

Making Choices Activity

Intro Script

United Way believes that our community will only reach its full potential when everyone participates. We fuel lasting change by uniting people for social good. The rising income and opportunity disparities hurt us all. United Way focuses on the safety net (preventing hunger, and homelessness; supporting independence for seniors and people with disabilities; and providing access to health care); and education/jobs (providing early childhood education, reading support and academic enrichment for children and youth pre-K-grade12; and providing jobs and training for adults to support themselves. Over 730,000 people in our community live in or near poverty. That is equivalent to one out of every four citizens in the 9 county Twin Cities metro region.

The purpose of this “Making Choices” game is to have you experience the difficult decisions hardworking people in, or on the edge of poverty face every day.

Supplies:

- Copies of the “game sheet” for each person or group of people.
- One roll of “Smarties” for each person or group. (15 “Smarties” in each roll)

Instructions (read to participants)

- You may work alone or in small groups.
- The “Smarties” are symbolic of your budget so don’t eat them until after the game is over!
- For the purpose of this game, each person or team is to pretend they are part of a family of four, two adults and two children, ages sixteen and four.
- One adult is working full-time and the other is working two part-time jobs. Both make minimum wage.
- The family has a limited budget and only 15 candies to spend.
- You must make some tough decisions.
- Each participant or group must study their choices in each row and invest their candies with one, two or three candies depending on what’s most important to them: one being the least desirable option and three being most desirable option.
- You must not skip any rows

After a few minutes, when everyone has a chance to place their candies, let them know there has been a change:

Since it is summer both of your children are not in school, where they receive subsidized lunches, since you qualify for the program. The family doesn't have enough money to purchase additional summer food. In order to get enough food to put on the table you must remove two candies. Now, take off two candies from your sheet and adjust the rest as needed.

After they adjust their candies let them know there has been another unexpected event:

Your spouse just got laid off with no severance pay. You must take off four more candies and adjust accordingly.

Closing Script

Hardworking people make these kinds of decisions every day in Minnesota. United Way not only helps meet the immediate needs such as hunger and homelessness, they also address the root causes of these problems. Specifically, United Way works to strengthen those in or on the edge of poverty: the one in four families in our community who are earning less than \$50,200 per year-for a family of four with two working adults and two children.

On average, the total monthly costs needed to sustain a family of four is far greater than \$50,200. The average monthly costs of living in Minnesota are:

- Food: \$995
- Housing: \$1,362
- Health care: \$467
- Transportation: \$927
- Child care: \$1,646
- Clothing: \$689
- Net taxes: \$1,272

SOURCE: Minnesota Employment & Economic Development: Cost of Living in Minnesota
<http://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/col/>

That adds up to a total annual cost of \$88,296. That's a \$38,096 shortfall!

The amount of money that a family of four on the edge of poverty makes per year is clearly not sufficient to meet their needs.

That is why United Way We empowers people to break the cycle of poverty and make the most of their lives. Through greater access to education, jobs, and basic human services, we create opportunities for everyone to contribute to a stronger community.

Today, I offer you a call to action to invest in humankind by giving, advocating and or volunteering with United Way to keep this community a great place to live. Please join me in creating opportunities for humankind!