

Voices From the Margin

Thrive were out on Stockton High Street once again facilitating a community conversation workshop, 'Voices From The Margin' as part of a national conversation in the lead up to the General Election. A number of get-togethers were organised to talk vision, values, priorities, stories, identities, solidarities... and what we can do together as citizens.



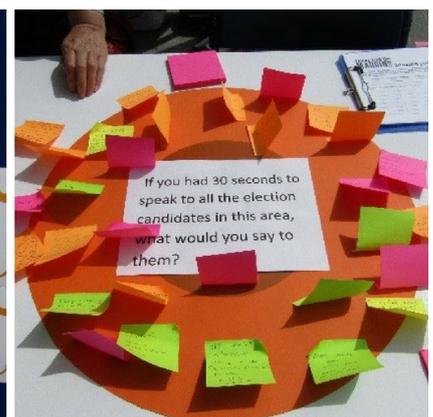
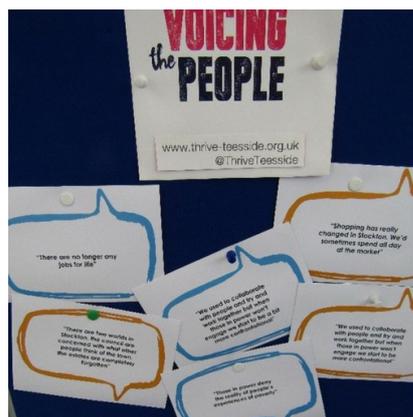
As the election was drawing nearer, more and more people who have been left behind due to poverty were provided with the opportunity to speak out through a national **Voices from the Margins** project. It was felt that only by talking about issues that affect people together that we could know what we need our politicians to do with us, or for us.

The Poverty Alliance brought together people from across **Scotland**, while Church Action on Poverty have visited centres working with people facing severe disadvantage in **Calderdale** and **Hull**. Everywhere, people are taking pride in their communities even though they face huge difficulties - and a powerful challenge. Like elsewhere, Stockton on Tees also needs politicians who understand the difficulties and who will work with people to overcome them.

Stockton residents were asked if you had 30 seconds to talk to your candidates what would you say to them? Responses included 'how are you going to help the most vulnerable in our society? We have too many children going hungry, families unable to put food on the table and people not having enough money to live on'. Limited job opportunities, the harshness of the sanctions regime and zero hours contracts were also highlighted as particularly problematic. People were worried about the proposed building of the Hilton Hotel and what would happen if this was not a success – would services be cut? Would council tax rise?

Thrive extended an invitation to all candidates from Stockton North and Stockton South to take part in this Community Conversation and provided them with an opportunity to listen and respond to some of the comments raised by people living in Stockton. Representation was visible from Labour, UKIP, The Green Party and the Lib Dems. Unfortunately, no communications were received from the Conservative Party candidates.

Thrive would like to thank all those who participated and shared their comments about living and working in Stockton on Tees.



Thrive attending 'For Whose Benefit?'

The everyday realities of welfare reform' A Parliamentary roundtable and book launch

The event also saw the launch of a new book:

'For Whose Benefit? The everyday realities of welfare reform by Dr Ruth Patrick'

"What does day-to-day life involve for those who receive out-of-work benefits? Is the political focus on moving people from 'welfare' and into work the right one? And do mainstream political and media accounts of the 'problem' of 'welfare' accurately reflect lived realities? For whose benefit? The everyday realities of welfare reform explores these questions by talking to those directly affected by recent reforms. Ruth Patrick interviewed single parents, disabled people and young jobseekers on benefits repeatedly over five years to find out how they experienced the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and whether the welfare state still offers meaningful protection and security in times of need. She reflects on the mismatch between the portrayal of 'welfare' and everyday experiences, and the consequences of this for the UK's ongoing welfare reform programme. Exploring issues including the meaning of dependency, the impact of benefit sanctions and the reach of benefits stigma, this important book makes a timely contribution to ongoing debates about the efficacy and ethics of welfare reform"

As further welfare reforms are rolled out and Universal Credit is gradually implemented, this event provided an invaluable opportunity to hear from those living with the consequences of welfare reform and to discuss the likely and possible future for social security policy in the UK.

The event opened with presentations from three individuals directly affected by the reforms of recent years, featuring representatives from the Dole Animators and Thrive Teesside. Sarah Duffy, a welfare rights advice manager from GIPSIL in Leeds gave a reflection on the changing social security landscape and the challenges that those she works with face followed by responses from **Kate Green MP**, **Andrew Harrop** (Fabian Society) and Dr **Ruth Patrick** (University of Liverpool).

The chair, **Patrick Butler** (The Guardian), facilitated a roundtable discussion on these key questions:

How can policy makers and stakeholders more effectively incorporate the expertise that comes from experience in developing policy agendas around social security?

What are the likely consequences of the most recent wave of welfare reforms?

What would a more inclusive and effective social security system look like, and how might we get there?



Thrive actively involved in the Teesside Together

Thrive's participation in this weekend of events symbolised the organisation's commitment to pledge to work with others for positive change and social justice.

Teesside Together Weekend was a collaboration between the Economic Justice project and MIMA. It offered a number of workshops, training and discussions that enabled participants to explore issues that affect communities across Teesside, challenging participants to learn, connect and acknowledge differences.

Participation in this event provided opportunities to explore the effects that social injustices have on our communities and how we can better build mutual support and work collectively towards change.

Thrive alongside other partners raised awareness of a number of issues (including, but not exhaustive): Why I wear the Hijab / failings of the benefit system through the screening of I Daniel Blake / Sayno2sanctions / Justice First – movement for refugee rights / Belief in Action with Islamic Diversity Centre.



“From small acts to large movements that have changed the world, togetherness is a powerful thing. Exploring how we can overcome division and what we can achieve when we work together is key to affecting sustainable change”

 **“The Thrive Vision”**

“ Thrive's vision is to close the gap between the rich and poor, ensuring social justice and equality for all in Teesside. People living in Teesside on the margins will have the support to be empowered to improve their livelihoods, gaining the power needed to effect real, transformative change and tackle issues that have, in the past, kept them in poverty. ”

Thrive Took to The Streets in Middlesbrough

Thrive took to the streets in Middlesbrough with Unite to continue the fight against the unfair and unjust benefit sanctions regime.

The rationale for continuing to take action:

Withholding claimants entitlements and reducing their income for minor infringements causes undue stress.

‘I nearly lost my home, couldn’t pay lodge’.

Putting money on any gas or electricity card is impossible, households spiral further into debt and are unable to buy food. Claimants often ‘go without food so that their children can eat’, {they have been noted to} ‘live off porridge’, rely on foodbank referrals or ‘rely on family’ to feed them. Basic dietary requirements are unobtainable, which then impacts on claimants physical and emotional wellbeing.

Sanctioned claimants have talked about increased levels of anxiety and stress:

“I had to live on £36 per week....I have mental Health problems.... after being sanctioned I attempted suicide”.

Low mood levels and heightened feelings of anxiety can lead to sanctioned claimants becoming more socially isolated. Not going out or having the bus fare to visit family has been noted in a number of testimonies given to Thrive.

Family relationships suffer:

‘we missed bills, I became stressed and argued with partner, had to borrow money for everyday living costs’...

‘Added extra pressure on Mum, who is now facing eviction due to non-payment of HB/CT’

If you have been sanctioned or wish to help Thrive continue to challenge this unfair and unjust regime, please get in touch.



Stockton Poverty Truth Meeting

Thrive Teesside held their first meeting for local people who are facing difficulties and struggling to get by as part of the development of a **Stockton Poverty Truth Commission**

This was a fun and interactive session, with the group designing their own snakes and ladders game to mirror life's ups and downs in relation to financial matters.

The aim of bringing people together is to start thinking about how people living in poverty can have opportunities and take the lead on challenging the Borough's leaders to work with them on tackling poverty. Will this make a difference to the decisions that are being made? Would new solutions to poverty be discovered? Would people listen and, if they did, would they better understand the challenges that poverty brings?"

People who get involved will:

- ✓ have their say and share the realities of living in difficult circumstances
- ✓ develop relationships with key leaders and decision makers
- ✓ agree and implement actions to relieve poverty in Stockton



To find out more or get involved, please get in touch with Tracey or Corrina at Thrive:

Telephone: 01642 678811

Trust Map

Thrive have been working with **Durham and Northumbria Universities** on a project called the **Trust Map**.

3 workshops have been delivered and a 'community conversation' around living and/or working in Stockton-on-Tees was initiated.

The workshops explored the dynamics of trust within the community and it is hoped the findings and learning will inform an event later in the year with policy makers.

What became apparent during these sessions is that participants had limited levels of trust with institutions such as the DWP and statutory organisations. Mapping aspects of trust and understanding how these relate to particular organisations and people is of benefit to Thrive to enable relationships in the community to be developed which will help with the advancement of a Poverty Truth Commission.



Sessions were welcomed. They were fun and interactive with participants feeling that it helped them understand how they built and developed trust. Of particular importance was understanding how trust can help build relationships and affect change.



Thrive supporting Rainbow Laces Day

Rainbow Rounders at Teesside Uni

Raising awareness through sport. Teams from all over Teesside got together to play rounders to celebrate Teesside University's commitment to **its All Different, All Equal** pledge as well as raise awareness for **Stonewall's Rainbow Laces** campaign. The campaign raises awareness through sporting activities to ensure that no LGB and/or T person feels excluded.



Thanks and acknowledgements

Thrive was set up as a project of **Church Action on Poverty**. We are immensely grateful to Church Action on Poverty for all their work and expertise, and look forward to continuing our close working relationship with them. Thrive is now an independent charity in its own right! We look forward to continuing our work in Teesside well into the future and growing in stature, power and expertise locally. Thank you also to all of the volunteers, churches, mosques and faith groups who support our work locally. Thanks to our partners, including **Oxfam UK's Poverty Programme, Church Action on Poverty, Durham University** and **Teesside University**.

Support the work

Like many charities at the moment, Thrive is struggling and needs income to continue to support and empower the most marginalised groups in Teesside. If you could make a regular or one-off donation to Thrive, please contact the office.

Contact details

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