

Understanding the Journey: Community Improvement and Impoverished Youth in Low Income Communities

Dr. Deborah Leblanc

Professor of Public Administration
National University, Los Angeles
5245 Pacific Concourse Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90045
United States of America

Giving is important to living a fulfilled and meaningful life; regardless of one's social economic status. This article interviewed 25 youth from underserved urban communities in Southern California and identified four common themes in understanding their journeys and struggles. Each of the youth interviewed shared your life story and struggles. Of the 25 youth, 95% of these students lived in families whose total household earnings were less than \$15,000/year and had four or more living in their residence. "The nation's economic crisis has deeply affected the lives of millions of Americans. Skyrocketing foreclosures and job layoffs have pulled the rug out from under many families, particularly those living in low-income communities", according APA studies. Studies further found, "deepening [poverty](#) is inextricably linked with rising levels of homelessness and food insecurity/hunger for many Americans and children are particularly affected by these conditions" (APA, 2017).

Youth interviewed reported the following four common themes: (1) I am a community giver; and (2) I am striving daily to become the best man that I can become at home, work, and play. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' I have heard this saying, all my life, in church and at home; (3) I have lived a life of extreme poverty; and yet, (4) I have found opportunities to give to the family and my community. One youth shared that family giving consisted of selling cookies and candy bars to give money to buy food for my family. "Giver" is giving to the world around us. Homelessness and food insecurity/hunger was a shared experience among 87% of the youth studied.

Studies revealed family lives have been very challenging and stressful like many children growing up all over the USA. According to the 2015 Kids Count Data Book, "the Great Recession hasn't released its grip on Alabama children, who suffer higher rates of poverty than they did 15 years ago". Like many youth of Alabama, growing up in poverty has meant finding creative ways for impoverished youth to provide for their families and it to make a difference in their community. Giving provides a way out of the helping others.

"In 1978, Richard Bolles wrote a book called *The Three Boxes of Life*. The theme his career development book was that our lives can be divided into three areas: education, career and leisure. Bolles provided an exploration of a typical person's progression through the three boxes of life. Each box represented 1/3 of you". Even though this was a very old book, its information is still relevant and useful. Bolles' first box of life was education; the second was career; and the third box was leisure. One youth reported, "his family life has boxed him in and created many of obstacles; yet he continues to give of his time, support, and when possible, his resources. For example, he worked during the summer of 2017, to help serve the youth of his community as a student worker for the Inglewood Department of Recreation and Parks. Giving adds value to life.

This article identified some of common themes shared by disadvantaged youth in their day today challenges and approaches to continuous giving back. Author Bolles encouraged having a well- balanced life; and having fun throughout one's life and finding ways to give to life. Giving has both tangible and intangible benefits. Not having something tangible to give can create stress in ones' life. Youth want to give, but often do not have anything tangible to give; and thus become even more stressed. Youth need to start by understanding the triggers and sources of his stress; and instead look to identify more intangible ways to give to others, and thus this may become the first step to enjoying a fuller life.

This calls for a change in thinking. “Clearly, change is not always easy,” (p. 14). *Managing Stress and Coping with Life’s Challenges*, must become a lifelong goal for Youth. Many home lives have been very stressful, complex and inconsistent. Studies show the importance of having healthy relationship that do not have high conflict. Youth reported, that “his parents are unemployed and do not work but they get along well together. Some of his friends live in homes where their parents are always fighting and it really affects them.” It is good to have a healthy relationship with family and friends; and that is intangible. Further findings, found parents are giving of themselves, even though they have very little to give. Often disadvantaged parents will inspire their children to move forward in life”, (CFES, 2017).

In conclusion, remembering the work of Bolles helps to keep the focus of life in proper order. There are of a lot of things going on impoverished homes, communities, and world, in general. Giving should be a priority in the life of anyone who wants better health, greater happiness and less stress.” One strategy can be to first get to know ones’ self, give more and develop ones personal career action plan. ‘*Know thyself*’, live a balanced life, and continue to give to the world around you; all of which is his endgame.

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