



**Cambridgeshire  
Children's Trust**

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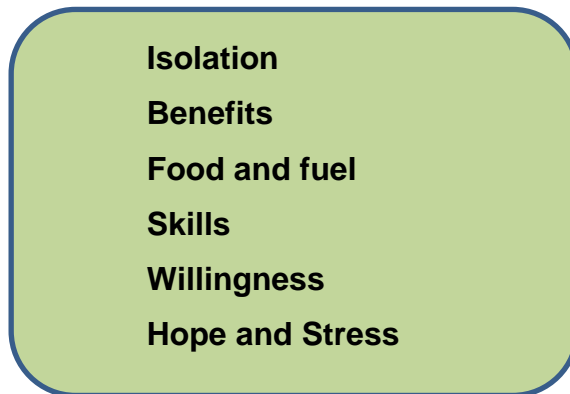
# **Cambridgeshire's Child Poverty Needs Assessment 2014:**

## **The Views of Practitioners Research Outcomes**

## Introduction

The development of the Child Poverty Needs Assessment has included contributions from frontline practitioners working with families affected by poverty from across the range of organisations in Cambridgeshire.

They have particularly considered the impact of poverty on children and what has been seen to work well in improving the lives of their residents. Overall there are five main themes that have emerged:



The input from providers covered issues for people in poverty, ideas that have worked well in combating poverty, barriers to these and suggestions for the Child Poverty Champions Group. The sections below summarise the material provided. Their contributions were based on the real experiences of their clients.

### What are the main issues for people in poverty?

**Isolation** – feeling different to other people in the community, unable to afford to participate, e.g. in school trips, extracurricular activities. Unable to afford the same things, e.g. internet, unable to travel

**Benefits** – the impact of changes and the complexity, e.g. bedroom tax, other housing benefit changes, fear of future changes

**Food and fuel** – affordability of living, unable to feed the family, unable to afford healthy living, unable to buy fuel oil, rationing heating and hot water

**Skills** – managing on a low income, cannot budget successfully, cannot access better income, digital exclusion (e.g. schools setting homework on line)

**Willingness** – being held back by pride, apathy, confusion, knowledge, too proud to seek help, cannot see the impact of their lifestyles

**Hope and Stress** – scared to be hopeful, cannot see a way out, depressed that a different future cannot be seen, low aspirations

### What works well in addressing these issues?

**Isolation** – multi-agency working, identifying those in poverty as early as possible, good signposting

**Benefits** – multi-agency working, having the tools and signposts at hand to help families

**Food and fuel** – money, trust that the agencies involved want to support people, target our resources

**Skills** – access to education, online tools, practical advice

**Willingness** – building relationships, small improvements (*Small things make a big difference, e.g. hardship fund from children's centre, school uniform support from schools*)

**Hope and Stress** – keeping promises, advice that can be used, quick fixes (e.g. furniture and white goods), empowering and enabling practice from support workers

### What are the barriers?

**Isolation** – transport, support to engage locally, trying to 'keep up with the Jones')

**Benefits** – poor communications between agencies, fear of changes, bureaucracy

**Food and fuel** – access to funds, starting in a new home, cheap fast food, start up cost of oil, other energy costs

**Skills** – access to education, access to useable ideas, saving ethic

**Willingness** – confidence in agencies, getting families to take a step towards us, being unable to recognise the issues and priorities

**Hope and Stress** – low aspirations, the small issues mask the big picture, accepting their situation – not realising things could be different

## What could the Child Poverty Champions Group do which would help?

**Isolation** – facilitate multi-agency approaches, work with schools, identifying those at risk as early as possible

**Benefits** – bridging support, educate agencies to the same standards, information sharing

**Food and fuel** – consistent budgeting tools, useable advice, targetting agencies' resources

**Skills** – budgeting in schools and budgeting with families, help to improve incomes

**Willingness** – consistency of approaches, messages and advice from agencies, create 'space' for families to step away from troubles and come back with a fresh view

**Hope and Stress** – promote success, promote benefits and work as an opportunity (*a way out*), work with the whole family, giving families opportunities

### Specific suggestions

#### Information and communication:

- *Run campaigns to challenge our perceptions of people living in poverty*
- *Facilitate poverty forums in local areas*
- *Support and coordinate cross-agency initiatives – e.g. budgeting tools, eating well on a budget, practical information to help people over specifics*
- *Advertise schemes which help people on a low income (e.g. low water tariffs, Warmer Home discount scheme)*
- *Support the development of on-line referrals and better integrated working through Advicehub*
- *Invite CAB advisers into Council departments to talk to frontline practitioners, so that they know how and where to refer for support*

#### Housing and homelessness:

- *Lead work with landlords to enable early notification when tenants fall into arrears*
- *Develop cross-partner working between district/county councils to agree a way forward for potentially homeless families with children*

- *Establish bulk buying schemes (e.g. oil club)*

**Work with and through schools:**

- *Source and publicise bursaries/grants for young people, schools and parents*
- *Information for parents on free/low cost activities*
- *Establish a project with schools which helps young people to learn how to budget and run a household*

**Other:**

- *Promote the living wage, and ensure all employees are paid a living wage*
- *Develop a digital inclusion strategy*
- *Local drop-in/advice available at supermarkets*
- *Help families to understand what being on a low income means and support them to have achievable aspirations and hopes.*

**Conclusions**

Successful working with our clients results from a willingness to accept that they are on a low income, understanding the benefits of the help offered and accepting that they are part of the changes needed. This can be combined with our knowledge skills and experience to improve the lives of families.

The impact for individuals and whole families can be a major, positive, turnaround, if we get a consistent approach and real support (i.e. things that make their lives better).