

PETERBOROUGH POVERTY TRUTH HIGHLIGHTS



**Nothing about us,
without us,
is for us.**



The Story Begins...

Nothing about us, without us, is for us is the key driver for a Poverty Truth Commission (PTC), meaning that lasting social change only happens when those who experience the struggle participate in generating that change.

The formation of a Poverty Truth Commission is about genuine involvement and presence of people whose stories of hardship and disadvantage are heard by people in positions of power to create an equal partnership for active change.

This booklet summarises our PTC journey and highlights a process that puts those who have lived experience of the struggle against poverty at the heart of the decision-making process.

The Relational Approach

The essence of a PTC is a relational approach; to take the time to grow and nurture relationships, getting to know local people on a human level and deepening our understanding of the issues they face. Qualitative data is the driving force of any PTC, and the recording of experience is one of its greatest challenges.

Our work has tried to capture this in a meaningful way, to ensure we have documented ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories at every stage of the process.

Engaging and Building Relationships

Peterborough Poverty Truth Facilitators, Cheryl McGuire and James Farson commenced in January 2023 and together led on a process that focuses on building relationships with a whole host of people within community and civic settings.

“I’m still amazed that I found a job where I got to hang around in community cafes and hubs in a wide variety of settings to talk about football, the state of the world and their stories” James

Over 350 contacts with local people in community settings were made including warm/food hubs, churches & places of faith, community centres, cafes and gardens, library & educational services, social housing initiatives - listening to stories of lived experience.

At the same time high-level support was brought on board from people in senior to CEO positions who represent the statutory, voluntary, charitable and community sectors.

With over 100 people approached, our intention was to ensure commitment from key people who have an interest in alleviating poverty and to join us with the objective to form a Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission.



Early Days

James: *"The first job was to identify what organisations in Peterborough were helping people in need, with food, advice, or anything else. In particular, the Winter Support Hubs were ongoing at the start of the project and represented a lot of what Peterborough is doing to help people who are experiencing poverty."*

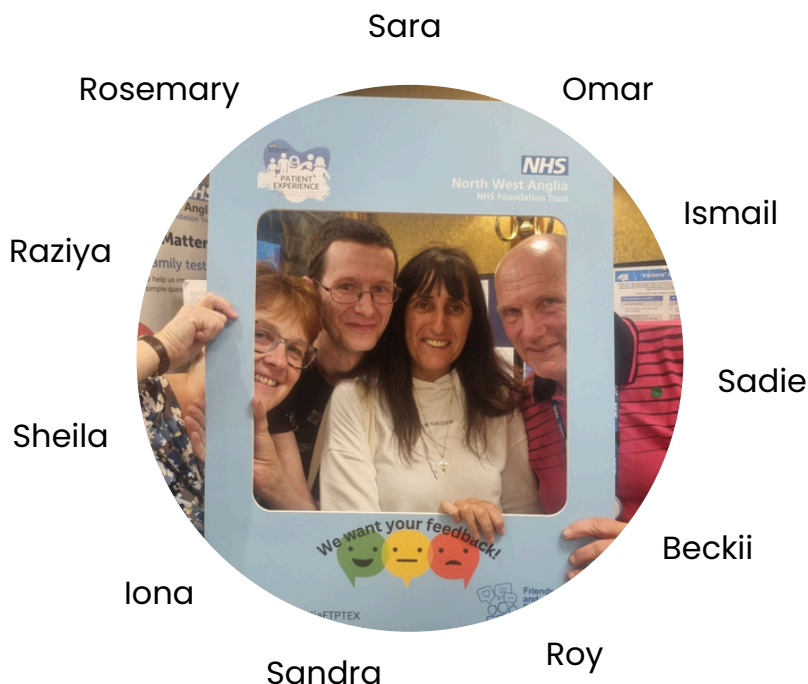
The next step was simple: go out and talk to people! Relationships are the foundation of this project, and the first relationships we are forming are between myself, organisations, and people in the community with lived experience. Listening is a big part of this project. We've been going to Winter Support Hubs, community cafes, community fridges, and just about anywhere else that is helping people in need, so we can be out in the community to meet people, hear their stories, and recruit people for the community side of our project.

While we have been having conversations with people about their experiences with struggle, Cheryl, our Civic and Business coordinator, has also been busy building relationships with people to be on the Civic and Business Commission. The conversations we have with the community inform who we are asking to be on the Civic Commission."



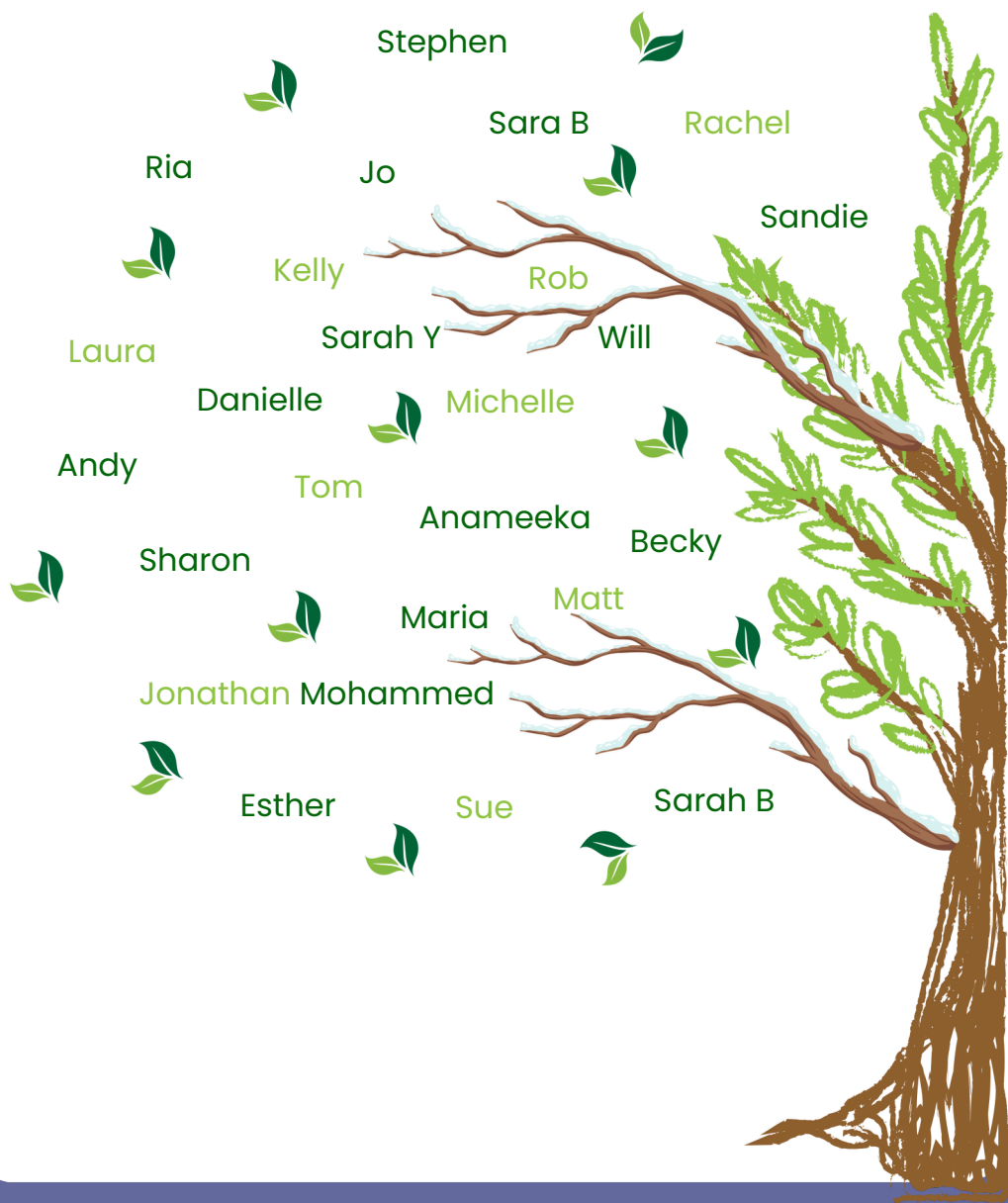
Our Community Empowerers

Through our engagement, we gained a commitment from 12 community empowerers and 27 people from the civic community who were to eventually form the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission.



Our Civic Commissioners

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The Launch

The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories

The launch of the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission took place in November 2023 at Kingsgate Community Church. Our community Empowerer stories were brought to life through the medium of poetry, film and storytelling told by the very people whose voices needed to be heard.



The launch hosted over 100 people from across Peterborough, many of whom had been involved in the project. It was an opportunity for the civic community to listen to the community, to hear their stories and to take away a deeper understanding of the impact of poverty on people's lives. It was inspiring to see how, in just one year, some of our empowerers had gained enough confidence to stand up in front of all these people and express their personal story.

The launch also highlighted how poverty does not have to define you. Many of our empowerers do incredible amounts of voluntary work with the community and we are proud to say that some have now moved on to paid roles because of their increased confidence.

A quote from the launch...

*"One of the best events I've attended in years... I hope the Poverty Truth Commission carries on going and we can work together for years and years to make services better for people who need them." Matt Oliver
Peterborough City Council*

Some More on the Launch

James: *"On the morning of the 23rd I think we were all feeling a bit nervous. I got the bus to Kingsgate with one of our empowerers and we did our best to calm each other down. We met Cheryl and a couple of other empowerers there and started getting set up.*

There was a moment in all this that I realised that the day was going to be great.

Our tech, Chris, had set up the stage with lecterns and microphones and we were getting used to the space, having people try out standing on the stage and talking into the mic. Beckii, one of our empowerers, got on the stage just to see how she'd feel about it. She spoke into the mic a bit while I peppered her with questions about who her favourite Bayern Munich player is, and then she decided to try reading one of her poems aloud. Someone else had read it out for her at St. Marks.

Beckii sounded really confident from the off, and as she read out line after line people realised what was happening, and all the conversations in the room trailed off. She finished her poem in a room full of rapt silence that burst into applause. It was then I knew that everything would be fine."

**Scan Here to View Our Highlights
Video**



**Or follow this link:
<https://youtu.be/VCuxuxHVC9U>**

The Eerie Silence of Nature

**Planes flying overhead,
Cars travelling in the distance.
Mist falling onto the street.
Not a single chirp or call from the birds,
No sight of rabbits, foxes or bears.
The wind still, the trees bare.**

**Leaves crunch while twigs snap
Beneath the feet of a lone passer by.
The street darkens as the mist thickens,
No sign of the sun.
Just the darkness and the silence of nature.**

**Colours gone,
Life is dull.
Mother Nature visits no more.**

**Decay spreads,
No land or water spared.
Pets are a thing of the past,
Zoos are now museums.
Jungles nothing but stumps
And oceans still like death.**

**Oxygen is pricey,
There are no more poor.**

Beckii Elizabeth Richardson



Building a Better Community Together

Our full first Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission took place in February 2024 and the mix of Civic and Community was terrific. With 26 people squashed in the PCVS Conference room there was a buzz and a real zest for embracing a very different style of meeting. No formal agenda, lanyards or remote sign in. Just human beings getting to know each other using activities and face-to-face communication.

The theme of 'What makes a good community' was explored in small groups with a large bit of card, coloured markers, modelling clay, and pipe cleaners at their disposal. Some creative ideas emerged but it was essentially a group of people, from all walks of life connecting over some play dough.

At the checkout: *"Did anything happen today that you didn't expect?"* The community empowerers hadn't expected all the civic people to be so friendly – the civic people had not expected there to be a meeting without a table.

One of our civic commissioners noted that his blood pressure and heart rate were the lowest they'd been in weeks (he had a tracker).



From Process to Priorities: The Means to Change

Over the last year we have worked as a fully formed Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission, cementing our relationships which has led to some very special friendships between the community and civic partners.

Every Poverty Truth Commission meet up has been scrupulously recorded and issues have naturally arisen. This work led to some key priorities with specific actions around what the commission wanted to change



Health - Increase access to health such as JOY/HAY apps especially for older people and where English is not a first language



Housing – Improve support for completing the Jigsaw application process to housing and follow up support



Education – Delivery of face-to-face support to access basic digital skills & access for face-to-face support to complete key forms

The initial development of **Working Groups** led to some clear underpinning themes and actions that we could take forward as a whole commission. Much of this was based around the need for increased **digital inclusion** and the need for face-to-face support.

Wildflower Seeds Blooming: Key Achievements



Year 2 of the project was all about the Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission coming together to identify those issues that were the most pressing and taking them forward into actions. An emerging partnership was with the Connecting Cambridgeshire digital strategy to offer opportunities to develop bespoke digital hubs across Peterborough including;

- Six potential digital hubs being identified with the process commencing
- Plan in place, in year 2 & 3 to roll offer potential digital hubs to ensure equity of offer and provision based on the need and demand
- Access for increase wi-fi availability and digital devices
- Opportunities to be a digital champion to support people with basic digital skills
- Embedding routine provision of contact numbers for clients to receive updates on their Jigsaw housing application
- Informing the development of the PCC led Jigsaw training video to support clients
- Linking with Jobsmart to offer a pilot focused on face-to-face support for form filling
- Project & costing plan in place to deliver a longer-term face to face support

This work will continue beyond the life of the PTC and, as part of the exit strategy, will be embedded within an infrastructure that can continue this great work.

Challenging the Way We/You Work

A Poverty Truth Commission is essentially a different way of working. It is about making sure that the recipients of your services are included in a genuine, meaningful way: that their views, experiences and ideas are central to the way we work and the way we develop services that meet their needs. It really is about listening, hearing and acting together to represent the people we serve in our communities.

It is a process that pays huge dividends for the people involved and here are some of the comments made by both the Empowerers and Civics on how they feel about being involved in a Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission.

Question: What are you taking away from this project?

Maria: *"It's been so positive for me to hear people with lived experience to take back to the Trust, Thank you for letting me be part of it."*

Danielle: *"For me it's about establishing relationships on a different level and reaching people on a more human level. This is the forum we want in our world. I'm excited to see what the next steps will bring and how we maintain this – to hear the community voice."*

Matt: *"This model helps us to think about new things – tiny things that add up. We don't have to change the world in one go. It has been hopeful and thankful."*

Sara: *"For me it's been really inspiring to see the project grow and see what other commissions have done. We are all part of something amazing. I honestly didn't see how we were going to get here – but we made it."*

A Word About the Poverty Truth Network & Our Representative: Sara

The Poverty Truth Network is a nationally based organisation which supports the development of PTCs across the UK. There are around 30 PTCs working with local communities and some have been going for over 5 years.



The Network helps to establish new PTCs, support facilitators to deliver the programme and create opportunities for learning.

It also amplifies the voice of commissions on themes and issues that are shared across the network.

Our representative for Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission is one of our empowerers. Sara has attended several national events and from the outset, shown a huge commitment to the values of the project. We are confident that Sara will ensure Peterborough will remain very much part of the national agenda through her continued involvement. We are very proud of her and how much she has grown in confidence to be at the forefront of our work and to represent us at this level.

Thank you Sara.

Where do we go from here?

Our work will continue beyond the life of the PTC and, as part of the exit strategy, will be embedded within an infrastructure that can continue this great work to ensure all the ambitions will be realised.

Our Celebration Event

James: *"It was a chance for the Poverty Truth community in Peterborough to be together and share the journey they'd been through, the changes that had already happened, and our hopes for a future where lived experience is at the heart of every service."*



Sara: *"The Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission's Celebration Event was more than just an end of project event, it was a reflection of resilience, collaboration, and the power of lived experiences in driving change. The event left us all inspired and motivated to continue the work of addressing poverty and ensuring that real voices remain at the heart of decision-making."*

As the night came to a close, one thing was clear: this was not the end, but a milestone in an ongoing journey toward a better, more inclusive community."

**Scan Here to View Our Highlights
Video**



Or follow this link:

<https://youtu.be/ygVeb7z0mYQ>

The Truth About Poverty

What is the truth about poverty?

It's an empty fridge

A hungry belly

A button phone

An ancient telly

An account in the red

An unpaid bill

Three layers of socks

And a no-heating chill

A walk in the rain

A bus that never came

An empty seat in a class

A fail not a pass

A condition untreated

An uncomprehending stare

A tooth left unpulled

A State that doesn't care

It's a person sitting

Alone in a room

With no hope to lift them

Only doom and gloom

That's the truth about poverty

Staring you in the eye

So who can make changes?

Only you and I.

Sandra Mcall



With Special Thanks to:

Clare Roberts, Mentor **Poverty Truth Network**
Heidi Haxeltine, **National Lottery Community Fund**
Will Plant – **Connecting Cambridgeshire Strategy**
Kip & Julian, (Film makers)

Gill Benedikz & colleagues in the
PCVS Communities Team

Ali Lyons, **PTC External Evaluator**

And above all:

Our Community Empowerers;

Roy, Sara, Sadie, Sandra, Omar, Iona, Rosemary, Beckii,



Further Reading

We blogged our way throughout our commission as a way of telling our story and keeping track. Here are some links to them so you can follow along! Just click on the links and they will take you to our website.

[Our first blog post.](#)

[Our visit to the annual Poverty Truth facilitator gathering in 2023](#)

[Our visit to the Birmingham PTC in June 2023](#)

[A post on the 2023 annual PTN gathering](#)

[A visit to ARU to talk to their social work students](#)

[The story of our rehearsal launch and build up to the launch proper in November 2023](#)

[A post-launch update](#)

[A trip to the museum for Chris Porsz' Reunions exhibition](#)

[A post on our first full commission meeting.](#)

[Our visit to BBC Cambridgeshire](#)

[A post on transitioning from full commission meetings to working groups](#)

[Our input into an NHS patient participation workshop](#)

[Our trip to the Lincoln Poverty Truth Commission celebration event](#)

[Peterborough Poverty Truth Celebrates!](#)

These blog posts (and any new ones) are all available on the PCVS website. Please scan the QR code or follow the link to view our new posts!



<https://www.pcv.co.uk/news/>