

### IN THIS ISSUE:

• **BIRMINGHAM POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION SPECIAL EDITION**

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## Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission

Thrive Together Birmingham has now hosted two Poverty Truth Commissions in Birmingham. This edition is a closer look at the most recent Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission...

"Nothing about us, without us, is for us" is the starting point for a Poverty Truth Commission (PTC). It identifies that lasting social change only happens when those who experience the struggle participate in generating that change.

In 2020 Thrive began hosting the second Poverty Truth Commission, funded by Birmingham City Council through Public Health, to build on the emerging themes of the first PTC, particularly housing. The PTC began with a small group of people experiencing the struggle against poverty (Community Commissioners), coming together with a commitment to see social change using their personal testimonies as the foundation. In the initial stages of the PTC, this group focused on sharing stories, to build and enable relationships and trust to develop.



Community Commissioners described being part of the PTC as giving a 'sense of belonging', 'solidarity' and a 'feeling of not being alone'



After a few months of meeting together the Community Commissioners invited key strategic people to a special launch event where they shared some of their stories.



Two of our commissioners taking part in the launch event. It takes courage to be at the front of a room full of people and share your story...



“ Some comments from guests who attended the launch: ”

*"I was really inspired to hear these courageous stories"*  
*"... the system leaders need to lead in compassion"*  
*"All speakers demonstrated their abilities, competence and resilience"*  
*"... poverty can affect anybody. It could be me, it could be you"*  
*"The importance of hearing the voices of those with lived experience"*

Birmingham's first Poverty Truth Commission, hosted by Thrive Together Birmingham and funded by Barrow Cadbury Trust, ran from 2017-2019. You can read the report from the first commission [here](#)



# 'Our Truth'



Local poet Amerah Saleh worked with the Community Commissioners and created a poem with them. This was performed during the launch by Amerah and the whole group. You can read the poem [here](#)

Following the launch, individuals in positions of influence and policy making in Birmingham were then invited to join the Commission as Civic Commissioners.

# The Facilitation...

The PTC's facilitation approach was participatory, relational and immersive. Intention was paid to an 'in-the-round' model where all had the opportunity to speak without interruption and particular importance was paid to listening well. Our Civic Commissioners arrived at the door of the commission with an expectation to remove their titles, to resist the need to 'fix' and to be present as human beings first. This set the culture of creating a safe and equitable space as Commissioners journeyed together over the following twelve months.

# The Themes...

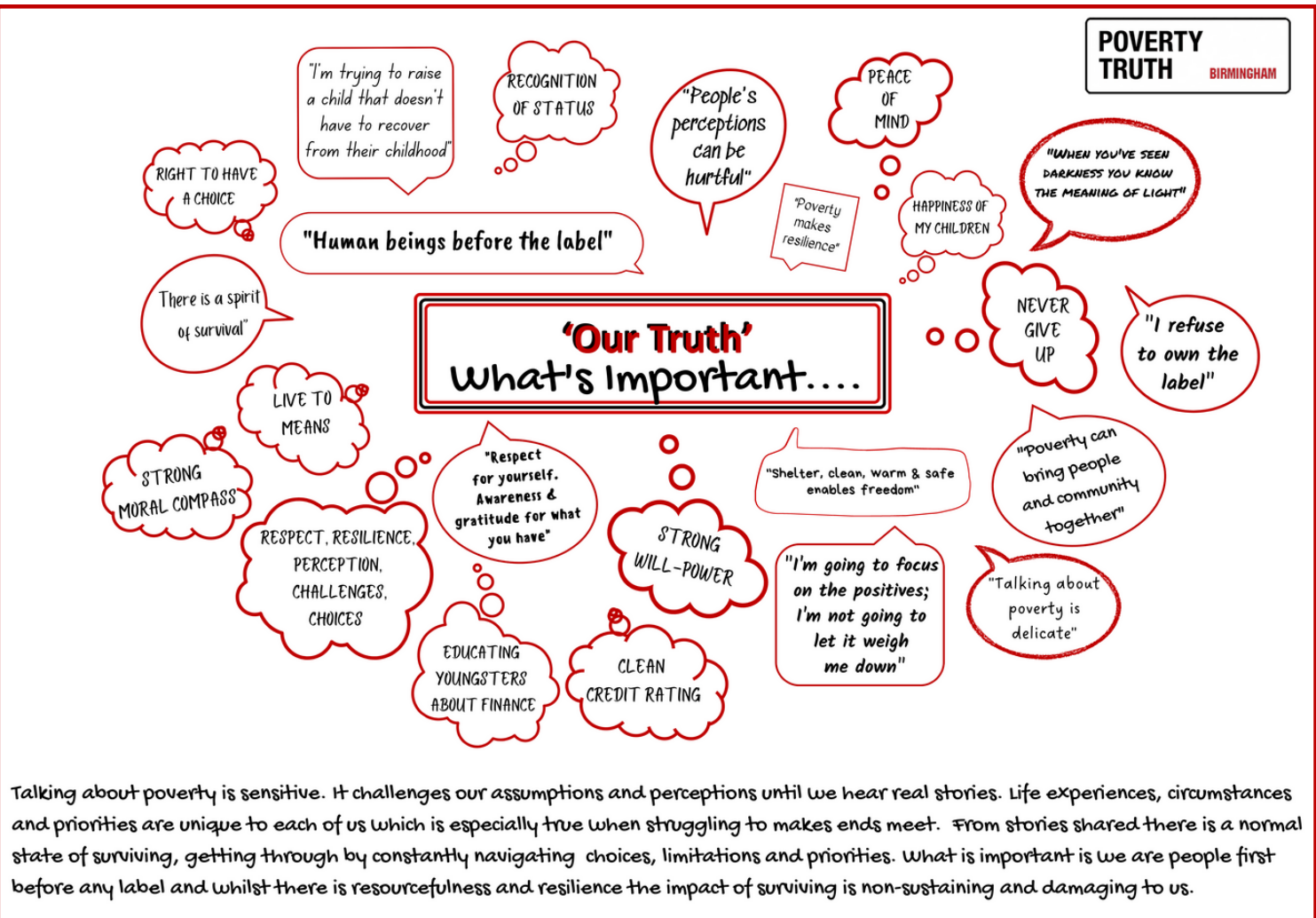
As relationships between commissioners deepened, sessions encouraged stories and experiences to be shared which informed key themes for meaningful exploration as the PTC moved forward. Special guests were then invited to attend three 'listening events' centred on these chosen themes:

- Poverty & Health, Children & Families
- Poverty, Health and Food
- Poverty and Housing

# The Listening Events...

The PTC wanted their guests, key strategic people in Birmingham City Council, to have an experience of a Poverty Truth session, so all were welcomed on a first name basis and invited to sit in the round and take part in the whole event. One of the reflections to emerge from these sessions was an acknowledgement that poverty is not a choice. The struggle against poverty must not be normalised, but rather efforts should be made to think about the right questions to ask when building systems for people.

The following graphic illustrates the Birmingham Poverty Truth Journey



Talking about poverty is sensitive. It challenges our assumptions and perceptions until we hear real stories. Life experiences, circumstances and priorities are unique to each of us which is especially true when struggling to makes ends meet. From stories shared there is a normal state of surviving, getting through by constantly navigating choices, limitations and priorities. What is important is we are people first before any label and whilst there is resourcefulness and resilience the impact of surviving is non-sustaining and damaging to us.

One of a number of posters created from the words shared by PTC. To see all the posters in a booklet click [here](#)



# Birmingham Poverty Truth Journey

**Our journey began building relationships with each other**

We took time to get to know each other as human beings first, sharing our unique stories.



Children arriving at school hungry

The impact of the cost of School Uniform on household budgets

Poverty & Health, Children & Families

Impact on child & parent's health

Housing

What does home mean?

Navigating housing systems from Crisis to Tenancy

Thinking about prevention

Humanising Housing Systems

lack of choice in the food system

Poverty & Health, Food

Dignity

Welcome to our Conversation Sessions on what is important to us



## We formed small 'Truth Pods'

Three small 'Truth Pods' journeyed together on areas that matter to Commissioners. Each 'Truth Pod' preparing to invite people in positions of influence to have a conversation with us.

## We talked more deeply about the things that mattered

Together we decided on three themes from our stories that mattered to us. We created small 'Truth Pods' to go deeper, exploring the themes and asking the question; *if change could happen what would it look like?* Two themes were clarified as being important: Housing, and Poverty and Health. Three groups formed to explore deeper topics within these two groups, that of Children and Families, Food and Housing.

*"We need to have better prevention in place to help people not become food insecure in the first place."*  
- Guest

## We hosted Listening and Conversation Events

The Commission hosted Three Listening and Conversation events with people who have decision making influence in our city. Each 'Truth Pod' invited key people from Public Health, City Housing Directorate, Education, City Council, and Charities, to join our deep listening conversations, on Housing, Food, as well as Children and Families

## Our Final Event

Sharing the Poverty Truth journey with others, asking the question, 'How can we make our city a more equitable place, where all citizen's voices are heard and we flourish together?'

*"When you have good people good things can happen. Listening well is important. Birmingham Poverty Truth is very good training in sharing your story"* - Guest

*"How do we re-set how we work with people in a more personable and humanistic way? We have a job ahead of us....."* - Guest

**POVERTY TRUTH** BIRMINGHAM

# The Closing Event...



On 12th July 2023 the PTC closing event was held at Birmingham Hippodrome with an audience representing statutory, voluntary, and charitable sectors in Birmingham.

The event focused on sharing the process of the PTC and hearing the voices of Community and Civic Commissioners as they shared their experiences of being involved.

As always with PTC, welcome, connection and hospitality were as important as the formal presentation. Circulation space was created

where key messages and learning from the PTC was displayed as guests were able to share reflections and meet commissioners as they shared refreshment before and after the presentation.



Guests listening to the formal presentations



Some of the Commissioners sharing their experiences of being part of the PTC

**Monika Rozanski**, (Service Manager - Inequalities, Public Health, Birmingham City Council), who has overseen the project, shared her enthusiasm for the PTC and the approach taken



*"The commission journey has been insightful in what can be done together with a group of people with different perspectives. We have heard commissioners express how they valued being in a place where titles, roles and hierarchy were removed. Just to listen with each other as human beings first has been transformative for all those who took part."*  
PTC facilitator

The second Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission has now closed. However, this is not 'the end' as the PTC is now entering its Legacy Phase. Members of the first and second Commissions are being invited to continue the journey of deepening understanding of the issues facing people living with poverty and developing new activities that respond to this injustice as we address the question:

**“What might be possible in how we address inequality and poverty in our city?”**



We were delighted Bishop Anne and Bishop James could join us



Guests viewing the displays and mingling in the atrium welcome space

**“ Some comments from guests who attended the closing event: ”**

- "It is good to see a network in Birmingham around this issue"*
- "... stop thinking in numbers but to think in humans"*
- "The essential necessity of investing time and listening to people if we are to shape strong communities and a better world"*
- "Reflecting on the importance of dignity in our interactions with those we serve"*
- "The advantages of removing labels and position – so that views and opinions are given the same validity"*
- "Crucial that learning from BPTC shapes all aspects of policy in our city – rights and dignity at heart"*

For more information or to be added to our mailing list please get in touch!