

# Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission 2021 - 2023

## ‘Our Truth’

*Our experiences and truths, shared with each other in our  
Commissioner Gatherings*



**NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US, IS FOR US**

**NOTHING ABOUT US  
WITHOUT US  
IS FOR US**

**POVERTY  
TRUTH**

**BIRMINGHAM**

# **Our Commitment**

***We are here because we want to  
contribute to change***

***We want to bring our lived  
experience to be a voice for others  
who don't have a voice***

**POVERTY  
TRUTH**

**BIRMINGHAM**





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.



# 'Our Truth'

## What Are Our Choices?

**POVERTY TRUTH** BIRMINGHAM

### FOOD

- Foodbanks give no choice
- Living on a food bank diet with a health condition
- Food pantries/food clubs are better, but you can still only choose from what food they have
- What we eat – unhealthy foods often the cheapest

### FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

- 'the toll on our children'
- Relationships under constant stress
- Lack of holidays or down time
- Loss of your support structure/friends/network
- Cost of socialising

### SHOPPING & MONEY

- Limitations around choices when using an Aspen Card
- How we shop & where we shop
- Can't afford entertainment/holidays
- Hobbies not possible – too expensive
- Always budgeting
- Deciding to eat or not to eat?
- Sometimes it can be a choice between food or internet

### MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

- Poverty doesn't allow you to have pride
- How people treat you
- Poverty allows other people to make your choices for you
- Lose control over your life
- Isolation
- Quality of life
- Trying to 'look the part'
- Poverty affects us physically
- Diet and health with limited budget and increase cost of living

### TRANSPORT

- Cost can take away choices of where you can go

### EDUCATION

- Opportunities limited
- Non-uniform days cost money
- Uniform costs
- Cost of school trips

### JOB & BENEFITS

- The only type of job you might be able to get can leave you worse off
- The only type of job you might be able to get can then limit other aspects of your life
- Childcare costs

### ENERGY

- Where and how do we get our energy?
- Meters far more expensive to use
- Heating costs

### HOUSING

- Type of housing choice
- Neighbourhood
- No choice of area
- Feeling unsafe

### STATUS [IMMIGRATION]

- Everything is queried
- Facilities not available
- Relationships difficult when you keep being moved around
- Treated like criminals

"Circumstances shape a person"

"Levels of understanding differ"

"Without status nothing else is achievable"

"Even though I had a roof over my head I felt like a prisoner, I didn't have status so I didn't have freedom"

"Systems do not understand or create pathways to employment or education"

"JUDGEMENT. ASSUMPTIONS"

"Perceptions necessitate change"

"I have to check the gas meter every day to see if I can put the gas on"

"Expectations dictate that people in poverty do not want to work"

"Cost of public transport makes massive limitations to several parts of life"







PLEASE FILL IN YOUR CONCERN IN THE BOX:

"SCARED TO BRING UP ISSUES TO DODGY LANDLORD, DON'T WANT TO 'ROCK THE BOAT' BECAUSE OF THE UNKNOWN OF POTENTIAL OF BEING EVICTED WITH YOUNG CHILDREN - B&B?!!"

"Need bigger house - lack of property."

"Change of regulations bad for me..."

'Not enough social housing'

'No understanding of severity of asylum story'

"You don't ever get attached to things you can't take with you because you never know when you have to up and leave"

"ANXIETY - NO STABILITY IN PRIVATE HOUSING - NO SECURITY."

"Voices not listened to"

"Access to housing is tough - very limited"

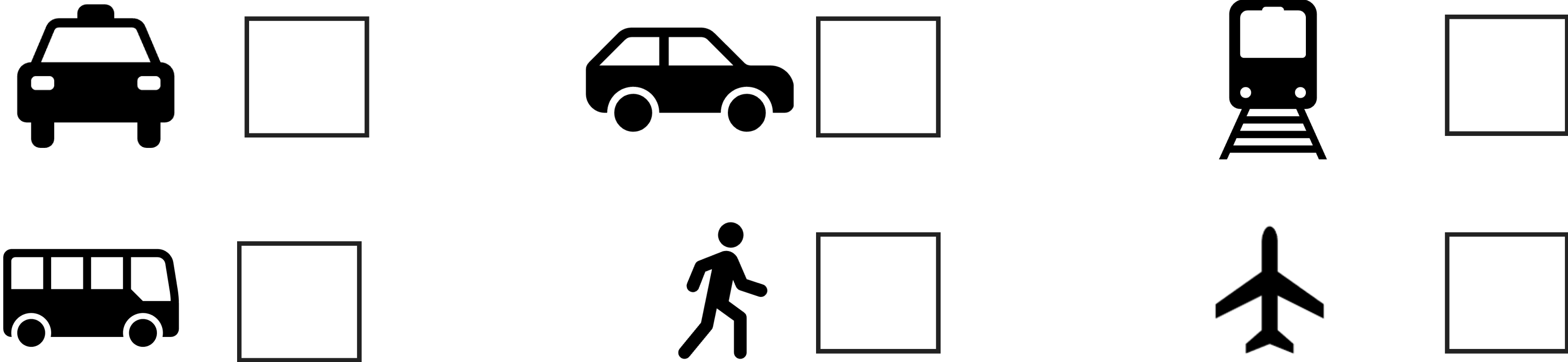
"Lack of safety for families in temporary accommodation."

RATE OUR SERVICE! (PLEASE CIRCLE)

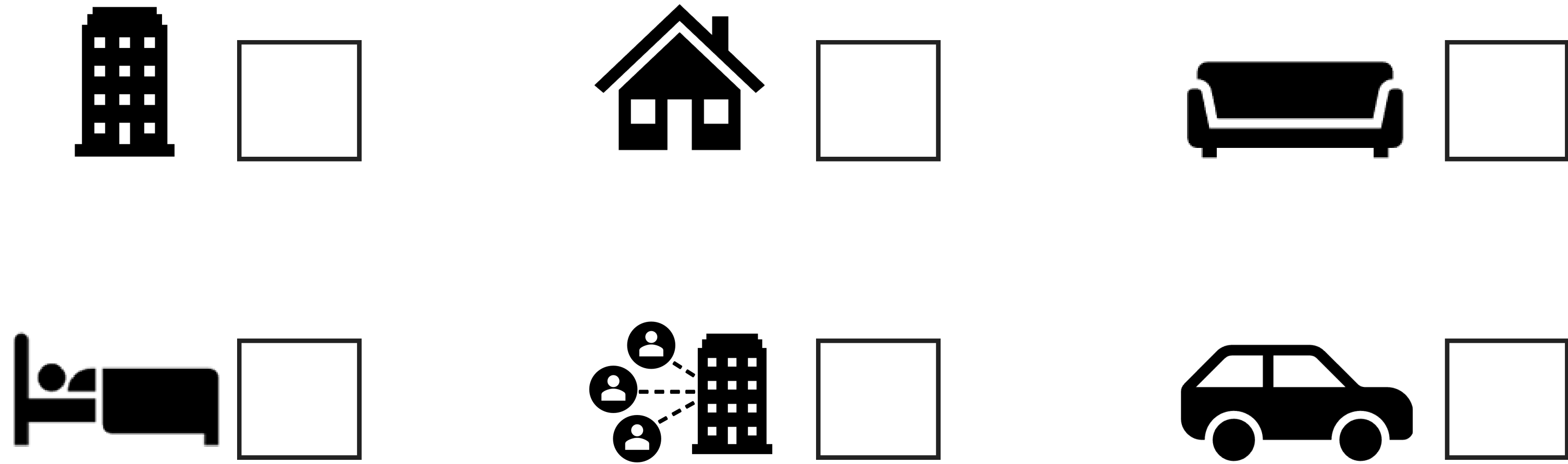


'Our Truth'  
The Journey to our Front Door

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO ARRIVE AS WELL AS MOVE AROUND OUR CITY, TO FIND OUR FRONT DOOR.

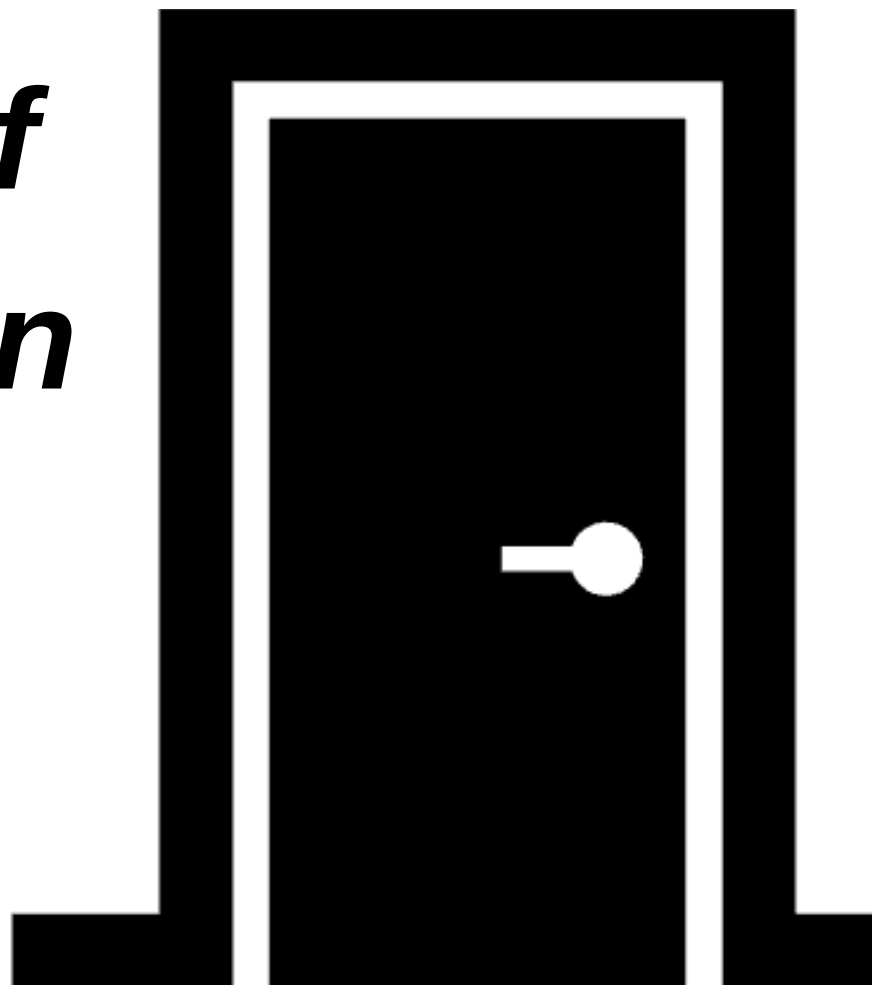


THERE ARE MANY DIFERRENT TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION IN THE JOURNEY OF ARRIVING TO A SAFE AND SECURE DOOR WE CAN CALL HOME.



WARNING  
ACCOMMODATION DOESN'T  
ALWAYS FEEL LIKE HOME

Our journeys to our front door are unique to each of us. We are human first and our stories are all different.



How does the housing system recognise our different journeys to arrive at a front door, where we are safe?

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR CONCERN IN THE BOX:

"Dealing with uninhabitable conditions  
- damp  
- mold  
- infestations  
- poor insulation"

'No choice but to accept the accommodation given'

'NO STATUS - NO RIGHTS!'

'HMO unregulated housing - No support given'

'No help if transient lifestyle'

'Easier access 'back in the day'

Expected to accept bad situations

'PTSD impacted by my housing situation'

'Housing cannot be looked at in isolation'

RATE OUR SERVICE! (PLEASE CIRCLE)





# 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

What does home mean?

Navigating housing systems from Crisis to Tenancy

Housing

lack of choice in the food system

Poverty & Health, Food

Dignity

Thinking about prevention

Humanising Housing Systems

Welcome to our Conversation Sessions on what is important to us



**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?'



**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.

**POVERTY  
TRUTH**

**BIRMINGHAM**

*"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

*"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

*"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



POVERTY HAS BECOME NORMALISED

**HIERARCHY -DICTATED TO**

"It can lead to crime and criminal activity because you don't have many other choices"

**STUCK IN THE SYSTEM**

**WANTING TO BE WITH PEOPLE AND  
NOT WANTING TO BE WITH PEOPLE**

**CHARITY SHOPS  
ON THE RISE**

**CONSTANTLY  
FIGHTING**

"Status reflects what is allowed"

**LIVING DAY-TO-DAY**

"You can't really have hobbies if your next pennies have to go to the food on your plate"

**A LACK OF INTERNET AND NO BUS FARE  
LIMITS WHAT JOBS YOU CAN ACCESS**

"You can only use your Aspen card in certain shops, it limits your choice...if you don't use the amount on your card that week then you lose it; you can only use it for food, nothing else"

**ISOLATING PEOPLE**

"It limits your choices; you can get into something you don't even want to",

'Poverty leaves mental, physical, as well as emotional scars'

"Poverty is about losing control, losing control over your life"

**HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT**

**LACK OF EMPATHY, HUMILITY,  
DIGNITY, UNWORTHINESS**

"Getting slagged off for using things like drugs and alcohol to try to cope"

**HUMILIATION HAVING  
TO ASK FOR HELP**

**BLACK FRIDAY & JANUARY  
SALES A GODSEND**

"Cost of public transport makes massive limitations to several parts of life"

**SOMEONE ELSE MAKES  
YOUR CHOICES FOR YOU**

"Poverty affects 100% of everything in my life, not just a particular thing"

**DEHUMANISATION**

**"Poverty doesn't allow you to  
have pride, self esteem, confidence"**

"Most of us here use some sort of food project that subsidises, that takes choice away. You get food but a lot of it isn't what you'd choose. You don't just go to the supermarket and choose what you want. This feels normal to me now, I don't remember what it's like to live like that."

**'Our Truth'**  
What's it like to make ends meet?

The effort of overcoming limitations is constant and overwhelming. Trying to make the best choice from already limited options, leaves a sense of frustration, exhaustion and no control of life.



**'Our Truth'**  
What Does the Cost-of-Living  
Crisis Leave us Thinking About?

CONSTANTLY  
LOOKING AT  
SMART METER

The Truth -  
information as it  
affects ordinary  
people in their  
everyday lives

THE EFFECT  
IT HAS ON  
CHILDREN

We need  
to be the  
catalyst for  
change

We are under  
constant pressure -  
I don't want  
to be

INCREASED NEED  
FOR FOODBANKS &  
FOOD PANTRIES

RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN POVERTY  
AND ILL HEALTH

Researching  
reduced price  
food places

Build something new and make the  
old system obsolete

Common sense  
to implement  
change

MORE AWARE  
OF PRICES

Where do  
we fit in the  
system?

Charity  
begins at home?  
Not as many  
donations

I'm always  
turning off the  
heat when the  
kids are out

Different groups  
are more adversely  
affected,  
ie: older people

Not just major  
supermarkets  
are hiking  
their prices

WORRIED ABOUT  
HEATING - PRICE  
INCREASE

Some people don't ever have  
to tally up so don't understand  
the cost of food

Living on £30 per  
week - are you happy  
with what you've got  
or are you just filling a  
hunger hole?

People not in  
poverty are  
cutting back their  
spending - a  
leveler?

Poorest most  
affected - they  
can't afford to  
buy bulk

PERHAPS WE  
COULD CREATE A  
LIST OF WAYS TO  
GET CHEAP FOOD

Eat or heat -  
I'm setting  
targets with  
available funds

Foodbanks  
seeing a  
reduction of  
donations -  
sparse

Extended families used to do  
collective bulk buying

Pre-paid gas and electric  
is appalling! so much  
more expensive - through  
poverty you pay more

I'm spending  
less on food so I  
can use the  
money for  
heating

Lots of 'basic' food  
ranges are massively  
reducing in quantity  
or going altogether



# **'Our Truth'**

*We forget that our skin can only save us  
through seven thought processes.*

*That we are only human  
and the triggers of losing patience  
actually happen frequently.*

*We are here  
Have been  
Will be  
Stood in front of you  
One by one  
Telling you our stories*

*From hostels that are inadequate  
To doors that entice us in but we don't enter  
New babies being born  
Fathers struggling for dinner money  
Mental health that moulds us into new people  
Kind ladies offering us oranges  
From mothers who are friends  
To neighbours who could be more friendly  
When does it stop, start, adapt, change  
- when is it any different?*

*We still exist  
Still here  
Will be  
Are*

*From courage that feeds lions  
Strength that holds children  
Loss that empties bellies  
Kindness that feels maternal  
Truth only written in diaries  
Storytellers telling the big issues  
Hugs that break ribs  
Smiles that crumble the hearts  
To love that feels handwritten*

*We are holding onto scraps of paper that we  
wrote years ago  
trying to figure out if we still feel the same.  
If we still are the same.  
As you.*

*This poem was written for Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission by local poet Amerah Saleh after she had shared time with us listening to our stories and experiences. 'Our Truth' was first performed publicly by Amerah Saleh and Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission at our launch, 19th May 2022*



Thank you for taking the time to read our stories. As Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission we have journeyed together as people who have struggled and lived with poverty, alongside people of influence in our city. We have listened to each other in a relational way with respect, seeing the humanity we share.

These are our stories and this is our truth. Our question for you is:

**What is your commitment to making our city a more equitable place, where all citizen's voices are heard and we flourish together?**

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