**Statement of Problem Sample: Poverty in Winnsboro, SC**

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A big concern among many rural communities and areas around the state is poverty. Exactly what is poverty? What defines that a person is living in poverty? Poverty is not having the needed money to be able to enjoy more than just the basic necessities in life. Poverty is "just getting by" and barely keeping your head above water while trying to make ends meet or living pay check to pay check. The US Census Bureau uses a set amount of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty (“Poverty”).

Poverty is a very serious issue and it affects rural communities tremendously. There are many rural communities such as Winnsboro, South Carolina, that lack the resources children need in order to grow and prosper into healthy and successful adults bringing about a need for more afterschool programs, youth community centers and mentoring programs in the area. According to City Data, 24.4 percent of the residents in Winnsboro, South Carolina receive income below the poverty level. 37.6 percent of the children who live in Winnsboro, South Carolina are living below the poverty level (“Winnsboro”). The rural poverty rate is growing and has exceeded the urban rate every year since data collection began in the 1960s. The difference between the two poverty rates has averaged about 5 percent for the last 30 years, with urban rates near 10–15 percent and rural rates near 15–20 percent (Jenson).

Isolation, lack of jobs, lack of services, lack of transportation and very few opportunities in rural areas cause children to become victims of generational poverty and cause them to face obstacles children should not have to face. According to Margaret D. Slinski, these issues bring about even more issues in rural areas such as teen drug use, gang violence, teen pregnancy, risky behaviors, inadequate nutrition, fewer learning experiences, instability of residence, lower quality of schools, exposure to environmental toxins, family violence, and homelessness, unsupervised activities, high school drop outs, poor school attendance, low graduation rates and less access to adolescent jobs.

When parents have to work long hours to provide for their families it sometimes leaves children to spend time alone and take on the responsibility of taking care of themselves, especially if they live in a single-parent home, as most children who live in poverty do. Parents often do not have a way of getting their children to afterschool programs or extracurricular activities or perhaps they do not have a way of paying for it. Because of this, children and teens get involved in unsupervised activities that they should avoid. Teens are easily influenced and persuaded. Many of them may become involved in drugs, alcohol, violence and risky behaviors. According to the *Washington Post*, “A study done on 766 15 year olds found that teens who spent the most unsupervised time with peers were 39 percent more likely to smoke cigarettes, 47 percent more likely to drink alcohol and 71 percent more likely to smoke marijuana than teens who are active in extracurricular activities or either employed” (Neumann). However, afterschool programs do more than just keep children out of trouble. As Alia Wong writes in the *Atlantic*, “[N]ot only do extracurricular activities help kids hone ‘soft skills’ and other abilities integral to successful careers and adult lives (such as ambition and curiosity), but they can also help boost academic performance. Even after controlling for socioeconomic factors and cognitive ability, extracurricular participation is linked with higher grades and graduation rates.” If rural area youth had a place they could go during their idle time problems, like the ones I’ve discussed could be decreased greatly and academic performance and preparation for adult life would be greatly increased.

According to th American Psychogical Association, children from a family living below the poverty line are at greater risk for behavioral problems, and Justin Caba explains that the roots of such problems as impulsiveness, aggression, ADHD, conduct disorder, and emotional problems—such as anxiety, depression, and low-self-esteem—can be traced to poverty. Furthermore, the negative effects of poverty on children are often caused by the parents’ inability to provide proper physical and mental health care.

Trying to educate children who are poverty stricken is very difficult for teachers. Teachers can only do so much to help their students, but when the school day is over the students go home to their families or sometimes go home alone where they do not have anyone to take time out to help them with homework or to study and reinforce things they do not understand. It is not the parents fault and they shouldn’t be blamed. It is extremely hard for single parents to juggle everything such as trying to maintain a job, pay bills, provide for children, make sure they have childcare, feed their children, and make sure they are at school on time, and so on (Mann). All these things can stress a parent out and then trickle down to the children causing them to be stressed. Ultimately all this stress causes poverty stricken children to perform more poorly academically than children who grow up in a home where they do not experience poverty (Jensen).

In poverty-stricken homes sometimes there is not enough parental involvement in children’s educations. Some parents want to help, some wish not to, some are not educated themselves so they feel embarrassed, and some are too busy doing other things. Children need support from somewhere. If parents cammpt give it to them then other reliable adults must step up and give them the support they need so young people in rural communities can break out of the cycle of generational poverty and become successful and independent adults.

Rural areas that suffer from poverty need help outside of school hours. Many children do not get meals when they get home from school, so children are fighting hunger. There is no way possible a child can learn or focus on academics when they are hungry. Many children have no help with homework. They need an adult to be there and guide them if they need help.

Journalist and historian Robert Mann shared a very touching story from his blog:

He was a very friendly and cooperative student with great manners.  I noticed right away that he was far behind academically. He also fell asleep in class quite often. I wrote notes to his mom and worked with him in a small group, hoping for improvement. One day I questioned him because he could not read the story he had been assigned for homework. I was very firm and told him he needed to do his homework if we were going to see good results. He started crying and in our conversation, told me that they were staying with his aunt and cousins. There were not enough beds so he slept on the sofa.  He told me that rats ran along the back of the couch at night and he could not sleep because he was so scared.

To think that any child has to go through this is horrible. Poverty is real. It is not something that can just go away in a day or even a week, but it is something that is going to take time to conquer. With one supporting and caring adult at a time rural communities can rise up from being poverty stricken and become something great. We must began with our children and ensure they are pushed to their full potential. All it takes is time, love, patience, support, and mentoring. We must teach children that their circumstances do not determine their destinations. They are victors and not victims. If we have more children who are pushed to greatness then it will trickle down and more and more children will become successful and we can break generational poverty.

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