

BIRMINGHAM POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

A WINDOW ON OUR CONVERSATIONS 2017-2019



**POVERTY
TRUTH**

BIRMINGHAM



What is Birmingham Poverty Truth?

‘A group of people who have some experience of various kinds of poverty, in a room with people who have some position of influence in a community and in a space where there’s kind of no hierarchy and everyone’s allowed to be human together and share experience and work on how we make things better together. That’s how I tend to describe it.’

TESTIFYING COMMISSIONER

An Upside Down Commission

The idea of a commission is not new. Where a problem or issue is identified, a group of people, usually professionals in the field, are tasked with exploring it and then making a set of recommendations. A good commission would involve some sort of consultation with the people affected by the issue, but consultation is usually as far as it goes.

A Poverty Truth Commission turns this model on its head and starts with the people who really know what the sharp end of poverty looks like because they live it.

The aim is not a set of recommendations but a set of relationships, in the hope that those relationships would encourage and enable those with influence to operate differently in their sphere.

So Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission started, by bringing together a group of people who have lived experience of poverty in Birmingham and were willing to share their stories in the knowledge that their experiences

reflected the lives of others living in the city.

The group met over several months sharing stories, building trust, forming friendships, identifying commonalities and through facilitated conversation discussing what they would like to say to people of influence, those with power and authority, so that they could better understand life from their perspectives.

In October 2017 that group, known as the Testifying Commissioners, invited people of influence in the city the business, public, faith and third sector, together with friends and family to come to a launch event and hear some of their experiences, told in their own words and in a variety of different ways.

At the end of the launch event influential people from business, university, media, housing, police, education and third sector accepted an invitation to join as City Leader Commissioners with the Testifying Commissioners to form the full Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission.

“Experiences of poverty, its causes, roots, impacts on people’s lives are complicated. The thing is though, no single label can fit someone’s experience. There’s no such thing as a single issue life. No human being fits neatly into a box, however hard we try, or how much easier it would be for the system. However many words we try and use, they’re just pieces of a jigsaw too complicated to boil down into a single image or statement. The experiences shared here are just single pieces of that jigsaw. But everything you see and hear is true”

BIRMINGHAM POVERTY TRUTH LAUNCH

Throughout 2018 the Commission met every two weeks to share personal stories, hear different perspectives and explore more deeply the themes that emerged. Three key themes were:

- Child Poverty and Education
- Housing and Homelessness
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

During the Commission we hosted four Conversation Events on our themes to which a small number of key senior strategic leaders were invited to come, listen and share in the conversation.

A key to Poverty Truth Commissions is creating a space where everyone is equal, and the experiences of all the Commissioners are listened to respected. This creates an important space for trust and honesty to grow.

“One of the really important things about Poverty Truth is that there’s no hierarchy. It doesn’t matter what your job is or how important you are, or what your life experience is, when you’re in this room you’re all equal, and the intention is we influence each other by understanding each other’s stories”

POVERTY TRUTH FACILITATOR

Our conversations have been uniquely human – funny, poignant, vulnerable and honest – where real life has been shared in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect.

“I felt really moved by all the testimonies and the sharing and I wanted to tip my hat to everybody for sharing because it’s the strength of coming to these sessions and its really very moving and thank you for it”

CITY LEADER COMMISSIONER

In compiling this report our main purpose is to amplify the words of truth that have been spoken in Commission sessions. Our primary sources are audio and written recordings of our conversations with Commissioners and others who have participated which have been précised for this report.

It is impossible to really do justice to the depth of conversation, relationship, understanding and impact that Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission has had on those involved. This report is an attempt to give you a window on our conversations, in the hope that its impact might continue to ripple beyond this Commission.

Truth about Poverty, Childhood and Education

“50p can be the straw that breaks the camel’s back...”

Everyone wants the best for their children, to provide all the things they need for a good education, giving them the best chances to grow up, develop and have a full and flourishing life.

Members of the Commission shared some of their experiences supporting their children through school on low incomes and tight budgets, whilst trying to navigate benefits, housing and asylum systems. The challenges of the costs of school uniform, the hidden costs

of schooling such as trips and non-uniform days; their concerns about their children being disadvantaged, stigmatised or made fun of because they cannot afford what others can and what the schools appear to be asking them to provide.

Other Commissioners shared something of their experiences of their own childhood and how poverty and negative experiences of school had affected their lives in the long term.

Snapshots of stories and experiences

“My budget doesn’t last the week. On the surface we’re doing ok but when you look down its just a tangled mass of numbers. I’m always counting. Then there’s a non-uniform day. The kids love them, fun dressing up, different clothes. But at 50p each, that’s £2, and I just don’t have it. It’s my bread and milk money, or its bus fare, or I have it, but I must pay it to somebody else. Whatever the reason I don’t have it.”

“I have a son who has ADD. He avoids going on school trips. He blames his behaviour, his illness – says the stress makes it too difficult. We accepted that, but then we found out that the real reason is that he knows we can’t afford it.”

“The cost of school uniform is like having to afford two Christmases. You start shopping at the beginning of the summer holiday, so you can pace yourself over the six weeks. To do that you have to take money out of the food budget, or less on the electric. But this stuff is essential, so you have to afford it.”

“I went to a tiny village school and from there to one of the biggest comprehensives in the country. I felt pretty isolated and scared a lot of the time. I was disruptive in class, attention seeking behaviour. I didn’t need any help or effort academically, so it wasn’t picked up that I didn’t have any friends. At college I spent time smoking bongs over the road in the park. I got a university place and started using heroin in my last year. I got a graduate job as a Big Issue salesman and lived in squats.”

“I had a good upbringing. We had a large family. We were very poor, but I enjoyed going to school, I had friends, I never missed school. When starting secondary school my friends all went to the bigger catholic school, but my Nan couldn’t afford a bus pass for me to go to there. So I went to a local school and I just didn’t fit in. I just used to wag school. Anything to avoid school. So no education. I didn’t know any better. I went to prison for theft & shoplifting. In and out of jobs in between. That’s where life took me, that’s where my education took me”

Reflections from our conversations

“Headteachers are dealing with what humanity says is important vs what Ofsted says is important”

“A lot of decision makers in school are not facing the day to day budget challenges that a lot of parents are”

“Uniform is a sacred cow, that can be a useful tool for a school, but experiences of parents struggling with costs, some unnecessary, needs to be shared.”

“We realise that you’re not expecting us to pass a bill – but we do have influencing skills. We have access to hundreds of head teachers, and some of your stories should be heard by them.”

“There is not a single education system anymore – schools are quite autonomous which can be a positive or negative in terms of supporting struggling families, depending on the pressure on the leadership team.”

“It is important for leaders in school to be completely intelligent to the different needs of different pupils in school”



Impact of our conversations

The experience of meeting with Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission prompted feedback to schools Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) and the City Council's Children and Young People Directorate (CYPD). The following are extracts from their publications:

“Hearing the voices of people who live at the sharp end of poverty in Birmingham describe their experiences of our schools was incredibly powerful. The compelling conclusion for me was how much we need each other to learn to do things differently. The work of the Commission had so effectively organised these voices to make the conversation neither a battle nor a guilt trip, but an absolutely invaluable chance for us as leaders to learn. From non-uniform days, to trips and IT access, but most of all, our obsession with school uniform, there are a host of reasons we have for learning to put the poorest at the centre of how we do things.” **BEP**

“The common link is the delimiting, corrosive effect of family poverty which can limit inclusion. Many schools ‘go that extra mile and more’ to support families that are cash poor but there are some quick wins that don’t cost anything. The members of the Commission know that we don’t have the direct power to make some of the changes that would make so much difference here. But we do have influencing skills and, let’s be very direct here: the cost of many schools’ uniforms that must be bought from specialist providers and the accompanying PE kit cause major trauma for families. It is the difference between a blazer that costs £11 in the supermarket and £37.95 from a specialist supplier. A third of children in Birmingham live in poverty and surely such excessive costs can be removed from their family budgets with a bit of thought?” **CYPD**

As a result of the conversation some of our education stories were filmed and shown to 400 Head Teachers in Birmingham and a new Church of England secondary school has chosen a local cheaply sourced school uniform.

Truth about Poverty, Mental Health and Wellbeing

“Mental Health has affected me or someone I know and love”

Every member of Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission (BPTC) acknowledges this to be true in their own life. The theme is deeply personal and therefore emotive.

While people from across all spheres of society are experiencing mental health, it is more likely to be experienced by those in poverty and exacerbated by the ongoing pressures of their lives.

Our conversations about mental health have involved stories of the impact of domestic violence, isolation, and addiction; trying to navigate complex and seemingly broken systems to access support; presenting mental health conditions judged as ‘aggressive behaviour’ resulting in refusal of help; the stigma that still exists around some mental health conditions and misdiagnosis.

We talked about feeling that the health system seems to operate in silos, one part of the system not knowing what another is doing and not communicating effectively.

Some of our Commissioners noted mental health wasn’t such an issue in their countries of origin, despite poverty and adversity, where culture is more communal, and people have relationships with all their neighbours – we wondered that said about the UK?

We talked about trauma experiences and about treatment; is medication too quickly prescribed as the answer? We noted that talking therapies are under resourced, waiting lists are long, and an overwhelming sense that our mental health services are vastly underfunded.

While our conversations have been deep, honest and rich it has been a challenge for the Commission to identify what to focus on and to determine ways in which we could have an influence.

We held two Conversation Events on this theme one with guests from the City Council and the other with guests from different parts of the NHS.



Snapshots of stories and experiences

“I had poor mental health – the symptom of that was my drug use. It was treated as a dependency on a substance which was actually a fairly small part of what I needed help with.”

“I think the society here builds isolation... In my country you cannot live in the street not knowing your neighbour. I live for four years here in my road, but my neighbour... the door is always closed, even during summer. Isolation. It brings anxiety.”

“Domestic violence just does something to you. It breaks you.”

“I attended a hospital appointment. The girl at reception noticed I suffer with Mental Health and all of a sudden she started speaking to me differently – almost as if I’m not a person.”

“Putting myself by cash machines and begging for money has had a large impact on who I am and how I interact with other people.”

“That’s where my using and my mental health took me, and no-one would listen because of the drugs and the drink... There wasn’t a lot of help out there”

“I was referred to a community mental health team for some psychiatric help. I realised after the appointment that the interview was an assessment process. I understand the shortage of resources and they can only take people with a certain severity, so I obviously slipped under the bar. What was really upsetting was that this was not explained to me. I was expecting to start the process of getting psychiatric help and walked away with a leaflet for cooking classes.”

Reflections from our conversations

“The stuff that we’ve talked about here over the last 12 months has really made me reflect and think about how to operate differently in the system”

“When we talked about mental health, and EVERYBODY in the room had a story to share; and the inequality in the response – the guilt I carry because my family member was treated incredibly well and fast – I had the privilege of getting that but there are people in the room who never had that experience – there is unconscious bias that exists within our services”

“So often we ‘do to’ – and this can be a catastrophic disaster”

“As a doctor most of us go into it because we want to do something good. As doctors we get taught about health and biology, but we don’t get taught about humanity. This is what we learn, if we choose, over years. What all your stories illustrate is that you can’t separate the two.”

“We know Mental Health is a big thing, everyone’s talking about it and the government is keen on saying how much money they are putting in but it’s very over simplified. So people with serious enduring mental illness are getting certain help, people with fairly simple psychological difficulties are getting some sort of help but a lot of people in the middle are not getting help because we don’t know how to provide it. Doctors are trying to help but we haven’t got the tools.”

“Dehumanisation trickles all the way down through systems to staff to ‘service users’. The language we use has a real impact on this –how ‘human’ they’re treated – joining things up is one of the biggest, most urgent challenges we face.”

“The voice of lived experience in the city never gets heard... I’m wondering how we make this part of the process and put it at the heart of what we do in a more meaningful way”

Truth about Poverty, Housing and Homelessness

“When you get in the system you get mugged about”

The conversations about housing and homelessness were wide ranging and involved discussion of the deeply complex social housing system, complicated online forms, experiences at housing offices, long waiting lists, lack of appropriate social housing, poor supported and temporary accommodation, experiences of rough sleeping, difficulties getting off the streets, the relationship between poor housing and homelessness, and the challenges of getting appropriate adaptations to council housing.

Snapshots of stories and experiences

“I found myself sleeping on the streets in Birmingham. I went to get help. They asked what they could do for me and said, ‘Do you have a current benefit claim’ I said, ‘well not exactly, I’ve tried to claim’ and he just said, ‘there’s nothing we can do for you then’. I was so desperate I said, ‘I’m sleeping on the streets, every night I go to sleep and I’m not sure I’m going to wake up again’.”

“When you sleep rough you can’t build up stuff and things get stolen all the time”

“Often its safer on the streets than in a hostel”

“I sold the Big Issue, and it saved my life. Overall the kindness I felt was fantastic.”

“My experience is through the asylum-seeking system. In one year, I was moved three times, to three totally different cities. You don’t have any choice – they tell you you’re moving and any time you refuse, they kick you out. They left me as a destitute asylum seeker for four years. A refugee charity gave me a place in a house”



“I filled in a homeless application and they said ‘but you’re not homeless’, so I said ‘but I will again next week’, they said ‘you’ll have to do it again then’ That’s been my rotation for six years, it just crushes you”

“Years ago, you had more faith in the council that you would get a property eventually. Now it’s a bidding system; you have to bid on a daily basis for something that is so essential – its degrading”

“Going to arranged viewings, there would be a group of people all being told to arrive somewhere together, five or six people who are in competition with each other viewing a flat together. And there’s a lot at stake for everyone – it’s potentially a home. I found that whole process really uncomfortable”.

“Spending a huge amount of time on hold with Universal Credit and being the kind of go-between between them and the Council, both saying they weren’t responsible for paying my housing, and feeling really frustrated and desperate at points.”

“I became disabled seven years ago. We live in a council house, and we were told that there weren’t any available disabled properties, so we decided to go through OT specialists for adaptations to the house. We had to take it up with our MP, who finally got us the right referral. After six years of fighting we finally got what we needed.”

Reflections from our conversations

“The reality with social housing is that we have a queue with 10,000 people but there are probably only about 4,000 properties, so how do you manage the queue and how do you make 6,000 people disappointed? how then do you say to that queue who deserves the houses? Once you are at that level fairness is almost impossible”.

“There just isn’t enough decent quality social housing, it is vastly, vastly underprovided and continues to be so. So a fair bit of what we’ve got are the symptoms of there just not being enough. Fundamentally we’ve just got to get more housing.”

“You work at the top of an organisation and you think you’re doing the right thing, putting in strategies. But what jumped out at me by coming to Poverty Truth is the disconnect between what we think we’re actually achieving and what’s going on the ground”.

“It’s not just about the home; you’ve got to have homes in a community that’s good, and gives every chance of being successful, otherwise you just have another revolving door.”

“The housing system currently puts people engaging with it in the position of ‘the perpetual service user’ – it’s disempowering”

“We need to look at what our ‘customer journey’ looks like right from the moment people walk in the door, and we are changing things but it’s difficult because of current crises here in Birmingham and across the country”

“Staff on frontline services can be really good, but sometimes they are tied up in processes and sometimes they’re just completely burnt out and desensitised. We need to look at how we use stories like this to train and support staff

“There’s a sense of powerlessness, dehumanisation for people at all different points of the system”

“Social Housing is turning into crisis management”.

Supported Accommodation

Supported Accommodation emerged as a significant subject. We learned that the quality of accommodation and the 'support' available varied hugely. In some places it was excellent and in others non-existent making life even more difficult for residents.

"I'm living in supported accommodation. It's just sheer chaos in there. Doors have been kicked off in there, by the police and by residents too. People's stuff, the washing machine and the settee have been nicked – it's just chaos. Supported accommodation is just a con! I go down to the office once a week, they say "Are you looking for work? Are you looking for accommodation" and I say "yeah, I'm bidding", and that's it. Apart from that I've got a room as big as a snooker table, I share my house with heroin addicts, needles in the bathroom y'know, no washing facilities. And that's what £300 a week benefits are paying for. Thank you, and I'm grateful, but I think I should get better".

"I live in supported accommodation, where no alcohol or drugs are supposed to be allowed but it's all over in there. And its beautiful accommodation, costing the council £1000 a month. However, there's no support at all, not even someone to knock on the door to check to see if we are alright. When it's Supported Accommodation, why isn't it checked to see what level of support is offered?"

The Commission wanted to understand why this was the case and how Supported Accommodation is regulated. Commissioners with expertise in housing provided some insight as did Birmingham Social Housing Partnership and Midland Heart. We then raised the issue with senior leaders at our Housing and Homelessness Conversation Event.

"I think Supported Housing providers think they provide a quality service and want to provide a quality service. But there's no verification or assurance about how that's done. There must be a better way of finding a quality standard"

"I know some fantastic landlords doing the best they can, part of organisations that are set up to make a positive contribution. On the flip side some landlords are purposefully in it for money and there isn't any care and support. The cases the council have taken on they've always lost. Legislation states that there needs to be 'above minimal care and support', so all that needs to be provided in a court of law is a support plan or assessment and then you've lost the case"

We have learned that this is a national issue around non-commissioned supported housing known as 'exempt accommodation', of which Birmingham has a disproportional amount. We are told some form of quality control and standards for all social housing and social landlords are being explored and locally and nationally, and we await the outcome.

Truth about Poverty as a Carer

"Carers allowance is not enough to breathe"

A number of our Commissioners have experience of being a carer or being cared for. Some of our commissioners shared their experiences in a special Carers Session.

People in caring roles provide a range of support from domestic or practical assistance, to personal care and emotional support, mainly to close family members. Caring for

someone is personal and generally takes place in the home, and is rarely recognised and valued, and usually hidden in the community. We learned that there are over 6.5m carers in the UK, many of whom struggle financially, with the burden of caring, and with the increased likelihood of not being able to juggle a work commitment.

Snapshots of stories and experiences

"My journey as an Unpaid Carer started when my wife was diagnosed with Cancer. The same year I lost my job because the company went into liquidation. The income stopped and the burden on my brain increased. Our expenses went up with the cost of all the hospital visits."

"I am living with my wife, son, daughter-in-law, grand-daughter and father who has recently been diagnosed with dementia. This is our choice, so we all can get help from them, but it means can't get any housing benefit or council tax discount."

"Now I have become a 'Sandwich Carer', caring for 2 different people with different needs and different mind sets. I only get Carers Allowance each week which is not enough to breathe. The isolation and loneliness is taking me towards physical & mental health problems which in future could also be physical & mental disability perhaps resulting in myself being in need of a Carer."

Reflections from our conversations

“The carers are saving money every year from the government but they themselves have entered the circle of poverty”

“I felt a strong sense of responsibility while caring for someone; it was a huge relief when someone else then cared for me.”

“While sitting in the waiting room I noticed that the carers of the patients were 50+ and most of them were pensioners.”

Carers Passport

Carer poverty is an issue one of our commissioners has been raising with leaders from NHS and Local Authority bodies. In May 2018, he was invited to talk about his experiences and the emotional and physical challenges of caring round the clock. He put forward the idea of a Birmingham Carers Passport, as a way for carers to be recognised and valued by the community. The idea is businesses, hospitals, transport operators would not only recognise and treat carers with greater respect, but they would also consider financial discounts for any purchases by carers.

A Carers Passport Scheme has now been accepted as a key priority by the commissioners of carer support services in Birmingham.



Truth about Poverty as a Asylum Seeker

“I lost my dignity, my freedom, my privacy, my future”

The experiences of those seeking asylum have featured as a key issue in all our themes; so we wanted to make sure there was a focus in this report that picked out the particularly harsh circumstances for asylum seekers, such as the hostile environment those seeking asylum face

on a daily basis. Having come to Birmingham to seek refuge they are faced with so many difficulties. There are many good services and charities supporting people who are seeking asylum, but there is a real gap in integrated services.

Snapshots of stories and experiences

“I came here as an asylum seeker. And when I reached England I was living with a family in Portsmouth. I was in detention for three months. They assessed me as a destitute asylum seeker. I got a place near Birmingham through a charity. I started doing some volunteering, so I have some connection with people, with the church, and to give back to the system. From there they wanted to take me to Nottingham. I said I was not going. I had been moved from Portsmouth to Bolton, to Birmingham and now Nottingham. If I go I have to start again. To find new friends. They say if I will not go – no money, no house”.

“As an asylum-seeking family I remember when my daughter went to breakfast club and she was not allowed in. After school she told me ‘Mummy, I wasn’t allowed breakfast’. I just imagined my daughter without breakfast – a child. And when I asked about it they said, ‘we’re not paying for you anymore’.

“If truly they say ‘every child matters’ then every child should be treated the same. As far as I am concerned my daughter is not being treated like every other child... – irrespective of parent’s immigration status children should be treated the same. But we are not equal, so our kids pay for it”.

Reflection from our conversations

"Birmingham prides itself on being a welcoming city, we want people to connect and contribute but the asylum system makes that impossible, because you could be moved tomorrow. Asylum seekers who have been moved around, we know someone whose daughter was born in this country, and by the time she was 11 she had 7 schools – what are we doing to our children and families! In the case of that person's story she was moved into a hostel with her 7 year old daughter, in awful conditions, having threats daubed on the door, in a hostel with addicts – that's not humanity! For me this is totally unacceptable in this city. Some of it is G4S, national processes that are beyond our control, but if we want people to be citizens and welcomed and valued in our city, we need to address some of this"

Other Truths

Digitalisation and Online Processes

The Commission learned about the consequences of increased requirements to have access to the internet to access benefits, services and support. We heard the frustrations of people who do not have easy online access and how this further marginalises and isolates people.

- *"I have a problem with forms. A lot of people have problems with forms. Especially if you have to do them online."*
- *"I gave up applying directly to the council for housing because I found the procedure for applying online too complicated."*
- *"As a Commission we all tried to apply for housing using the current online process; it was incredibly difficult and confusing."*

Environment

One of our Testifying Commissioners is passionate about the environment and has a strong sense of caring for our world for future generations, a passion that regularly filtered through our conversations and helped us to think a bit about poverty and environmentalism.

- *"We all belong on one planet, and that one planet of ours is in danger, maybe not for us but for our descendants".*
- *"Poverty makes it so much harder to behave in environmentally friendly ways – often environmentally ethical choices cost more".*

ID

The difficulties of life without photographic identification is a subject that has come up repeatedly in our conversations. To illustrate this we required our Launch Event audience to bring two forms of ID, which not everyone remembered to bring. Those without identification were directed to specific seats at the back of the room. This gave them the opportunity to experience a little of the frustration, humiliation and powerlessness that many people live with every day. One of the guests recalled how irritated he was to be ushered to a seat at a basic table at the back of the room from where he could observe his colleague sat at the front of the room receiving hospitality. A year on the impact of being treated as a second class citizen was not wasted on him.

- *"When you have no address you cannot get ID; without ID you cannot get a bank account; without a bank account you cannot access benefits."*
- *"You're always having to prove who you are, and if you can't you're stuck."*
- *"The first thing they said was 'do you have ID?' ... I was made to feel more stupid and embarrassed by the attitude of the person, who'd got that look on their face, that kind of 'oh here we go', impatient look making me feel really uncomfortable. Eventually I found my ID and handed it in."*

What we have learnt

Poverty is hard

It's hard to live with and it's hard to change

People are extraordinary

Human beings have an enormous capacity for resilience, compassion and empathy.

Systems are broken

Systems that are supposed to help people often don't and become another difficulty to manage. Those working in the systems feel frustrated too.

- *"When you're on the receiving end it seems so broken – people don't get it from our side, it feels ineffectual and dysfunctional"*
- *"It's an unfair playing field from the start"*
- *"Systems seem to be holding people in silo mentalities"*

Change is possible

But it's often the small things and starts with relationships.

Systems need to be rehumanised

Many systems feel very dehumanising, both for people seeking support from them and for those working in them. Often policy, bureaucracy and power dynamics encourage and increase that. There is a lot of good will and many people trying to make changes in the system where they can. But change is slow, often gets caught in bureaucracy and silos or in 'doing to' people rather than 'doing with'.

- *"We have to find ways to see past labels of client, tenant, patient, service user to see the person – human being meeting human being."*

What we have experienced

Relationships

- *"Getting to know a whole group of people as people. Not as case studies, and really understanding how we all have the same things in our lives – the highs, the lows, the challenges"*
- *"The most powerful thing about Poverty Truth is that you don't take a load of people's stories and implant them into a system, you actually introduce people to each other."*

Empathy and compassion

- *"I didn't sympathise, but I did try to empathise"*
- *"Poverty could affect you or me"*
- *"What we've created here is a real sense of empathy. There is compassion fatigue in the public services at the moment – this is about reconnecting with that compassion"*

The power of conversation

- *"At Poverty Truth we hear stories and not just hear people's views...we need to improve the way people understand people".*
- *"Sometimes it's not about finding a solution but creating time and space to listen"*
- *"Don't judge or assume – listen"*

No hierarchy

- *"A space where there's kind of no hierarchy and everyone's allowed to be human together"*
- *"Relationships won't change until we deal with the hierarchal position that says, 'I'm the expert and you're the beneficiary'"*

Impact of Poverty Truth

There have been a number of direct and indirect impacts of this process, some of which have been mentioned already but the most profound impact has been on the members of the Commission.

"There's power in a group. when you stand alone you don't have power, when you're in a group people listen to you"

TESTIFYING COMMISSIONER

"The stories – that's the power of this. That's impacted on how I go about things on a day to day basis"

CITY LEADER COMMISSIONER

"Because of my experience in this room I feel more able to engage and that doesn't just impact me but on the people I work with"

TESTIFYING COMMISSIONER

"I'm amazed by the generosity of everyone here. I say to myself every day that this is not a place of risk for me"

TESTIFYING COMMISSIONER

"It's getting that sense of purpose back into something I'm doing. Getting to know people as people. The benefit is not just for me, people back at work have had the opportunity to be connected to this. Simply telling them the stories reminds them why"

CITY LEADER COMMISSIONER

"We've got people with all different experiences in the room. That's the beauty of this – together we might come up with solutions we might not have come up with on our own"

FACILITATOR

"We're not demanding change. We're not here to get in people's faces. Using the power of our stories to explain where things go wrong we're here to say, 'what can we do to help you?'"

TESTIFYING COMMISSIONER



Challenge to Birmingham

"I used to be a proud Brummie until I started this. How can we be proud when we are letting so many of our citizens down"

CITY LEADER COMMISSIONER

As a Commission we have been asking ourselves and our guests a number of challenging questions. We invite you to join us by asking yourself these questions too:

How do we lift the labels we put on people to see, hear and understand the human being?

How do we build relationships in a non-confrontational way to hear and understand the truth of what's going on?

How can we use our influence, wherever we are, to make things better?

In doing so, can we rehumanise our broken systems?

Thanks

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For more information go to
www.brumpovertytruth.org

There are Poverty Truth Commissions up and down the whole of the UK. We are proud to part of something much bigger – a movement that is seeking to challenge poverty in a different way.