



Five common misconceptions about poverty, addressed

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"If you're poor, just get a job. Go to college and you'll get a job."

For every job opening, there are 2.9 people looking for work, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) said in 2013.

"The community has to have the jobs available to support higher wages," said Trish Ottley, director of marketing and development for the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency. "Second of all, you may have somebody that, for various reasons, never graduated from high school and never had an opportunity to go to college and college wasn't even on their radar."

Regarding those who *have* gone to college: A 2008 report from the [Institute for Higher Education Policy](#) found that among Americans ages 18 to 26 who were living at or below the federal poverty level, 47 percent had been enrolled in college and 11 percent had earned a degree.

"People on SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) just use it to buy alcohol/cigarettes/fancy restaurant food. There's a ton of SNAP fraud."

According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), which administers SNAP, the benefits can only be used to buy household foods — breads and cereals; fruits and vegetables; meat, fish and poultry; and dairy products — as well as seeds and plants that produce food.

SNAP cannot be used to buy alcohol or tobacco, pet food, toiletries, vitamins, medicines, foods eaten at the site of purchase, or hot foods.

Additionally, the USDA notes, SNAP fraud has fallen to 1 percent as of 2008.

The SNAP payment error rate, meanwhile, fell to an all-time low of 4.36 percent as of 2009, the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#) reported.

"People on unemployment don't look for jobs."

A 2011 study by the [Joint Economic Committee of Congress](#) found that among the long-term unemployed, those eligible for benefits spent more time looking for employment than those who weren't eligible.

Among people unemployed as a result of job loss, time spent looking for employment tripled since Congress enacted federal unemployment benefits, the study found.

The [New York State Department of Labor](#) requires unemployment insurance claimants to maintain a [work search record](#) documenting their attempts to find employment in order to issue benefits.

"People on the street begging for change make more money than they would working minimum-wage jobs, and they just use it to buy alcohol or drugs."

A March 2013 [survey](#) of 146 panhandlers in the Union Square area of San Francisco found that 60 percent made \$25 a day or less. Further, 94 percent used the money they collected to buy food.

From interviews with 50 panhandlers in the Portland area in late summer 2013, Joe Streckert of [The Portland Mercury](#) reported their average hourly income as \$4.96 and their average daily income as \$21.69, which comes from an average time spent panhandling of 5.94 hours a day for 6.24 days a week.

"I worked a minimum wage job, too, and I was OK."

A New York state minimum-wage job pays \$8 an hour, and thus \$16,640 a year before taxes if one works 40 hours every week.

The [federal poverty rate](#) is \$11,670 for a household of one, \$15,730 for two, \$17,790 for three and \$23,850 for four.

Further, the [Economic Policy Institute](#) estimates the yearly cost of living for a single parent and child in the Syracuse area to be \$52,981.

"Finding employment that pays a living wage is really challenging, and part of that has to do with the mix of jobs that are available here in the community," Ottley said. "There's a lot of minimum-wage jobs, but at the same time, there's a lot of people trying to get those minimum-wage jobs. That's an across-the-board national issue, the living-wage issue."