

Living without money

1 LEAD-IN You are going to watch a short trailer for a film about Heidemarie Schwermer, who has lived without money for the last 16 years. Before you watch, try to guess the answers to the following questions.

- 1 Why does she live without money?
- 2 How does she manage to live? Think about food, accommodation, transport, clothes etc.
- 3 Do you think she is happy with her lifestyle? Why/why not?

Now watch the video and read the subtitles in English (the film is in German). Check your ideas.



2 VOCABULARY

1 Which three words have similar meanings? What does the other word mean?

swapping bartering house-sitting making payment in kind

2 Explain the difference in meaning between these words and expressions.

worthless penniless materialistic short of cash

3 Explain the meaning of these words describing people

consumer pensioner disciple commune dweller urbanite passer-by refugee

3 READING Now follow the link to read the article about Heidemarie from a British newspaper. Add more details to your answers from exercise 1.



<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/happiness-is-a-life-without-money-in-rich-germany-2341025.html>



4 Read the text again more carefully Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

1 The author considers Heidemarie Schwermer to be
 A quite aggressive
 B rather attractive
 C highly religious
 D extremely poor

2 When Heidemarie's family first arrived in Germany
 A They were relatively well off
 B They had no money at all
 C They were quite materialistic
 D They had lost everything in a flood

3 Heidemarie's swapping network was particularly attractive to students and people who
 A had quit their job.
 B enjoyed housesitting
 C were retired
 D were divorced

4 What did Heidemarie NOT do in 1996?
 A leave where she was living
 B get rid of everything she owned
 C start a new career
 D stop paying for health insurance

5 How did Heide's friends and family feel when she gave up money?
 A uninterested
 B confident
 C furious
 D anxious

6 Heidemarie pays for where she is currently staying by
 A Using her pension
 B Doing odd jobs
 C Using money from her books
 D Selling her possessions

7 Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a source of Heide's food?
 A Growing her own food
 B Food which has been thrown away
 C Food grown by a friend
 D Food given away by a charity

8 Heidemarie hopes her actions will encourage people to
 A Stop being afraid about life
 B Grow their own vegetables
 C Think about how they are living
 D Join her in communal living

5 SPEAKING Work in pairs or small groups. Which of the following comments on the article do you agree or disagree with? Why?



Lucas 2 days ago

She isn't living without money, she's just living on other people's money. If everyone tried to do that, the economy would collapse! It's just unrealistic.



Maddy 2 days ago

What's noticeable is that she doesn't just live without money; she earns money from her books and has a pension, but she chooses to give her money away to those who need it. And she works for her accommodation. She's almost certainly contributing more than she is taking from others. Good for her.



Barb 1 day ago

I couldn't do it myself, but I admire her. She's making a good point about all the things we all think we really 'need'. Most of us work very long hours just so that we can buy stuff that we don't really need.



Louise 1 day ago

It's easy for her to live without money in a rich country like Germany, where everyone has plenty. I don't think she'd find it so easy in a poorer country.



6 Do you agree with Heidemarie that things aren't working at the moment? If so, what do you think we should do about it?

Key

1

1 Why does she live without money?

Because she feels society doesn't work the way it is. 'Money distracts us from what's important.'

2 How does she manage to live? Think about food, accommodation, transport, clothes etc.
People are happy to have her to stay and send her a ticket to travel there.

3 Do you think she is happy with her lifestyle? Why/why not?
'After my apartment was emptied, I jumped around for joy.'

2

1 Swapping, bartering and making payment in kind all refer to exchanging goods or services rather than using money. House sitting is when someone lives in your house while you are away, in order to look after it. People are usually paid to do this.

2 Worthless means that something has no value (not necessarily referring to a financial value), penniless means you have no money at all, while short of cash means that you don't have very much or enough. If someone is materialistic they are over-concerned with money and material goods.

3 A consumer is someone who buys something, a pensioner receives money from the state when they are too old to work, a disciple is someone who follows a great teacher or leader (usually religious), a commune dweller lives with other people (not family), sharing work and possessions, an urbanite lives in a city or town, a passer-by is someone walking past on the street and a refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because of persecution or other serious problems.

3

1 Why does she live without money?

"Giving up money gave me quality of life, inner wealth and freedom,"

Born during World War II in what was then East Prussia, Schwermer as a child joined the flood of refugees expelled by Russian forces. Her family arrived in Germany penniless.

"I saw how you were considered to be even less than worthless if you did not have possessions or money," she said.

In the late 1960s, she spent a year in Chile, and "I saw extreme poverty there."

'....that was not enough, I wanted to do more for the world," she explains.

2 How does she manage to live? Think about food, accommodation, transport, clothes etc.
since 1996, she has lived by a unique scheme of swaps and barter

She found a health food store in Dortmund that gave her discarded produce, and now in Wilhelmshaven a friend sometimes hands her vegetables from her garden. If need be, she occasionally seeks the help of a soup kitchen.

In return, she takes out the trash and mows the lawn.

3 Do you think she is happy with her lifestyle? Why/why not?

"Giving up money gave me quality of life, inner wealth and freedom,"



4

1 B the elegant pensioner with a warm smile

2 B Her family arrived in Germany penniless.

3 C Pensioners and students answered the call in droves.

4 C In 1996, she took the decisive leap: she quit her job, moved out of her rented home, gave away all her possessions, closed her bank account, cancelled her health insurance

5 D "My daughter was worried to death, my friends nearly cried anxious my friends nearly cried.

6 B In return, she takes out the trash and mows the lawn.

7 A She found a health food store in Dortmund that gave her discarded produce, and now in Wilhelmshaven a friend sometimes hands her vegetables from her garden. If need be, she occasionally seeks the help of a soup kitchen (a soup kitchen is a place where poor people can go to be given simple food).

8 C Schwermer said she is not seeking disciples but perhaps "to help people reflect on their way of life and their relations with others."

Notes

The lead-in video is in German, so, if your students speak German, you might prefer to play this with the sound down.

The link to the lead-in video is via Youtube, but if this is difficult to access, the same video is available on Livingwithoutmoney.org, a website all about Heidemarie and the film made about her.

The text from The Independent newspaper is not reproduced on the worksheet for copyright reasons.

This lesson could provide a good companion piece to Unit 5 in Real Life Advanced, Pearson (see publications page on my website), which features Mark Boyle. He also lives without money, but takes a different attitude, living in a caravan in the woods and being self-sufficient.

Mark Boyle has also made a TED Talk at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PuyYVVVkIM>

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