

## Poverty – An Epidemic In Idaho

A new disease has recently been found infecting eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds. Idaho has the highest number of those infected with this virus in the nation, not a wanted statistic for our often-overlooked state. The causes of the disease are many, starting with low paying jobs, and those who are infected hardly know where to turn. Yet there are treatments being thought-up, and hopefully a miracle cure is on its way. This sickness is known as poverty, an epidemic as serious as physical illness, and infecting just as many.

Idaho's high rate of poverty for young adults is the product of many factors. As eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds, these people are going through a transitional stage, changing their lifestyles from living with their family to living on their own. Usually they do not have a strong financial support, and are either living off their parents' income, and some of their own contribution, or solely their own. This leads to another problem: the only jobs eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds can get are low paying jobs – at, or slightly above, minimum wage. A person cannot live solely off a low paying job – part time or full time – thus they sink into poverty. The problems continue with the fact that some parents stop supporting their children once they become a legal adult, at age eighteen. Most young people cannot support themselves; they do not have the know-how or the financial assistance to live on their own. For eighteen years they do not pay for rent, food or education, but now they find that they must pay for every aspect of their lives: from their home and meals to their school and books, and hardly have the money to buy anything else. Parents do not realize how hard it can be for their children, especially

when most eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds yearn to be independent and, instead of asking their parents for money, which they view as a sign of dependency, they instead turn to loans from banks or other institutions in the place of their family.

The solutions for decreasing Idaho's rate of young adult poverty can come about in many ways – one is to raise minimum wage. If young people could earn more money, they could slowly rise out from under the weight of poverty, and could afford all of their expenses, slowly but surely. Another solution is to encourage parents to work with their new adult. If they would slowly transition their child from family dependency into financial independence both would benefit in the long run. The child would stay out of poverty, while working to become self-reliant, and the parents would insure that their child would not be coming back to them for money, because they are helping to instill good financial habits in their child. Schools could provide informational workshops for high school students and their parents, to inform them of what can happen, before they are thrown into the thick of it. These workshops could be given with statistics and facts, as well as booths and presentations from organizations that can help as well as prevent the students' future poverty. If young adults and their parents were informed of the situation, they would know what to expect.

My plans for staying out of poverty in the near future are numerous and hopefully beneficial. I plan to go to college and work towards a degree that will enable me to obtain a high paying job once I graduate. I intend to work part time as I attend college, but I know that I cannot support myself entirely. I will express my situation to my parents – in that I need their help – while promising to pay back all I borrow. I do not desire to own a credit card, unless I am sure I can use it responsibly, and I will not spend my limited

funds on unnecessary items. But most importantly, I will try to get informed of the causes and prevention of my future poverty. I fully understand, though, that I may have to live impoverished during my early independence years, but I do so with the knowledge that I am sacrificing my financial security for a better future with a college education and a dedication to climb out of poverty.

I believe that the programs and organizations already set up by local and national governments or institutions are quite helpful and there is no need in improving them or setting up more. I do believe, however, that there is a great need for information. I have only recently heard of the programs that can help me, yet if I would have been contacted earlier, I could have began to reverse my future poverty. If these organizations could contact young people when they are still in high school they could begin to prevent young adult poverty through knowledge. These institutions cannot help if they cannot reach those who can benefit from them. A financial program could be set up in high schools for parents and students to learn about how and why poverty occurs and how to prevent it. I am sure that once people are informed of their options and the facts, many will take advantage of that knowledge and work towards keeping themselves or their children out of poverty for good.

This epidemic is a serious problem in Idaho, but it can be controlled. Young adults must be presented with the facts of this disease, the prevention precautions, and the cures, and hopefully the epidemic will not spread anymore.