

## **Life Happens: A Work, Class, & Access to Resources Exercise**

**Created by:** Tracy E. Ore  
*Associate Professor, Saint Cloud State University,  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology*

### **The Objectives:**

1. For families to provide their members with the basic necessities of:
  - Food
  - Clothing
  - Shelter
  - Taxes
2. For families to provide their children with the best possible education.
3. To maintain the physical and mental well being of each family member by providing:
  - Health care
  - Entertainment
  - Vacations

### **The Equipment:**

- Family Descriptions
- Cost of Living Sheets
- Life Happens Cards

### **Preparation:**

Have class members count off from 1-7. After counting off, class members should then divide into seven groups according to their respective numbers.

Each group is then given a Family Profile that indicates the make-up of the family (e.g., how many adults, children, etc.), the household income, the amount of assets, as well as any special circumstances.

### **During the Exercise:**

Each family must meet the needs of each member and develop and maintain the budget of the household. Families should calculate a monthly budget.

The instructor periodically distributes *Life Happens* cards that indicate an event or circumstance that will impact the family. Members of that particular family will have to make attempts to accommodate the events and circumstances of these cards.

The instructor acts as the government/state/and any other institution that has the responsibility of insuring the welfare and safety of children. Due to the lack of response or the irresponsibility of particular families, it may be necessary to take children into protective custody.

### **Ending the Exercise:**

The game ends after each family has had adequate time to manage their budgets, deal with their particular life circumstances (as determined by their profile and *Life Happens* cards), etc.

Each family should give an oral report describing their family (how many members, what kind of housing they live in, what their jobs are, etc.) and what an average week day and an average weekend looks like

- 
- More information about this exercise, as well as copies of *Life Happens* cards can be found at:  
<http://web.stcloudstate.edu/teore/life>

for their family. They should then explain what happened to them by way of life events, how they dealt with those events, and what the impact was on their family. The class will then discuss how well they think each family dealt with their particular situations.

### FAMILY DESCRIPTIONS

**A Note About the Families:** Income levels of the families below are based on data from the 2000 census as well as a recent occupational salary survey. The income levels of the families essentially represent median incomes in the different income quintiles and are “typical” for the occupations described. It is important to note that none of the families meet official definitions of poor or marginally poor. As a result, they do not qualify for any social services.

#### Family Profile #1

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$16,080.00

**Assets:** \$0.00

**Family Members:** 1 Adult Female  
1 Adult Male  
1 female child age 6  
1 male child age 7

**Description:** Your family lives in an apartment in a small town outside a large metropolitan area. Both adults work full-time for minimum wage (\$5.15/hour). Your employers provide no health benefits or vacation time. There is no mass transit available. The youngest child has a learning disability and requires additional tutoring outside of the public school she attends.

#### Family Profile #2

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$25,000.00

**Assets:** \$0.00

**Family Members:** 2 Adult Females  
1 male child age 6 months  
1 male teenager age 18

**Description:** Your family lives in an apartment in a large metropolitan area. One adult works as a teacher in the public schools. She and one child are covered under her employer’s insurance program. The other adult recently lost her job as an employee at a major telephone company. There is a metropolitan bus service available. The teenager is applying to go to college.

#### Family Profile #3

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$40,000.00

**Assets:** \$5,000.00 (Non-liquid)

**Family Members:** 1 Adult Female  
1 Adult Male  
3 Teenagers age 13-17

**Description:** Your family lives in a (not-yet-paid-for) house in a small town outside a large metropolitan area. One adult works full-time at a refrigerator plant. The other adult works part-time at a catalog warehouse. There is a metropolitan bus service available. The youngest child is autistic and requires an adult be home with him.

#### **Family Profile #4**

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$65,000.00

**Assets:** \$10,000.00 (Non-liquid)

**Family Members:** 1 Adult Female  
1 Adult Male  
1 female child age 4  
1 male child age 8

**Description:** Your family lives in a (not-yet-paid-for) house in a large metropolitan area. Both adults work full-time in a small business that you own. Your health insurance is provided through your business.

#### **Family Profile #5**

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$14,500.00

**Assets:** \$0.00

**Family Members:** 1 Adult Female  
1 child age 3

**Description:** Your family lives in an apartment in a suburb of a large metropolitan area. The adult works full-time as a nurse's aid in a near-by hospital. There is a metropolitan bus service available. The friend that watches your child while you work is moving away soon. You will need to make alternative arrangements.

#### **Family Profile #6**

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$140,000.00

**Assets:** \$20,000.00 (Non-liquid)

**Family Members:** 2 Adult Males  
1 teenage male age 16

**Description:** Your family lives in a (not-yet-paid-for) house in a large metropolitan area. You own two cars, one of which is paid for. Both adults work as lawyers: one as a public defender, the other in a private firm. Each employer provides health benefits. Your son is hoping to graduate early from high school and is considering traveling before attending college.

#### **Family Profile #7**

**After Tax Annual Income:** \$250,000.00

**Assets:** \$100,000.00

**Family Members:** 1 Adult Female  
1 Adult Male  
2 female children age 3 and 12  
2 male children age 17 and 18

**Description:** Your family lives in a house in a large metropolitan area. One adult serves as the president of a Bank. Health benefits are provided for your entire family through the employer. You own two cars, both of which are paid for. The other adult does not work outside the home. The oldest teenager is applying to college. The 12 year-old-girl has a learning disability and requires additional tutoring outside of the public school she attends.

## COST OF LIVING\*

### Mandatory Monthly Costs

#### FOOD

Food on sale (lower quality, mostly prepared foods):	\$100 per person
Food not on sale (higher quality, fresh vegetables, etc.):	\$175 per person

#### CLOTHING

Buying new and cleaning old	\$20.00 per person (minimum)
-----------------------------	------------------------------

#### SHELTER

Renting a 2 bedroom apartment:	\$550 (electric not included)
Renting a 3 bedroom apartment:	\$650 (electric not included)
Buying a 3 Bedroom home:	\$20,000 down, \$800/month \$1,200 annual property taxes

#### UTILITIES

Gas	\$50
Electric	\$50
Water	\$50
Phone	\$40 (minimum)

#### TRANSPORTATION

##### New Car Payment:

Lexus	\$850
Honda Civic	\$350
Ford Focus	\$225

##### Used Car

\$170 (monthly costs for car for repair and service costs.) **Note:** if you have a used car you must also purchase at least one monthly bus pass.

##### Insurance:

Package 1	\$50/month/car \$500 deductible No coverage for uninsured drivers
Package 2	\$85/month/car \$250 deductible Uninsured driver coverage

Gas: \$130/car/month (minimum)

Bus: \$24/month

---

\* Note: These figures are based on rental costs in Minnesota. You will need to adjust these figures so that they accurately reflect the cost-of-living in your area. Go to the Economic Policy Institute ([http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/datazone\\_fambud\\_budget](http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/datazone_fambud_budget)) to calculate costs in your area.

## EDUCATION

Through High School:

Public:	Free
Private: Religious High School	\$3,000/year
Prep School	\$7,000/year for day student \$16,000/year for boarding student

College:

Community	\$2,800/year
State	\$7,400/year
Ivy League	\$29,000/year
College Application Fees	\$40.00/college

## HEALTH INSURANCE

Package 1	\$150/family \$500 one-time emergency room deductible \$20/office visit 50% off prescriptions
Package 2	\$275/family No emergency room deductible \$10/office visit \$10 co-pay on prescriptions
No Health Coverage	\$30/person for miscellaneous medical costs

## CHILD CARE

Basic care (no activities or educational programs):	\$250/month
Extended care (activities and educational programs):	\$750/month

## MISCELLANEOUS PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

Costs for everything from toothpaste to home repairs.	\$81.25/person
---	----------------

**STATE SALES TAXES** **\$25.00/person**

**CREDIT CARD BILLS** \$50.00/month (minimum payment)

### **Optional Expenses**

Cable	\$50/month
Broadband Internet	\$30.00/month
DVD/Video Rental	\$3.00/DVD/video
Going out to the movies	\$15.00/person
Donations (religious organizations, charities)	You determine amount.
Personal (haircuts, cosmetics)	You determine amount.
Gym membership	\$40/month
Pet food/Pet Care	\$40/month

### **Other Costs You May Incur Due to “Life Happens” Events**

Live-in nurse:	\$300/week
Physician (office visit only)	\$75
X-rays and other tests	\$300 per x-ray/test
Hospital stay	\$300/day
Pre-natal visits	\$100.00 (if uninsured)
Braces	\$1,500
Car Repairs	\$150
Plumber	\$100/hour (3hour minimum)
Hotel	\$75/night
Motel	\$35/night
Dining out (fancy)	\$25/person
Dining out (fast food)	\$5/person