

The Poverty Truth Community

Impact Report 2024



Introduction

‘The Poverty Truth Community is a place you belong, not just participate.’

Founded in 2009, The Poverty Truth Community (previously Commission) is a grassroots movement for change led by people living with poverty. For the last 15 years they have brought people living with poverty and people making decisions about poverty together in conversation - forming relationships, opening doors and creating change.

The Poverty Truth Community believes firmly that people living with poverty are the experts on poverty, and that they should be present in decision-making spaces. As their motto and the heartbeat of their work states, ‘Nothing about us, without us, is for us.’

The work has involved time-limited commissions, campaigning, conversations, mutual mentoring projects and the creative arts. They have successfully formed long-term professional relationships with the Scottish Government, the NHS, and others - opening channels of communication for democratic engagement on policies relating to poverty. Through these projects, the PTC has successfully influenced policy in areas such as kinship care, school clothing grants, asylum, and food poverty - improving the lives of people living with poverty at policy, individual, and community levels.

The Poverty Truth approach works to create lasting change. It is unique in its long-term view and focus on building relationships between community members and policymakers. The approach centres on creating a strong and sustainable community voice with supportive relationships at its core led by an ethic of love and understanding. Having nurtured these relationships for 15 years, the Poverty Truth Community has created a community of advocacy and support which is able to move alongside the ever-shifting issues of poverty and policy, ensuring all are welcome and no one is left behind.



A Note on the Report

This report forms part of the Poverty Truth Community's ‘Year of Reimagining’ in 2024 marking and documenting its 15 years of work. A series of eight in-depth interviews were held and the information presented in this report is a direct result of this qualitative research - presenting the Poverty Truth Community's story in its members’ own words.

We are grateful to the University of Glasgow for the ESRC IAA funding and supporting an internship for the research and collation of this report in partnership with Poverty Truth Community Members.

With particular thanks to Brian, Caroline, Cath, Emerencia, Donna, Glory, Marie, Zizi, Emily Menger-Davies, Dr Clementine Hill O’Connor and Kait Laughlin.

The PTC Approach

This report is based on interviews with members of the Poverty Truth Community (PTC), carried out in October 2024. The interviews explored the themes of change in order to tell the story of not only *what* has changed but *how* this change has occurred. The research finds that PTC has taken a long-term approach to advocacy and policy that spans right back to the Poverty Truth Commissions upon which this community is based. The PTC have spent a significant amount of time forming strong working and social relationships within the PTC but also in the way they have worked with policymakers and decision makers. The interviews illustrate the ways that the PTC has addressed core social needs such as friendship and wellbeing which has supported the conditions for lasting change to occur.

The research indicates that the approach creates change at three key and interconnected levels:

Personal

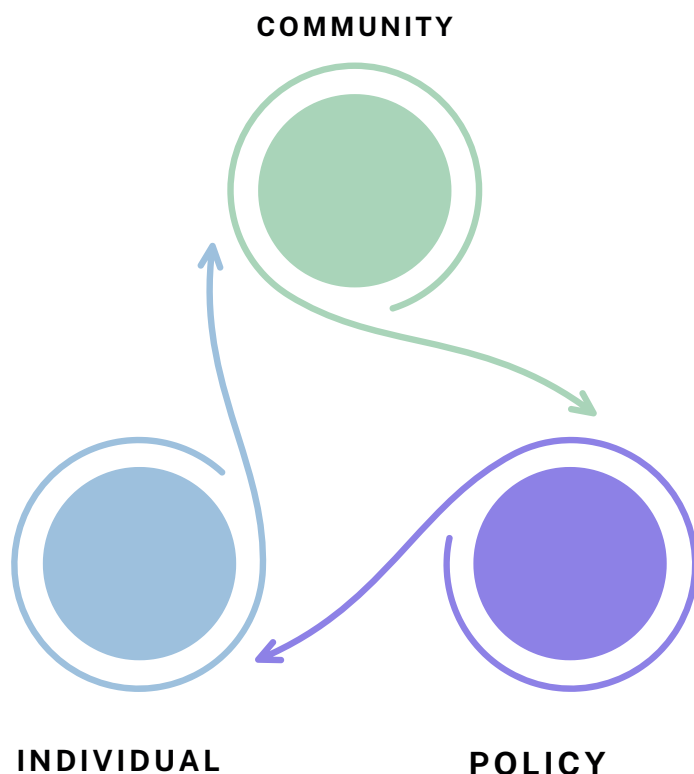
Addressing individuals' foundational social needs by providing a safe environment to be listened to without judgement, building confidence and resilience, and forming a support network.

Community

Members share skills and information, advocate as a community, and work with other organisations towards shared goals.

Policy

Barriers are removed between people in decision-making spaces and the community, allowing people with a lived experience of poverty to enact change at the policy level.



Our Journey of Change

WHAT WE DO	HOW WE DO IT	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Address foundational social needs for people living with poverty.	Provide travel expenses to come to meetings, provide tea, coffee and food, and foster an empathetic environment free from judgement.	Members tell their stories, build social connections, and share information and skills.	Members' confidence to use their voice builds, a support network forms, and advocacy occurs for themselves and others.
Provide opportunities for social and personal enrichment and wellbeing.	Organise meals and trips. Offer ad hoc support. Regular wellbeing sessions. Undertake a variety of creative techniques for idea sharing in meetings.	Friendships form, space is made for enjoyment and creativity, and members discover new experiences and skills.	Improved mental health, better quality of life, and increased creative output as a community.
Collaborate with other anti-poverty organisations.	Working together on projects, campaigns, information sharing, and attending and hosting workshops.	A network of organisations benefitting from and informed by the PTC approach works together to achieve shared goals.	Organisations are able to more effectively enact change together. Members join multiple organisations, learn more skills, and form more social groups.
Break down barriers between people experiencing poverty and policy makers.	Mutual Mentoring scheme pairing a policy maker with a community member. Regular Poverty Truth Conversations, campaigns and social gatherings.	People living with poverty and people making decisions about it learn from each other in formal and informal ways.	Members inform policy surrounding poverty and establish long-term working partnerships with government representatives.
Advocate with community members on agreed upon issues	Organise meetings with representatives to share experiences and propose alternatives.	Policy is informed and changed by lived experience.	Lives of people living in poverty are improved and channels for democratic participation are maintained.

Being Heard

A core part of the PTC approach is the knowledge that stories hold the power to create change. PTC members interviewed talked about the ways that people start slowly, quietly, talking about their experiences. The PTC foster a judgement-free environment to provide a safe place to explore these stories and experiences so that shared issues are identified. What starts out as individual stories and experiences becomes a collective understanding of a particular issue. These issues often then become the focus of campaigns to create change for PTC members and beyond.

Interviewees describe the process of moving from sharing personal stories to the creation of a collective understanding of the issues that face those living in poverty. It begins with confidence building:

“Slowly, you see their confidence building, you see their small steps, they speak more within the group. Then they take part in an active campaign. And they then move on to speaking to the policymakers. They're gaining experience and confidence all the while until eventually they're speaking with that trust, and they're speaking to not tens of people, but sometimes dozens of people to hundreds of people.” – Brian

Sharing life stories within the PTC, with others who have similar experiences, means that community members start to identify the systemic issues that shape their experiences. This knowledge, and the developing sense of a communal story means that people start to be able to take steps towards creating change.



The creation of a safe space is key to this process and Marie describes the specifics of how this done in the following excerpt:

“ It's a safe space and you feel heard. These people already do have a teeny, wee voice, they just don't realise it, but Poverty Truth inadvertently nurtures it. It's not a conscious effort, it's just nature taking its course when people are sincerely interested. Nobody will judge you because they're very empathetic. They understand you're just in as much in hardship as they have been through. – Marie

“A lot of times you don't regard yourself as poor and because you don't know any different, and you live with that, you just think it's normal until people say no, you shouldn't accept that. And so over the years in the groups you get used to talking to more than one person, and then you speak up for things” - Marie

Being Together



A consistent theme that was present throughout the interviews is the extent to which the PTC has become a key source of support for those involved. The interviewees often described the group as a family and recounted experiences of love, warmth and solidarity in times of difficulty. The PTC addresses the foundational needs of the community members, supporting those who have experienced social isolation and a loss of wider family or community support.

“They have become a shoulder where you can cry on and you have somebody... the people you meet, you see, they become like part of your family and I can, for me, if I can name one sister I have in Scotland now is one person I've met in the Poverty Truth. Yeah, she's become a sister to me she's become that shoulder that I can lean on if I have one worry.” – Emerencia

Many of the interviewees also described the opportunities they had been able to benefit from as a result of being involved in PTC. They have been able to travel and have access to new experiences. These have been an important source of fun and joy to counteract some of the more difficult experiences that the PTC members have to navigate on a day-to-day basis.

Caroline described her visits to Iona which had been made possible through her involvement in the PTC. She bought along stones and shells from these visits as the object that represented PTC for her:

“These are my stones and my shells, and there's 5 stones and there's one shell. [...] I've been (to Iona) five times and each time I've been, I've picked up one of these and every time it's been a hard time for me. Like my husband died or I've hit crisis point, and really bad, bad things in my life and each one represents a bad thing. But each one is also one that I've survived. I survived that stone and lived so I could get another and another. So, even though each one's a bad thing, it's a good thing. And it's kind of like everyone in the PTC, we're all different shapes and sizes and colours, but we're all still just one collection.” – Caroline



Being Together

“Poverty Truth lets you know you're not alone. There's other people in the same boat as you. You've always got a voice. It's like we say, ‘nothing about us without us is for us’, that's hitting it on the nail basically. [...] I've met a lot of lovely, lovely people at it. Became good friends with a lot of them as well. When you've got any problems, you could go and sit and talk to them, and they'll come and visit you. Aye, a lot of friends I've made through it.” – Cath

Ensuring that this mental and physical wellbeing is at the centre of the PTC work is vital to nurturing a supportive community which has the resilience to fight against poverty. Interviewees described the joy and love they felt in their work with the PTC, but always came back to the action that this helped to facilitate.

Marie described that it was this love that keeps the community together, but that crucially there is a common cause which they all work toward:



“I picked the heart as my object because I feel a lot of love, I feel that is at the heart of Poverty Truth. That that's at the centre. And a lot of people, that's the first thing they'll say is the warmth and the love that they get from coming to this group - all different backgrounds and cultures.

So, that's a common thread and I think that's the most important thing and that's what keeps everyone together and I think that's what keeps everyone in perspective. No big egos, no power aspect. We're all for a common cause outside of ourselves” – Marie

Similarly, Cath described the crucial information and support that the PTC offered, particularly during COVID 19 lockdown, alongside fun and laughter:

“It's a lifeline for me. I mean, I can go to all the meetings I want to go to. It's opened my eyes to what we are entitled to and what we should have. And I know that it's always a phone call away. If I want to speak to somebody, (I) phone them.

The Zooms, I think that kept us all sane during the lockdown. It was all daft wee things, making stuff and drawing pictures, but we all got a laugh, so we did. Yeah, we got a good laugh at it.” - Cath

Building Community



Zizi describes how the PTC support to navigate the asylum system gave her some of the knowledge required to help others:

“So I was kind of helping some people going through the asylum system through the help of the Poverty Truth Community to like, talk to them, make them know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel” – Zizi



The ripple effects of the PTC were evident throughout the interviews as people described the ways that they had connected with other organisations and community activities. The PTC was often an entry point for building further relationships and making connections across campaigning and support spaces.

“It's building relationships. You find a movement like the anti-poverty movement is like a root system. You start off with a tree central trunk which say in this case, in my case, was the Poverty Truth Community and through that it's like the root system moving out.” – Brian

“I got to know about Nourish Scotland through PTC. In fact, they signposted me to Nourish Scotland and since being with Nourish Scotland I have had the opportunity to have a meeting with politicians, I have fed into lots of consultations, I have run kitchen table conversations, round table conversations, and workshops.” - Glory

Finally, interviewees talked about the ways that the PTC had given them the confidence and opportunity to expand their work from the PTC into other spaces.

Brian said that it was his car keys that were the object that represented PTC best for him as he has travelled all over the UK to link the work of the PTC with others:

“Poverty Truth Community work has enabled me to travel up and down the UK representing the PTC and representing Scotland. [...]

Whether it's someone from Kilburn or Kent, it doesn't matter. Poverty doesn't know boundaries, doesn't know borders, and it's a unified fight.” – Brian

“It really opens your eyes to the different groups that you could go to visit, and through the PTC, I'm actually starting a pantry, a food pantry in the Gorbals.” Cath

Creating Policy Change

The work of the PTC acknowledges the complexity of the experience of poverty- it does not neatly fit into definitions or boxes. Within the context of PTC meetings members share experiences, stories and concerns whilst acknowledging that although poverty may impact at every stage and in every area of someone's life, it is not the defining feature. It is also not something which cannot change.

From the early days it was agreed by those involved that the PTC must be a movement of listening which then leads to action and change. Not everything raised by PTC members can be followed through, researched and campaigned on, but there are times when common themes arise. Small groups then do further research to drill down to identify a specific area where there is space for a campaign for change. The question they ask is what is a problem to which we know the solution because it is something we live with every day?

Healthcare Inequality



The hostile environment created by the UK political system has pushed many asylum seekers into poverty. The PTC has welcomed asylum seekers into the community and worked with partner organisations to support them along their journey to gaining settled status. Challenging the issues that fall in the gap between national asylum policy and devolved decision-making, the PTC has successfully challenged issues of inequality and discrimination. Emerencia shared her experience of challenging a decision to deny her life-saving healthcare with the PTC. The existing relationships that the PTC were able to draw on ensured that Emerencia could access senior decision makers to raise her concerns:

"The PTC organised a meeting with the politicians to talk about my situation. And I'm getting the treatment today thanks to their support. They stood by me. They were the voice, they spoke, they didn't just stay quiet, you see? I had to speak to them, I had to speak to other organisations, and they took it seriously. They gave me that support and eventually, NHS decided to give me treatment and I am on the treatment and that's why I'm still here, it is thanks to their support. [...]"

I was going through the most unjust aspect of mankind, like you are not treating somebody because of documentation, you see, and you were going to let this person die. And I was going crazy because I'm like, so I'm going to die without seeing my children? [...]"

Today I have my papers, today I have my family with me and everything has gone well and I'm ready to be part of PTC to support other people who may be vulnerable and be where I was."

Emerencia describes the crucial support that PTC offered. Practical support and the ultimately successful outcome were both of course important, but the key thing to note is that all her interactions with PTC were rooted in care and compassion. This was in stark contrast to her other experiences and invaluable in the context of being so far from family networks and support.

Access to Education

For some PTC members in the refugee and asylum process, their desire to contribute to life in Scotland met unexpected challenges. With professional qualifications from their home country not recognised, they found themselves denied access to SAAS (Student Awards Agency Scotland) funding because of their immigration status (the long residence, 10-year settlement route).

Building on work already done by community members and working alongside refugee organisations, the PTC brought community members together with the Minister for Higher Education and relevant civil servants to seek change. In 2023 the law was changed to allow those on the 10-year settlement route to access university funding. Zizi and Glory share their experience of the process.

The way that Zizi and Glory were able to voice their concerns speaks to the core way that the PTC work. People go beyond telling their stories or sharing their experiences and are supported to identify routes to change, not only from an individual position but to create wider social change.

“Following that, a consultation was opened by the Scottish Government, which we at the PTC fed in. The long residence no longer applies in Scotland. Even asylum seeker’s children can now go to university and access some form of funding as well. [...]”

Comparing that one year that was able to access the funding to the two years I couldn’t access it, the difference was significant. It was much, much better to have that support while studying. Life was really, really difficult without any help.” - Glory



“The Education Minister met with us and we discussed deeply and we told them, we’ve been in asylum, they’ve granted us leave to remain, now they don’t want us to become something, to use our potential. We can’t just have the right to stay here and are supposedly able to go to school but can’t go to school. That means they’re not helping us grow at all, especially for those that have been in asylum for a long time, they are not allowed to work, they’re not allowed to do anything. So they can’t even get into jobs easily, and some of them want to go to school to better themselves because they can at least read and write. So why at this stage are you not wanting to support them to become the most of themselves?”

We went through all this discussion and then I think they saw that we were saying something that was meaningful [...] When the results of the consultation came back, it happened that they said yes to SAAS funding us. I was able to finish my first degree in Community Development and to go and do my masters in Global Migration and Social Justice.” - Zizi

Tackling Child Poverty

A lot of the campaigning work that the PTC has undertaken relates to tackling child poverty and it was clear from the interviews that this was an issue that people felt strongly about. Brian described the reasons why it was so important for the PTC to be covering this.

“1 in 4 children in Scotland are in poverty and in dire poverty... you can show the pie charts and the bar charts or whatever and the projections (of where it will be in the future.) But as soon as you walk out the door, it's forgotten about and onto the next subject for the person behind the desk.

If you take someone who has a lived experience of having to live in poverty and seeing their children in poverty as well, when you hear the story of not being able to feed their children, they've got to make the choices of heating or eating [...] When you hear the stories of the impact of poverty has on lives and even down to the minutia, that people don't always consider, then that has an impact.” – Brian



Kinship Care

In 2009 one of the first issues that was the focus of the work of the PTC (then Poverty Truth Commission) was the experience of kinship carers. Kinship carers are family members who become primary carers for children (most often their grandchildren) so they do not have to enter foster and residential care. The PTC successfully campaigned for an end to the discrimination of children in kinship care who were not receiving the same level of financial support and access to services as those in foster care. The following is an account of the role of the PTC from someone interviewed in 2017, reflecting on what had been achieved:

Cost of School

Between 2014- 2016 the PTC focused on the cost of school, with particular emphasis on school uniform which was identified as a source of stress and a place where change could be achieved. This work is also an example of the ways that PTC has partnered with other organisations to create change across Scotland.

“The uniform was the big thing and at that time there were 32 local authorities in Scotland. Each local authority gave a different amount of grant towards buying these uniforms and some were quite generous, well over £100 and some like Aberdeen were £20 and they wanted to bring it down to zero. So we worked with another two charities, Child Poverty Action Group Scotland, and One Parent Families Scotland, because they had been campaigning for this cause for 10 years previously. We created a very respectful relationship with the Scottish Government and had a meeting with the Deputy First Minister. We changed policy. They made it a uniform amount for each (local) authority. So it was going from almost disappearing in some places to then being a standard.” – Marie

“PTC opened a lot of doors that kinship carers on their own wouldn't have got through [...] When the PTC done the talk in the City Chambers, and then won it hands up, all the votes went to kinship care and that started moving so it did. Opening doors, going into parliament, we wouldn't have been able to do that.” - Anonymous

Mutual Mentoring



One of the unique ways that PTC work is through the Mutual Mentoring programme which brings together those with lived experience of poverty and those working in policy making. This programme builds on the effective working relationships that have been established with the Scottish Government and provides a platform for the voices of the PTC, opening doors to decision making spaces. Through this scheme, long-term professional working relationships have been made which allows members of the PTC to fight for lasting change through engagement with decision makers.

Donna, Caroline and Brian reflect on the Mutual Mentoring programme, describing the way that it allows the PTC to push for accountability from decision makers:

“You can't resolve a problem until you know what the problem is, until you know where it's stinging. So there's no point saying they are going to help the people who are poor in Glasgow if you're not saying, 'wait, where is it hurting?'”

‘I've seen things be resolved, so it does work. The councillors and the people that we met, They were really wanting information. They were wanting to know that what they're doing is the right thing. They're not wanting to think that what they're doing is just them sitting around a table and deciding, you want somebody that knows on board. So, it's not just for the people in poverty, it's also for the people who are doing the decision making.’
- Donna

“I was mentoring him more than he was mentoring me and you know, we're still pals and we'll have a good laugh and that opened a lot of doors to MSPs because he introduced me to a lot of them. It's good to have a foot in the door. [...]”

I do a lot of stuff with the Parliament, so I've got a lot of contacts.” – Caroline

“That's what the PTC does, it opens the door to give people who are living with the real experience of poverty the chance to speak to those who are making decisions that are going to affect that person on the other side of the desk.”

There needs to be accountability, and that's what the PTC does.” - Brian

Moving forward

The Poverty Truth Community has been working on a 'Year of Reimagining' throughout 2024. This culminated in the co-production of a vision for change and a rearticulation of the work and values. These will form a foundation from which future work will develop.

Our Vision for Change

We believe in a future without poverty and a world where everyone has a part to play.

A society which flourishes, is just, and is built on humanity.

Communities where people speak up, where people are heard, and where change means working together as equals.

Led by People living with Poverty

- *We are founded on and live out the motto, 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us.'*
- *We know first-hand the isolation and powerlessness poverty brings – and the strength and solidarity of people coming together.*
- *We are building a movement for change led by people living with poverty – supporting, challenging, and empowering each other along the way.*

Humanity at the Heart

- *We understand the trauma and challenges poverty brings.*
- *We create safe spaces where everyone is welcomed, heard, and valued – placing humanity at the heart of our work.*

Sharing the Truth

- *We know the transformative impact of being heard, sharing stories, and shifting the narrative around poverty.*
- *We work creatively to share the truth about poverty – with each other, with those in positions of influence, and with the wider public.*

Conversations for Change

- *We are a movement of action. We acknowledge the power imbalances at play in much of society and know from experience that change flourishes through conversation and connection.*
- *We invite people of influence into our spaces - to build relationships, have transformative conversations and to work for change.*
- *We encourage people of influence to further invite us into the rooms where decisions are made – and to work together for change as equals.*

Grounded in Human Rights

- *We believe that the existence of poverty is a denial of human rights and dignity.*
- *We work together with others to expose the multi-layered nature of poverty which is not solely about income, and to work for dignity, not charity.*

What does the PTC mean to you?

All those interviewed were asked to reflect on what was most important to them about the PTC.

“This is how I see the PTC, a garden full of love with lots of ideas on how to improve things for the common man, to defend the rights of the vulnerable.

So, all of us in PTC, we come under the small umbrella where we all share love and support with one another and we are needing the support of politicians, of our ministers, of our parliamentarians, of the state as a whole to be able to make Scotland a garden of love.”

Emerencia

“It sounds a bit corny, but love. I feel loved and wanted... they're always there for me. It's... I don't know. Like I say it's like your anchor, they're my anchor, they keep me afloat, they keep me grounded kind of thing.”

Caroline

“I feel a lot of love, I feel that is at the heart of Poverty Truth. That that's at the centre. And a lot of people, that's the first thing they'll say is the warmth and the love that they get from coming to this group. All different backgrounds, cultures.”

Marie

“The tree of life for me represents Poverty Truth because it is a living body of people and the tree of life, it also symbolises hope, you know. And it takes many different branches and leaves to make a proper tree and like a proper community. It has to grow, like 17 years since that first meeting, it's now growing, it's got so many leaves and so many branches to it.

The bigger it gets, the more hope there is for people to be heard, to have a platform to speak from. I just feel it's been a very worthwhile journey for myself.’

Donna



What does the PTC mean to you?



"The PTC embodies compassion, responsibility, and also they believe in positive change. And they believe positive change is possible. it's just about creating hope and opportunities and just making the world a better place. That's it."

Zizi

"The PTC means everything to me. The PTC got me through the lockdown, even though they were in lockdown, there was still a lot of work going on, and they worked hard to keep everyone in contact. And there was still campaigning to be done. It got me through my cancer. it's what kept me going. It gave me a focus."

Brian

"The reason it's important is because it gives you a voice that you never realised you had. The Poverty Truth that lets you know you're not alone. There's other people in the same boat as you. You've always got a voice. It's like we say, 'nothing about us without us is for us', that's hitting it on the nail basically."

Cath

"The PTC means family to me. PTC means connection to me. PTC means, how do I put it now? Like a backbone. Like I always say, money is not always the thing. It matters more when you have a shoulder to lean on when you need to."

Glory



This report is produced in memory of those Poverty Truth Members who are no longer with us and with thanks to our funders, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and The Robertson Trust.

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