

Q4 Newsletter

Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission

PETERBOROUGH POVERTY TRUTH UPDATE

We are now coming to the end of the first year of the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission, and what a year it has been! Since our last newsletter we have formed a strong Community and Civic Commission who have gradually started to come together to form relationships.

The national gathering of Poverty Truth Commissions across the country took place in October, along with a collaborative visit to ARU's Social Work department and not one but two launches of the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission; one of which has been dubbed as the 'people's' launch and the other the formal launch on 23rd November at Kings Gate Community Church.

Underpinning all of this work is the PTC motto, ***Nothing about us, without us, is for us*** and this has been our guiding principle for every meeting, every discussion, and every event. We have a plan in place for 2024 and this will be taken forward by the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission which has now been formed and led by our Empowerers who will determine of the priorities we will be taking forward.

Poverty Truth Highlights: National Gathering of PTCs



Every year the Poverty Truth Network hosts a gathering of Commissions from across the country, and we attended this year's.

The strapline for the gathering was “sharing the struggle, holding the hope”. That word “hope” is very important; a Poverty Truth Commission is a process where people come together and imagine that things might improve, but it is the process that is important, not setting specific outcomes. Creating a space to hold that hope and share that struggle is what Poverty Truth is all about.

We spent most of the three days (apart from the meals, because there's no meeting without eating) in a large circle of about fifty people. The Poverty Truth Network never does anything without demonstrating the same values they talk about. Our first exercise together was to have a think and write down on a small piece of paper what our hope for the next few days was, what we wanted to get out of it. We took those hopes, and things that were going well, and put them into a newspaper frontpage all about our commission, including a snazzy picture of a rocket ship.

We spent the rest of the three days just being together, sharing experiences and stories, talking about what things were going well for our Commissions and which things we'd found challenging. There were a lot of successes to share and we look forward to going next year and telling them all about our launch and the rest of our work!

Poverty Truth Highlights: Community & Civic Commission



The first meeting of some of the Empowerers and the Civic Community took place on 11th October at the Willow Cafe in Peterborough Central Park. This was a chance for our two groups to start forming relationships with each other in an informal and lovely setting. It's a credit to how far some of our community Empowerers have come in their confidence to meet people from the Civic community and to easily mix over food, conversation and shared experiences. The Civic Commissioners who attended represented Women's Aid, Peterborough City Council, Opportunity Peterborough, and the Integrated Neighbourhood System.

We didn't have to do any prodding or make any speeches or come up with any ruses to get people talking to each other. It was just really nice and natural and human and within minutes of people arriving there was a lively conversation and the beginnings of our work for the next year. Above all, it was equal and gave us an insight into what can be achieved when people are open and genuinely interested in making this project work.

I didn't quite realise how far we'd come until I looked across the room and realised that this was it, this was the full Poverty Truth Commission. In miniature, yes, but this is how we'll make change.

Poverty Truth Highlights: Visit to ARU Social Work Department



Sarah Collins from ARU invited us to speak to their Social Work students about what a PTC is and what we've done so far. James and Sara (without an h) went down to have a chat with them about how we work.

We didn't go with anything prepared, we just turned up ready to have a chat and be present, the PTC way. We introduced ourselves, gave them our elevator pitch, and then let them ask us questions. The students were super engaged and had a lot of questions that ranged from day-to-day things like, "How do you recruit commissioners?" and "What issues do people want to focus on in Peterborough?", to big questions like, "Why do you use the word poverty? How do you define it?" They also made sure to ask Sara a lot about how she came to be part of the PTC, and how she'd found the experience so far.

I mentioned in a previous blog a resource the Poverty Truth Network is developing to show to first year health students so they are more aware of lived experiences of struggle that people might be presenting to them with. That filled me with hope, and so did this chance to speak with the students at ARU Peterborough and their interest in people's experiences of the struggle against poverty.

Poverty Truth Highlights: The 'people's' Launch



It was our boss, Gill, who referred this event as The People's Launch, and that's what it felt like. The community at St. Marks Church on Lincoln Road told us how disappointed they were that they couldn't make the date of our full launch due to it clashing with their Community Hub. We have been regular visitors to the hub over the past year and, because of their endless support for the project, we decided to have a pre-launch/rehearsal there and open it up to the people who use the services of St Mark's. It took place at St Mark's Church on the 8th November.

There were a few nerves, but it all came together beautifully.

In total there were over 50 people from our local community attending and we were lucky to have vegetarian food provided by the local Jai Hind Women's Co-operative. The atmosphere was wonderful. The energy was so generous and positive, exactly what a Poverty Truth Commission is about. James said he had never felt anything like it. There were lots of tears and as much laughter; just a real moment of us being together and sharing something. The launch ended with the song, *I Wish*, which was devised and put together by Roger, a volunteer at St Mark's which will, I hope, be available on YouTube soon.

At the end, Community Lead Femi said a few very inspirational words about holding on to the humanity in yourself and in others, about how behind every poverty statistic there are real people with real names

and real stories, and that we should never forget that. She also highlighted that everything is a team effort and paid tribute to her volunteers.

Poverty Truth Highlights: The Main Launch



The main launch of the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission took place on the 23rd November at Kings Gate Community Church. Following on from the success and feedback from the 'peoples' launch we were confident that it would go well but in reality it exceeded expectations. In total over 65 people attended and these represented the diversity of our organisations and communities across Peterborough. We re-created the informality of St Marks with everyone on first name terms and the opportunity to contribute to the word cloud for their thoughts on poverty.

The launch itself went seamlessly but the real stars were the utterly incredible contributions from the Empowerers. Stories about real lived experience of poverty were told in film, read statements, recited poetry, Roger's song; a real mix of different experiences and ways to express them. Like St Mark's the energy was generous and positive and people listened with intent and genuine empathy. Everyone in the room listened with an open heart and a generous spirit. It was really special.

We invited Jonathan, our chairman, and Bella Saltmarsh, the Mayoress, to respond to these stories. Jonathan quickly picked up on something that we've all noticed as this project has grown; that it's often

the people who have the least who give the most. This is so true. Our group of Empowerers are made up of exceptionally caring people who are more concerned with giving back to community than helping themselves. Bella then congratulated them all on their courage in telling their stories and agreed with Jonathan.

We included some civic perspective from someone who has been part of our process already; Danielle Black, the local Integrated Neighbourhood Programme Manager, talked about her PTC experience. Danielle again congratulated the Empowerers for their bravery and talked about how totally committed she was to this way of working to make people's lived experiences and needs a core part of the way services are developed.

Everyone went away with a packet of wildflower seeds which represented the idea that if you plant a seed and then it is nurtured, it can grow into a flower, a plant or even a tree. The Poverty Truth Commission starts with an idea, a thought or a suggestion which, if nurtured and supported can grow into something tangible that will make a difference to many many people. Each packet of seeds had our launch strapline:

The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories

Jonathan's Thoughts



“Nothing about us, without us, is for us”, is the ethos of every Poverty Truth Commission. The idea is simple; that lasting social change only happens when those who experience the struggle participate in generating that change. This core principle is at the very heart of PCVS and drives everything we do.

Our community is the heartbeat of our city, and within its rhythm, there exists a core strength that comes from the diverse tapestry of cultures, experiences, challenges, and triumphs. It is our responsibility, as members of this dynamic community, to ensure that every voice is not only heard but truly listened to. The PTC represents a journey on which we are embarking that goes beyond rhetoric and statistics – a journey that delves deep and in a very personal way, into the lived experiences of those among us who confront the harsh realities of poverty daily.

As we launch this commission, let us all approach this endeavour with open hearts and open minds. Let us be inspired by the stories we hear, moved by the struggles we understand, and motivated by the possibilities that lie within our grasp when we unite as a community.

Poverty Truth Network: Amplifying local issues



Peterborough is part of a larger network of Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK with some being established for many years. Sometimes issues arising for local areas reflect the need for change at a national level. Amplifying these issues is part of the Poverty Truth Network's objectives who act as a lobby for challenging and changing current policy on issues such as, accessing services, mental health provision, housing, and cost of living. So what comes out of our own Poverty Truth Commission plays an important contribution to the wider need for change and to potentially affect so many people in need.

Word Clouds

A large part of the conversation we've been having as a PTC has been around what poverty is, what we think it is, and what it is to us. We have spoken to a lot of people who have struggled against poverty - but don't identify as being "in" poverty themselves. We wanted to put this question out to the people coming to our launches. There are similarities, but also differences, in how the two groups conceived of poverty.



1 - The word cloud from our "people's" launch



2 - The word cloud from our main launch

Contact Us



3 - Cheryl McGuire, our Civic and Business Facilitator



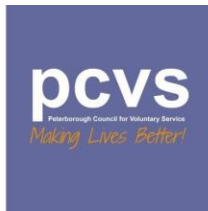
4 - James Farson, our Community Facilitator

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Who We Are

poverty
truth
network



The Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission is hosted by PCVS, supported by the Poverty Truth Network, and funded by the National Lottery.

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