# EarthLinks at the Roots: Urban Poverty

As many of you know, EarthLinks provides "a work program for people who are homeless and low-income to learn skills and create Earth-friendly products that sustain the people and the planet". Meaning that not all of our participants are currently homeless (although the vast majority have known homelessness during their lifetime), but all of them deal with the effects of urban poverty.

Living under financially difficult circumstances in the city has many effects on people.

**Neighborhoods of residence**

Often times, the housing that has been set aside for low-income individuals is located in neighborhoods that already have a high concentration of poverty. These areas are often considered unsafe due to violence or because they are located near potentially dangerous places (such as power plants or train tracks). Police protection may be less or there may be a sense of distrust towards the police within the community which fuels negative relationships between law enforcement and the community. Businesses are less likely to settle in those neighborhoods, opting for areas where they are more likely to earn more revenue. This often requires individuals to travel farther to access jobs, markets, and other resources. Of course this is not always the case, but it is one of the common issues of urban poverty.

**Education**

Public schools in the area are funded by property tax, which means that the amount of funding they are getting is lower in areas where the housing costs less. This leaves individuals in a situation where their neighborhood school systems may provide substandard education or just have limited resources, overfilled classrooms, and underpaid teachers. Unless outside aid goes towards these schools, the property taxes funding schools in low-income areas will never be able to match the property taxes going to the schools of wealthier neighborhoods- causing inequity in the school system. Without a good education in grammar school and high school, it is very difficult for people to succeed in college- which these days is becoming more important for employment. If people are unable to get a

thorough education, they may continue to struggle with finances for the rest of their lives.

**Healthcare**

Health insurance can be very expensive, and not having insurance can prove to be even more costly. For people who cannot afford healthcare, very few options are granted to them. This often leads to overlooking preventive care, causing potentially treatable conditions to worsen over time. They have access to some clinics, but those clinics are unable to perform major surgeries. People are granted emergency room care, but once the emergency has been addressed there is not a requirement for follow-up. So what happens to people if they have a medical condition but are unable to obtain treatment? Often, they stay sick until it becomes even more severe.



**Nutrition and food access**

Though food stamps are given, not everyone has access to them or can get by on them. In those cases, there are also food pantries and soup kitchens. Though these organizations are doing exceptional work keeping people fed, the food may not always be the most nutritious and many things have been donated because they are approaching or past their expiration date. For those who do have food stamps, they find that healthful foods, such as fruit and vegetables, are usually far more expensive that processed foods- which often are also more filling. This also leads to unhealthy diets.

Whether it is lack of food or malnutrition, food access is imperative to people's success and proper nutrition leads to healthier people. When people already do not have health insurance, the last thing they need is diet induced diseases such as Type II Diabetes or high blood pressure.

**The World Bank**

The world bank has created the following list surrounding the difficulties individuals experience when faced with urban poverty.

*"Urban poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. The urban poor live with many deprivations. Their daily challenges may include: limited access to employment opportunities and income, inadequate and insecure housing and services, violent and unhealthy environments, little or no social protection mechanisms, limited access to adequate health and education opportunities.*

*But urban poverty is not just a collection of characteristics; it is also a dynamic condition of vulnerability or susceptibility to risks."*

**Solutions**

Solutions to urban poverty involve a lot of political change. Pushing for healthcare reform, education reform, housing reform, job creation/job readiness programs, and produce subsidies are among those necessary changes. Beyond political reforms, there are also non-profits that work to provide immediate aid to individuals experiencing urban poverty. Anyone can get involved politically, volunteer with non-profits, or even get involved with struggling public schools and do fundraisers or supply drives. The options are limitless, because the goal is to help people emerge from poverty. Many people are huge activists about homelessness, but the thing is that people in poverty are constantly at risk of becoming homeless- if they experience a major sickness, or a foreclosure, or a job loss- because they don't have a huge savings that can keep them afloat. The best way to prevent homelessness is to support people who are struggling with poverty.