



the
**POVERTY
ALLIANCE**

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

**Stigma and Poverty:
We can solve it**

**Rachel Thomson
Campaigns & Policy Assistant
The Poverty Alliance**

THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

- Formally established in 1992 – 25 years old last year
- Membership organisations – Third sector organisations, trade unions, community groups, faith groups and local authorities
- What we do
 - Campaigns
 - Policy
 - Research
 - Fieldwork – CAAG
 - Projects: Menu for Change
 - Living Wage Accreditation



CAUSES OF POVERTY

- Low incomes and high costs

SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY

- Higher incomes and lower costs

WHAT WE PUSH FOR

- Scottish Living Wage
- Scottish Social Security Bill
- Broader welfare reform
- Top up of Child Benefit
- Poverty-aware work practices
- Free school breakfasts

- An end to the need food banks
- Positive representations of people experiencing poverty
- Better childcare provision



Fair, equal
and responsive

DESIGNING A SOCIAL SECURITY
SYSTEM FOR SCOTLAND



PROGRESS

- Ambitious Child Poverty targets set by the Scottish Government
- Dignity and Respect – key pillars of the new social security system
- Recent research from FrameWorks Institute shows how narratives can be shifted
- Narrative is shifting, but needs more work



Talking about
POVERTY

THE STIGMA OF POVERTY

jobcentreplus

- Job centre
- Housing
- Education
- Health



WHAT PEOPLE THINK



- Evidence suggests that public attitudes to poverty have hardened in recent years – both in terms of what poverty is and what causes poverty
- However, it is important to emphasise that public attitudes are often inconsistent or contradictory
- Public opinion varies according to the context in which poverty is being discussed
- To change public opinion, we need to shift the narrative

Anti-Stigma Campaigning

- The Stick Your Labels Campaign was born in 2010 out of the EPIC project
- A direct result of what was raised by people experiencing poverty
- Re-launched in 2015 with a new series of pledges
- Over 60 organisations in Scotland have given their support including all five of Scotland's party leaders
- Clear shift in narrative as a result
- Currently undergoing a re-framing process and will be back!



the
**POVERTY
ALLIANCE**

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

- *'we must treat the causes of poverty at their source...whether that's debt, family break-down, educational failure or addiction'* (David Cameron, 2012)
- *'We've lost a lot of our cooking skills and poor people don't know how to cook'* (Baroness Jenkins, 2014)
- *'As Ed Miliband has reminded us, "the clue is in the name". We are the party born of the self-respect and solidarity of working communities.'* (Rachel Reeves, 2014)
- *'You cannot say that you're struggling on £50 a week with a widescreen TV in the background!'* (Twitter user re: Benefits St, 2016)
- *'You need to live in the real world - the benefit system which I support gets abused. Those crying poverty do so because they'd rather spend our cash on Sky, booze, fags etc rather than the important things'* (Twitter user re: Foodbank usage, 2017)

THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

- Evidence suggests that the stigmatisation of people in receipt of benefits has negative impacts on their well-being and may reduce benefit take up. This weakens the welfare state, something we may all need one day.
- By blaming individuals for their poverty, we are ignoring the real causes and failing to hold Governments to account.
- In order to tackle poverty effectively, it is important to get the message across that people experiencing poverty are people just like anybody else.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *I felt small, simply because I was on benefits did not mean I should have no choice, I want to be happy' (SWF)*
- *'Being on low wages, sometimes you feel judged by other people. People who work in better jobs- jobs that maybe they've studied for- they often work the same amount of hours as I do, but they get paid a lot more. I think sometimes people in other better paid jobs will look at me, and maybe think that I'm useless or not that clever'. (In work poverty)*
- *'It's no like me, I like providing for myself, I like doing the shopping myself. So coming in here and begging was a bit embarrassing you know. But at the end of the day you've got to do it, if you want to eat you've got to do it' (Foodbank research)*

In groups please divide the cards into language that is **progressive**, language that is **problematic** but can be powerful, and language that should **never be used** when talking about people living in poverty.



the
**POVERTY
ALLIANCE**

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

THE ANSWERS!

Language that should never be used:

- The poor / Undeserving poor / Deserving poor (as this implies an undeserving poor)
- Work-shy
- Underclass
- Welfare dependency / handouts / benefit culture / Languishing on benefit
- Sponger, scroungers
- Sink estates

USE CAUTIOUSLY!

Some language has the potential to make either a positive or a negative contribution to challenging poverty and must be used with care.

- Poor people
- Impoverished
- Poverty-stricken
- Poor places / Deprived places
- Peripheral housing estates / Estates
- Marginalised / Peripheral / Hidden
- The downtrodden
- Hard working families / hard working majority (as this implies that there are work-shy families)
- Benefit cheats

Respectful and progressive language

Some language emphasises that the problem is the condition of poverty (rather than the problem being the people who experience poverty). For example:

- People experiencing poverty
- Areas with deprivation / areas with poverty
- Low income living / living life on a low income




WHY IT MATTERS



- Negative attitudes about people on low income and the benefits system weakens the welfare state – this is not good for any of us
- Changing attitudes can be a condition for changing policy and legislation
- Stigma has a real and damaging impact on people living on low incomes
- Time wasted blaming individuals for poverty is better spent holding the government to account

WHAT NEXT?

- Poverty Alliance is working with around ten local authorities to develop actions to tackle the stigma of poverty
 - Working with young people to prevent negative attitudes towards people experiencing poverty developing
 - Work to encourage other organisations, particularly those which deliver to services, to come on board
 - Get in touch!
- 

Contacts

Rachel Thomson, Campaigns & Policy Assistant,
Rachel.thomson@povertyalliance.org

www.povertyalliance.org

Twitter: @povertyalliance

