

People Perish Without A Vision

“It was hell!” Madelyn Sherwood said of experiencing what it feels like to be poor in the poverty camp simulation that AIDSLink International conducted for Operation Mobilisation (OM) in Pretoria, South Africa, recently.

In the simulation, families lived in shacks and made bags out of newspapers to sell in order to pay their landlord, pay for food and pay for schooling for their child, etc.

AIDSLink facilitators played the roles of shopkeepers, landlords, a missionary, a pimp and a human trafficker. If the families could not make enough money to pay their landlord, they were evicted to the garbage dump. Some families never made it out of the garbage dump and spent the entire time there.

One family sent a daughter to school, only to find out that she had been captured and sent to work in a brothel. Only five of the nine families managed to send a child to school, and two of those were sponsored by the missionary.

Denise Healey, from New Zealand, described her simulation experience: “I have seen a lot of poverty, but being that person, where all the choices of how to survive came at me, made it more real. You get so tired that you make decisions you normally wouldn’t make. I was sold to a brothel and it was my choice, because I knew my family could then pay our landlord.”

In relation to how she will apply lessons learned to helping the poor, Denise said, “I can’t always change people’s circumstances, but I can help them dream. It’s getting them past survival. When I see a deeply abusive situation, it breaks my heart, so I am drawn to help. I look to the young

person's community and connect them with resources that can help them out of the poverty cycle."

Naudeen Bonthuys, from South Africa, added her thoughts about the simulation facilitators, saying, "You broke my trust. Because you are missionaries, I thought you'd take me out of the situation."

Andy Milligan, from the US, concluded, "The opposite of poverty is not wealth—it's justice."

The reason the poor stay poor is injustice. We haven't given them a vision.

***Holly Keur**, originally from the United States, is currently serving with OM partner organization AIDSLink International in South Africa with her husband, Nigel.*