giving back a little something to Mother Earth always yields immense satisfaction. Though it might not be possible for a person to change the phase of the world single-handedly and make it heaven for all, it is always possible to make a part of it, however bigger it is, better. Why not the small locale of interest be in our neighborhood?

The State of Alabama has entwined with my life long enough for me to call it "Home" now. It hurts to see people at home to be in misery. Poverty rates in Alabama have constantly been on the rise for so many years now. The Food and Agriculture Organization for the United Nations notes that hunger is just a direct result of poverty. Hence, eliminating poverty will eliminate hunger. As exposing issues such as hunger, illiteracy, poverty etc. do not generate much attraction, the media conveniently chooses to neglect covering these. There are so many affluent good hearted souls in this state. The first and best thing to do is to expose these issues. No problem is solved until it is dealt with. This is a problem where the people of the entire state and the country should be made responsible for. The primary goal has to be to create awareness among people. People should be made aware of what poverty is, the cause of effect of poverty and how they can help to eradicate this. Poverty is not incurable like cancer.

Practice before you preach. Before asking other people to wipe out poverty and hunger, we ourselves need to take some action. Students are a very motivated crowd. There are stories in history made by students. Student, if they will, can change the history of the world. We, at the University are at a great advantage as we have an army of them. Students can be asked to donate one meal's worth of money. According the statistics, parents with two children need to earn \$9.69 per hour. Student organizations can adopt families and support them. Each student organization can take turns to organize pot luck dinners every week and host families that are poor and famished. The potlucks aid the interaction between the students and the under privileged. This makes the people feel a certain oneness with the world.

It is one thing to help directly. For most people with an ocean of commitments in today's busy lives, it becomes very hard to do that. The next best thing is to help people who help people. Organizations like Red Cross of West Alabama are always looking for volunteers. Students of similar interests or friends could take turns to volunteer. Volunteers have fun too while working in groups. The essential factor to be kept in mind is that giving people money and food is not the only solution to eradicate poverty. We need to help people to get to ways where they can get money and food. As Confucius said, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Volunteering could include activities like babysitting, helping people to get to work, taking them to buy groceries. These can help people go to work or get around the place to get work done. No help goes wasted. There are also other organizations which have been created by people who have a vision. One such example is The Alabama Poverty

Project led by Dr. Wayne Flynt. There are many churches which help poor people to reduce poverty and hunger. Those are some places that can be helped to help other people.

Athletics is a great part of schools and colleges. Food drives before big games and making schools compete on how much food they are able to collect are marvelous ideas. Programs of this kind have to be given more importance, exposure and support. This helps food banks immensely. The government provides food stamps to the poor people. People should be encouraged to use this. Nutrition programs that care for young children and pregnant mothers should be strengthened.

Colleges in India have a mandatory program for freshman that they should serve in the underprivileged areas every weekend for a year and should attend a camp at the end of the year to help the poor and deprived for six weeks. This is something that I think all schools should consider. Many students, though they like to help do not take the effort to do it. A program like this may not be liked by all students but sure will make some people turn a new leaf. This involves a lot of effort from the university and may be even a state legislature. It should be made as a law to serve their Motherland for at least a year. It is just like collecting taxes just in a different way. This is not tyranny; this is just giving people an opportunity to feel the completeness and satisfaction when they make a difference in someone's life. Schools and colleges should think of this as giving students their first lesson in life.

All the above discussions have been on how to lessen the effects of poverty. While taking steps to do this, we should also be thinking about how to eradicate this problem and make it not happening in the future. It is not just good enough to find a solution to the existing problem, we should also be thinking about this problem as a whole can be eliminated. The first solution would be to educate the younger generations. Students can tutor and mentor children who are not able to school. Students also should bring to the attention of parents that sending their children to school is not an option but a necessity. Parents and Children should be made aware of changes in lifestyles that come with a good education. The benefits of education have to be clearly laid out in front of them.

People should also be educated about the necessity for saving money. This is a healthy habit if it is practiced in moderation. Schools should cultivate the habit of savings in students right from young age. Schools should also take the responsibility of enlightening the students of the dangers of being covetous. Students can also talk to local producers and farmers and help them provide essential food to the poor people on subsidized rates. Buying directly from the farmers saves the tax and the profits collected by intermediate agencies and also promotes local businesses and agricultural activities. People also should be advised on healthy eating habits. A hearty and healthy meal can be cooked for the same price of a buying a hamburger.

We can list all possible ways to eliminate and eradicate the problems of the world and all that would be just words until when they are typed to be on this sheet of paper. We all understand that all the above mentioned do not need any magic or miracle to happen. All they need is some good will and little initiative from people. This is available in plenty among a young college-going crowd. Where there is a will, there is a way. So, let's recognize the needs of the very society where we live in, reaffirm ourselves of our duties as a person with a good soul and take a little step to pave way for the society's progress. Heal the world; make it a better place for you and for me and for the entire human race.

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