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We could rescue children from poverty if we cared enough

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For the past month the world has been watching the struggles and triumph of the 33 miners in Chile. The story was one of courage, technology, unity and combined contributions from all over the globe.

As the miners were brought forth, one by one, I saw minute by minute updates on my friend's Facebook pages and on the news. And we all rejoiced when the last miner and their rescuers were free. What an incredible story of hope, ingenuity and the power of working together to achieve a goal. It gives me hope seeing what can be accomplished when people set their minds to something.

Several weeks ago the Census Bureau released data on child poverty in America. The number of children living in poverty is now one in five, and this is America. In Utah 105,000 children live in poverty, almost 17,000 more than a year ago.

The fact that significantly more children are living in poverty in Utah than a year ago received several news stories and editorials, and a great editorial cartoon from Pat Bagley. We heard how children who grow up poor are more likely to have poor health, to miss more school and fall behind, and to have children of their own who also grow up poor. But now it has once again been placed in the back of our minds and out of our day-to-day concerns.

Every day, poor children in Utah are struggling to overcome incredible odds. Like the miners in Chile, they are hungry, scared and in pain. I wonder what would happen if the plight of these children in our nation and our state became part of our social consciousness. What would happen if every adult in our country put the plight of poor children uppermost in their minds for even just one month.

What if child poverty were front and center every time you booted up your search engine, and updates on what was happening each day in the life of poor children were scrolled across our TV sets and were the top stories each night on our evening news. Would the lives of these children and their families suddenly become real to us, would we want to know more and keep the issue in the forefront of our psyche?

Would the country, at last, make ending child poverty a priority? What could we accomplish if the nation put its combined efforts into rescuing children who are living in poverty?

No child in the United States of America should ever feel the pangs of hunger. No child in America should be forced to live on the street. America has always risen to the challenge of ensuring a brighter future for all our children. It's time we rise to that challenge again.

There are real solutions to the problem of child poverty. But once again, like the miners' rescue, we would have to recognize the problem, have the convictions to act on the solutions and create the kind of solidarity that enables us to take the necessary steps. But it would take the political will to accomplish it and that would mean that people would have to stand up and speak out on this important issue.

We would have to care about children we have never met and about their families. We would have to create a more meaningful collective consciousness that puts child poverty on the same playing field as a natural disaster and expect miracles to happen. I know that it can. We saw it happen last week.

Terry Haven is KIDS COUNT director for the nonprofit Voices for Utah Children.