



Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty

The Office of the Children's Commissioner's response

Summary for Children and Young People

March 2013

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WHO IS THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER?



Maggie Atkinson is the Children's Commissioner for England. The Commissioner and her team make sure that adults in charge listen to children and young people. You can find out more about the Children's Commissioner and her office [by visiting our website](#).

WHAT IS THE UNCRC AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says what most governments must do so that children can grow up as healthy as possible, can learn at school, receive protection, have their views listened to, and be treated fairly.

The Convention matters because it is a set of promises – 42 in all - that the Government makes to all children and young people. These are known in the Convention as articles.

Articles 27 says that children and young people should have enough money to get by, and that sometimes families and young people need help to do this. Article 12 states that children and young people should have the chance share their views about issues that affect their lives and that adults should respect what they say.

Because the Government has made these promises to all the children and young people in England we think it is important that they are asked what child poverty means. We are doing this now because the Government is thinking about what poverty means and how it can be measured.

The Government want to count how many children are growing up in poverty because it helps them understand how big a problem it is and what can be done about it.



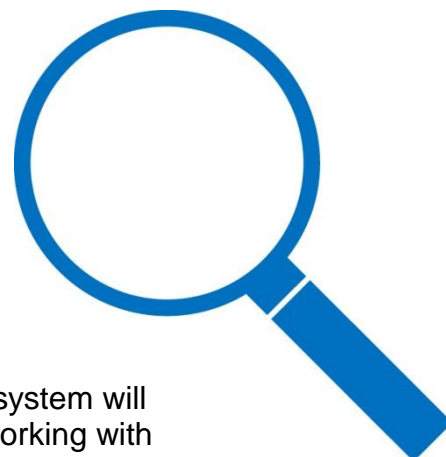
WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CHILD POVERTY?

Our job is to tell the Government what children and young people say to us and let them know what they could do to keep the promises to all children in the Convention.

The first time we asked children and young people about poverty was two years ago when we published a report called *Trying to Get By*. This work told us what life was like for young people who did not have much money. You can find a young people's version of this report on our website.

The things young people told us in *Trying to Get By* really shocked us, so we wanted to understand more about what poverty meant to different groups of children and young people.

Over the last year we have looked at how changes to the benefits system will affect how much money some families have. We have also been working with disabled young people to see what life without much money is like for them, and our young people's advisory group Amplify have been asking others about how poverty can change people's hopes and dreams.

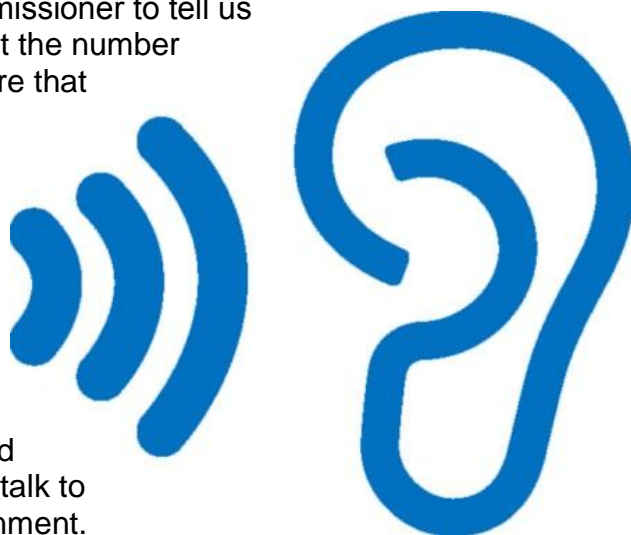


WHAT HAVE WE DONE MORE RECENTLY AND WHY?

Last year the Government came to the Children's Commissioner to tell us they were planning to ask people how they should count the number of children and young people living in poverty. To be sure that they asked the right questions they wanted to speak to some children and young people and ask them what they thought poverty meant.

We thought that this was good and important work to do. Since September we have met with lots of children and young people who have helped us understand what growing up is like when you are not well-off. We have met with young people in small groups and held a bigger event in February where almost 40 children and young people from all over England came to London to talk to the Commissioner and officials who work for the Government.

All of these meetings helped us write a report that has now been sent to the Government. The full report is on our website and explains in more detail about the issues we cover in this shorter report.



A SUMMARY OF WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD US

Since September last year we have met with lots of groups and talked to them about child poverty and what life is like for families who are struggling to get by. Some important messages have come out of those conversations and meetings. These messages cover the things that matter to children and young people and what it means to live in poverty. What they told us was that the following things are important for anyone trying to understand what poverty means:

Income and money

Nearly everyone we spoke to said that money was really important in explaining what poverty means. Not having very much money is the main way everyone understands what poverty means.

Poverty is not having enough money to buy basic things like food, new clothes or a decent home.

Money also plays an important part in how well children and young people do at school because:

- money buys basic things like pens and books
- money means pupils and students can join-in activities like school trips
- those who are less well-off are sometimes bullied because they are seen as different and having less than others.



Community and home life

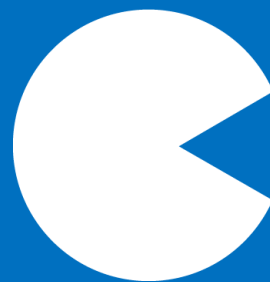
Lots of children and young people told us that poverty also means living in a bad house. This means homes that are too small, run-down, that do not have much furniture or things that other families take for granted – like a washing machine. We were also told that living in poverty means families could not afford to heat their homes very well.

All of this sometimes means that home life is difficult because parents feel bad about what they cannot buy their children, and families have to live in small spaces without much room to themselves.



Children and young people's voice

Although there were very clear topics and issues children and young people wanted to talk about – like money, jobs and their homes – there was one message that came up in all our conversations and meetings. This was the issue of *participation* and *children's voices*. Children and young people wanted to be listened to, taken seriously and treated with respect. This is a really important issue to all groups and individual children and young people we worked with.



A SUMMARY OF WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD US

Education and school

Most children and young people want to do well at school. But they also think it is very hard to do well at school when you do not have much money. Teachers often forget about the difficulties children and young people face when they are less well-off. Some even said that teachers could be unkind and uncaring towards those with less money. This is backed-up by other work that the Children's Commissioner has done that showed how poorer children are more likely to be excluded from school than those with more money.



Children and young people also know that those who are poor often live in worse neighbourhoods where the schools may not be as good as those in more well-off areas. This made them worry that they would not do as well and get good results.

Jobs and employment

Not doing well in school means that it is more difficult to get a good job. Young people who have left school – or were about to – were worried about their chances of getting any kind of job, and thought that not being well-off made it a lot more difficult to get a good job.



Money helps young people find a job after leaving school because those who are better off can do things like buy nice clothes for interviews or afford to have work experience without being paid.

Government could do more to help children and young people and their parents who are less well-off find work by making sure there are jobs for people to do.

It is also important that everyone is paid a fair wage for what they do. At the moment this is not the case - so it is not right that poverty is counted as the same as being unemployed because there are also lots of people who do have jobs who are not very well-off.

Being able to travel around and access other areas and opportunities

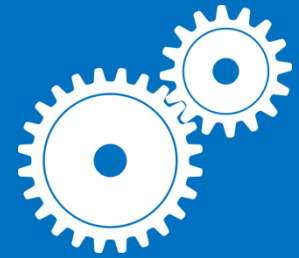
Children and young people in poverty feel cut-off from other areas and chances to take part in things that they need to travel to. Living in the countryside was especially difficult because there were fewer buses and trains, and if you do not have much money families cannot afford to have a car.



A SUMMARY OF WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD US

Expert support and services

Because we spoke to children and young people who were disabled, in care, had committed a crime, or had to leave their home countries, we talked a lot about the special support they needed to do as well as other children and young people.



They all felt that this was important and that a lot more should be done to help out children and young people who needed special support. They wanted the adults who provided expert help to be good at working with children and young people and real experts in what they did.

Although lots of children and young people who are disabled, or in care, or wanting to stay in this country do not have much money, the children and young people we spoke to felt that they should not be counted as poor just because they are disabled, in care, a young offender or live in the country because they could not stay in their own home.



WHAT WERE THE MESSAGES WE GAVE TO GOVERNMENT IN OUR REPORT?

There were some clear messages that we have given the Government following our work with children and young people. These are:

That poverty is about not having much money. If you are poor you do not have enough money to get-by and this affects how well you do at school, your chances of getting a good job, the house and area you live in.

But

However difficult children and young people's lives may be they are still hopeful about what they can achieve with the right help and support.

And

Being listened to and valued is as important as having nice things.

Children's rights are important and the Government must think about how all children's rights are affected by what they do.

Children and young people need experts and good quality help and support to help them succeed, get a good job and enjoy the things experienced by those with more money and fewer difficulties.

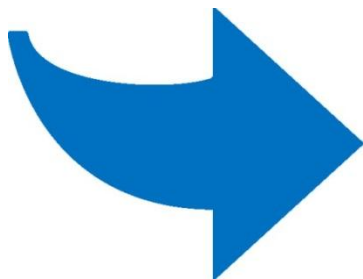
That more should be done to help children and young people support other children and young people.

What can the Government do?



In our main report there is a list and a lot more detail of the ideas children and young people had about what could be done to help those less well off. These have all been sent to the Government.

The work we did was to help the Government think about how they could better count how many children and young people are living in poverty. To do this we said:



- **The Government should measure poverty by the amount of money families have.**
- **Children and young people should have a say in how poverty is measured.**
- **Lots of children and young people are bullied because they are less well-off and so the Government must think about how their decisions and the actions they take change the way people think about those less well-off.**

OUR FINAL THOUGHTS

Our final thoughts are the thoughts of one of the young people who came to meet with us...

Poverty is relative to the eye that perceives it
Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder
Poverty is about more than
Just money
It's about quality of life
Or lack of it

As a child we moved house
We forgot to pack my dad
Then it was Cereal to eat, 'cos that's all we
had
Charity cured the disparity
Of the rumbling stomachs of my family
And so I would give my milk to my sister when
hers got split
Eating hot water and value brand cornflakes
Over thinking about our fates
In between the angels and insects
Before Armageddon and paradise
Is this the life we now lead?
Who else is thinking of our needs?

All sleeping in an air-bed, on floor boards
Listening to the night symphony of discord
Memories of tears and prayer
A background to shouts echoing out there

With the draft chilling the night air
From a broken window
'Cos were not from their estate
Not comprehending their casual hate
Anti-social housing provides no homes

Still no stable education
To add into my equation
With no understanding of mental health
We got our Demon Haunted toys
Chucked out

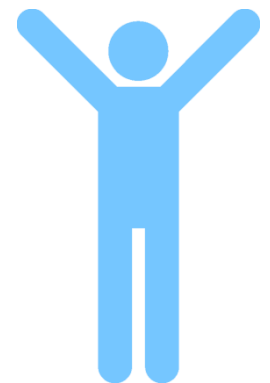
No choice to work from thirteen
Working in a country with laws of equality
And age discrimination policy
Telling you're worth less per hour per pound

Having my Curtains and mental health mocked
By a hollow man that only accounts healthy
human stock
Almost tempted to hug that glorified cheque
writer
While peacefully protest drenched with
kerosene
Flicking my lighter

But I have been listening to the wrong radio
station
It's had me chained to a negative perception.
Having returned I feel free
Living a reality of possibility
Because poor self-esteem is poverty of the
mind
When you mentally flinch when people are
kind.

The quality of my poetry didn't take my life
It grew resilience over continual strife
Made me able to speak to you today
To have an informed say, in this poetic way
It made me rebel and learn more
Because poverty is something
You should never apologise for.

by Callum



WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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