

# Understanding Poverty in our Community

Understanding the difference between generational and situational poverty is crucial for people who are community advocates. People in different types of poverty tend to approach their circumstances differently, and they may have very different values or priorities.

## Situational Poverty

Situational poverty is a period of being without resources caused by situational factors. There are several reasons for **situational poverty** to emerge, but some of the most common are divorce, death of a spouse, unexpected health expenses, the loss of a job and most recently, the pandemic. These uncontrollable circumstances can cause a spiral of events which leads to a loss of income and material possessions.

Someone experiencing situational poverty often has a higher level of education than people who experience generational poverty. People in this situation are also more likely to have assistance to fall back on in the form of family members and supportive people in the community which can make a huge difference. Families experiencing situational poverty tend to remain hopeful, knowing that this is a temporary setback.

## Generational Poverty

Often when people think of extreme poverty, they are actually thinking of **generational poverty** which usually encompasses three or more generations. These families tend to be stuck in the cycle of poverty which means they and their children will continue to live in poverty until an external influence can help them escape.

People caught in the cycle of generational poverty are often in survival mode. They are focused on whatever challenges greet them each day, whether that's paying the rent, buying food or taking care of a health problem. The rural nature of South Deschutes County only exacerbates the issue because of the lack of community resources. Taking classes or getting their children to school are forced to be lower priorities.

Hopelessness is a key factor in creating and continuing the cycle of poverty one generation to the next. Without hope and the belief that life can be better, the motivation and energy needed to break the cycle is very low.

### **The Solution**

Research shows that the most effective way to break generational poverty is through education. A lack of education is central to generational poverty and the reason poverty continues throughout generations. Without a high school diploma or GED, chances to earn a living wage are greatly reduced.

Research also shows that the positive influence of one person – a teacher, coach, friend or mentor - can have a significant impact on changing the trajectory of a young person's life.

Ending generational poverty requires many different programs to help children and their families find hope in their future and provide them with the path to reach those new dreams. These programs allow the cycle to be broken by taking that day to day need for survival off the top of the list for families and allowing attending school for children to become a priority.

### **How We're Helping**

The Sunriver Women's Club's **Community Grant** program and the **Power of 50 for Education** support non-profit agencies that provide services that help end generational poverty. By supporting programs that bring education, safety, secure shelter, health care, nutritional support and a little human kindness, we can begin to break the cycle of generational poverty.