

Welcome

Professor Rob MacDonald



We are pleased to **welcome** our new **Trustees to the Board of Thrive: Professor Rob MacDonald** from Teesside University has a range of leadership roles in the School of Social Science and Law and is currently deputy director of the Social Futures Institute. **Professor Tracy Shildrick** who has recently left Teesside University to move to Leeds University as Professor of Sociology and Social Policy. Both Tracy and Rob have research interests in worklessness, poverty and social exclusion. And **Steph Mulrine**, a very experienced PhD student, described by others as a 'pragmatic radical' who is very passionate about tackling social injustice.



Steph Mulrine



Professor Tracy Shildrick

Funding Update

Newtown Ward Community First Panel

Mission Statement:

Thrive Volunteers will be given dedicated support (half a day a week over 6 months) to reach out and engage with residents of Newtown, to encourage attendance and active participation at various community / social action events that aim to dispel the myths of people living in poverty and address some of the issues faced by this particular marginalised group. **Volunteers will;**

- carry out a leaflet and door knocking campaign
- attend various community events to promote the work of Thrive
- promote 'dignity in and out of work', Leadership Council meeting(s) and focus group meetings
- gather case study material to dispel the myths of people living in poverty
- support and encourage attendance of Newtown residents at the above key events
- work closely with residents to 'speak out' about issues in relation to inequality and poverty
- encourage residents to become members of Thrive and work within its guidelines of campaigning and taking social action.

Specific actions Thrive are concerned with include: tackling high cost lenders; mitigating the impact of welfare reform; addressing job centre sanctions; zero hours contracts & living wage.

Funding Update

Stockton & Community Sector Investment Fund

Welcome to new volunteers

Throughout 2014, Thrive have recruited **8 new volunteers from the Stockton area**. The Investment fund has allowed Thrive to establish a co-ordinated approach to the recruitment and retention of volunteers, ensuring voluntary involvement is an opportunity and valuable experience for all, taking specific measures to improve accessibility and providing additional support for those members of the community who are particularly socially excluded

To ensure the future sustainability of Thrive, we acknowledge the important role volunteers bring, especially with regards accessing some of the most socially excluded households. Community volunteers have a greater understanding of their local communities or interest groups and generally have experience or knowledge of available services, so they are in a good position to support potential volunteers and signpost beneficiaries to local services and social activities.

If you would like to volunteer with Thrive, please get in touch with Tracey on 01642 614126 or via email traceyherrington@thrive-teesside.org.uk

Funding Update - Comic Relief Funding Success

Thrive have recently been awarded a grant by **Comic Relief** to carry out a 2 year project with people who have been sanctioned in the Teesside area.

This project will address the issue of **job centre sanctions** and consequent hardship.

Between June and November 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions issued 600,000 'sanctions' (reduction to or cessation of Job Seekers' Allowance), with this being the biggest single reason for referral to foodbanks.

At Thrive we see the consequences of this enforced destitution and want to work locally with those affected. People subjected to these sanctions have a poor relationship with the DWP and feel powerless, voiceless and stigmatised. Previous project work has highlighted some of the tensions and difficulties between staff and clients, with negative attitudes on each

side, and a general 'us and them' feel to encounters.

The project will support 40 jobseekers, enabling them to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and build relationships in order to influence and change Job Centre practice, thus reducing the risk of avoidable and inappropriate sanctions.

40 jobseekers will influence over 250 local people to counter negative stereotypes of people on benefits:

If you (or anyone you know) has been affected by a benefit sanction and would like to share your experiences or take part in this project, please get in touch with Thrive on 01642 614126 or via email traceyherrington@thrive-teesside.org.uk

To raise awareness of sanctions in Stockton, **The BBC's Inside Out programme** aired on the 6 October asked the question '**Do sanctions work**'. Testimonies from Tanya, a Thrive representative, The Moses Project and Prefer Homes highlighted some of the indiscriminate practices and the subsequent impact these sanctions are having upon people. Job Centre sanctions in Stockton average about 365 a month which in monetary terms equates to £97,163 a month (more than a million pound a year) which is taken from our local economy. The sheer number of sanctions is causing financial strain and 'plunging people into crisis'. Those that have been sanctioned are speaking out and commenting that 'individual circumstances are not taken into consideration', 'sanctions and loss of benefits are not helping' ... people can be without their job seekers allowance for up to 156 weeks and are leading to 'feelings of worthlessness'. The financial difficulties are having a massive, negative impact upon people... and when people have no choice, for some they have had to steal food in order to eat. A spokesperson from the local Job Centre commented that sanctions were passed by decision makers if it had been deemed to have gone through a 'fair, reasonable and consistent' process. Debates have been around 'are there targets for sanctioning claimants?' with mixed feelings around this issue. A representative from PCS Union talked about 'local expectations' and the correlation between these expectations and the high number of sanctions. It was unfortunate that Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was unavailable to comment on the issues raised in relation to sanctions and it is hoped that raising awareness of what is happening in our communities and opening up a dialogue with local job centres will help to change practice and reduce the need to sanction so severely in the future

A Thrive Participant said,

"I worked for 21 years and lost my job 2 years ago. They've stopped my money 3 times, it's not fair"

The Crossparty Commons Select Committee said (Mirror 28.01.14),

"Many of those on the dole are being "sanctioned" inappropriately when common sense dictated that they should not lose

A destitute asylum seeker before and after Thrive campaigning action said,

Before: *"I had been brainwashed and rendered powerless by the system, I felt discouraged, voiceless and powerless".*

After: *"Most things are achievable if the community works together. I feel empowered and equipped."*

"I just really wanted to let you know...when you go along you realise it informs you a bit more about the society in which you live... people tend to think they're scroungers and

Dignity In and Out of Work Event - 17th September

'Thrive, Together Middlesbrough and Caritas Social Action Network facilitated this partnership event on 17 September with support from grass root speakers, the Moses project and Prefer Homes. **Over 70 people attended** the event and for some of the speakers, this was the first time they had ever spoken publicly. Without the courage of the speakers, this event would not have been possible. They openly talked about the difficulties they face as a direct consequence of welfare reforms (in particular the bedroom tax), raised awareness of the daily struggles faced in order to 'get by', put into perspective the sheer determination of maintaining self worth and made clear to the audience some of the harsh choices made in relation to the impact of being sanctioned. Numbers of sanctions in Stockton over during 2013 are recorded as 4,514 across 5,750 Job Seeker Allowance Claimants

Community speakers are keen to see change... they are **'not a statistic, but a person'** deserving of respect and support . It is hoped a dialogue can be opened up with Job Centre Plus practices in order to build relationships with claimants and advisors and together promote positive practice that actively seeks to enable change.



Dignity In and Out of Work Where do you stand?

On Teesside today
40% of children are living in poverty
Middlesbrough & Stockton ranked top of Youth Unemployment Table
20,000 households living in fuel poverty
4,514 Sanctions in Stockton during 2013 across 5,750 Job Seeker's Allowance Claimants
The high interest lending industry is growing at an alarming rate...



Community speakers are keen to see change... they are **'not a statistic, but a person'** deserving of respect and support . It is hoped a dialogue can be opened up with Job Centre Plus practices in order to build relationships with claimants and advisors and together promote positive practice that actively seeks to enable change.

Feedback from attendees has been very positive:

'I thought the event last week was both moving and humbling and let us hope that in time it may lead to some improvements in the lives of the speakers Claire (one of the speakers) was pleased with her effort, glad to be part of it and it certainly boosted her confidence.'

'I wanted to say a big thank you to everyone for all their hard work, particularly in supporting people to share their stories, which was the heart of the event. I have had some really positive feedback from a variety of people who attended, who thought it was extremely powerful.'

'real stories, real people .. it was great to hear so many stories from people who have been directly impacted by and struggled with the system we have in place today .. key recommendation are to relax sanctions, value those in need of help and treat them with the respect they deserve'

Quote from Speakers,

' I was sanctioned for getting my appointment mixed up with another appointment - basically I turned up on the wrong day. I explained my error and apologised. It is not in my character to not do what is required and expected of me. I expected a ticking off and perhaps a warning.. my attendance record previously has been exemplary.. this was not the case.. I was sanctioned... I sometimes wonder if common sense could have be applied'

'I was sanctioned and as a result (having no money) I stole food to feed myself. I was caught and about to receive a community sentence .. I asked to be sent to prison. At least in prison, I have a roof over my head and food in my stomach... I don't have to worry were my next meal is coming from'

Greg Brown - Recognition by Church Action on Poverty

Greg's determination and people skills helped to make Thrive one of the most successful examples of community organising **Church Action on Poverty** has been involved in. We were always impressed and inspired by the actions he enabled local people to take in Stockton – from crashing council meetings to challenging high-cost lenders and meeting Jesse Jackson! The work which Greg did on high-cost lending – amplifying the voices of local people with creative resources and wider mobilisation – has become a model for all of our national campaign actions. Church Action on Poverty wishes Greg all the best in his future career, and is grateful for all he achieved during his time at Thrive.



The Role of Faith and Belief Groups in Building Resilient Communities



Financial resilience is a key factor and concern for many of our communities which is why it's great for Thrive to have had a presence at an event held by Middlesbrough Interfaith Network on 2nd October which explored the role of faith & belief groups in building and sustaining resilient communities.

As well as talks from the key note speaker **Rt. Revd. Paul Ferguson, Bishop of Whitby**, the event included examples of local initiative, workshops and networking and information stands from key agencies, including **Public Health, MIND, Clinical Commissioning Group, C.A.B, Together Middlesbrough & HealthWatch**.

Thrive highlighted some of the difficulties faced by people living in poverty in our communities. In particular, unmanageable debt is rising and it is having a dramatic effect on people's health and wellbeing. *'I couldn't sleep at night for the worry'*. People are finding it difficult to 'get by' financially and are under increasing pressure to borrow money to fund basic needs or repay other loans. It has often been suggested 'that work is the best route out of poverty', however the fact is that the majority of children and adults living in poverty in the UK live in working households. Thrive are seeking the support of their partners within the faith communities alongside other partner organisations to address issues relating to the 'working poor'. In particular, to champion the need for a 'living wage' and tackle zero hours contracts




“ 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 ”

A Sad Farewell to John Barnes



It is with regret that we say a sad farewell to our **Treasurer and friend John Barnes** who recently passed away. John has supported Thrive for a number of years and his wisdom, insight and expertise will be sadly missed. John will be always remembered for his determination to ensure the sustainability of Thrive and his legacy will be that of 'remaining strong, united and championing the needs of those facing social injustice'.

Become a Member of Thrive



We would like to invite organisations to become members of Thrive. Thrive Teesside is an award winning, independent organisation (Voluntary Organisations Network North East 'Most Inspiring Campaign 2011', Sheila McKechnie Awards 2011).

We aim to close the gap between the rich and the poor by supporting low-income communities to gain the power they need to enact change. We do this through detailed research and local action: bringing together local people and institutions, supporting them to set their own agenda, take action and campaign for social justice. The Rt. Hon. Nick Hurd MP, the Minister for Civil Society, has called our work the 'best example of Community Organising' he has ever seen (BBC Newsnight, Nov 2011).

Thrive membership is free and annual membership means that a member group is part of a broad based coalition which can offer mutual support in taking actions forward and addressing areas of perceived injustice

If you have any questions or your organisation would like to be involved in some of the work we do and become a member of Thrive, **please contact Tracey Herrington: traceyherrington@thrive-teesside.org.uk**



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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