



More Snakes than Ladders

A report from the A Different
Take Leeds panel



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



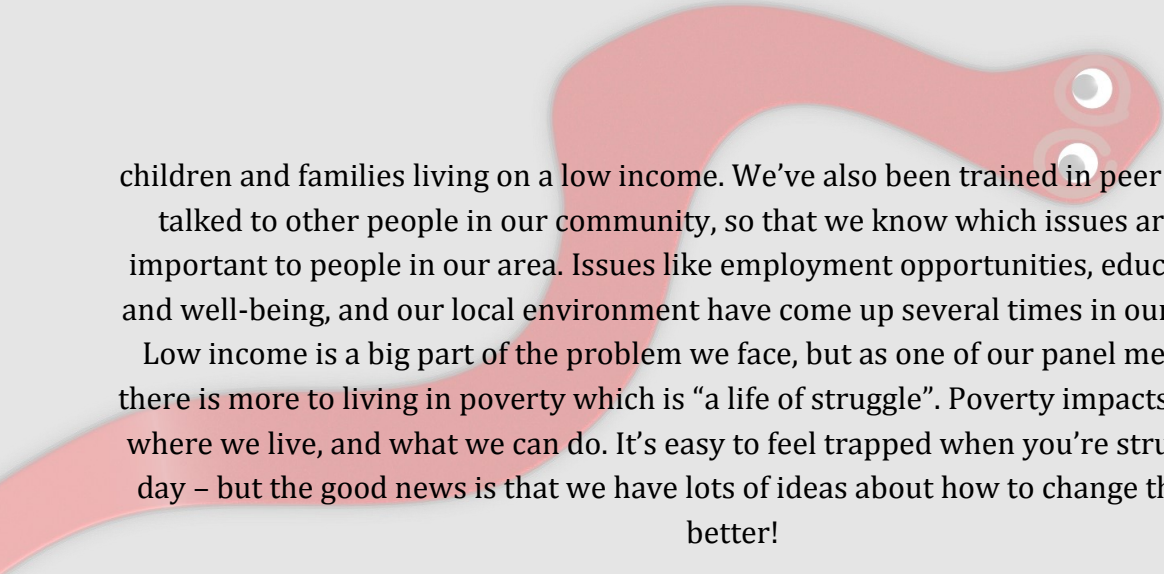
More Snakes than Ladders: A report from the A Different Take - Leeds panel

It is difficult to define what poverty is. For some people it is not having food but for others it means something different. So what is poverty? How do you measure it? What criteria is being used to say who is living in poverty? We should agree on that.

We are a group of young people, young adults and parents who live in Leeds. We all have personal experience of living on a low income. We are used to people talking about people in our area, but we are rarely asked about our personal experiences and what we think should, and can, be done to improve our area and our lives. That's why we took part in 'A Different Take'. It has given us the opportunity to talk about the problems that we face and the solutions we would like to see implemented.

Despite all living in a similar area of Leeds, we have very different life experiences. Some of us are single parents, some are young people who have experience in the care system, some of us have had dealings with crime and some have moved here from other countries. We are from different races, religions, and family backgrounds. We are no different from everyone else in terms of our goals and aspirations; we all want to live a good life with the same opportunities to succeed as everyone else. But living in poverty can impact the choices that are available to us, the way we feel, and the realities that we live day to day.

We have met a number of times over the last four months to discuss our thoughts about what poverty is, how it affects us, and what we'd like to see done to improve the lives of



children and families living on a low income. We've also been trained in peer research and talked to other people in our community, so that we know which issues are the most important to people in our area. Issues like employment opportunities, education, health and well-being, and our local environment have come up several times in our discussions. Low income is a big part of the problem we face, but as one of our panel members said, there is more to living in poverty which is "a life of struggle". Poverty impacts how we feel, where we live, and what we can do. It's easy to feel trapped when you're struggling every day – but the good news is that we have lots of ideas about how to change things for the better!

This report marks the end of the research project, but we are passionate about improving our local area and the lives of people living in our community. Our voices need to be heard. We've received training in communicating about our research, and we want to make a long -standing impact on how people talk about poverty and how politicians – locally and nationally – make policies which affect our lives. We want to continue to work towards overcoming the barriers we talk about in this report – and we hope that you will want to join in with us to create a more just and equal society.

Where we live

There shouldn't be any "Scarehills" no more (parent)

Our homes

Everyone needs decent, affordable housing to have a good life – but the housing available in Harehills often falls short of this standard. The quality of our housing is poor, with condensation and damp. This leads to physical health problems but also mental health problems, when the place that we live isn't comfortable and parents can't provide what our children need for a good start in life. Living in a less advantaged area can lead to problems in our homes – because the area looks bad, people are more likely to do things like drive badly, leave litter on the streets, and dump things in our gardens. This means that our neighbourhoods and even our gardens aren't safe spaces for our children. This leads to tension between neighbours, especially if they don't speak the same languages and so have difficulty communicating. Lots of our streets and houses are overcrowded—in Harehills there are 117 people per hectare compared to 13 per hectare on average in Leeds, and the percentage of houses with more than five occupants is double the Leeds average. This creates more tensions between neighbours. Because Harehills is such a diverse community this often turns into racist attitudes because it's easier to blame people nearby and fall into stereotypes about our neighbours' behaviour than it is to get people with the power to make changes to listen.

Despite all the problems with them, our rented houses are expensive, and it is difficult to juggle paying for this alongside other bills. We believe that sometimes private landlords are to blame for unsuitable living conditions, because they are interested in collecting their rent, not in their tenants' well-being and safety. The Council could do more to make sure that landlords have to provide decent quality homes. When you live in poverty or on a low-income it's difficult to escape the trap of rented accommodation because we don't have the financial stability to save for our own homes – so we think that good quality rental

accommodation is vital to making a fair society.

Our neighbourhoods

They are not bothered [about selling drugs openly], it's like the daily living style for them. The police have come so many times. When you go up Harehills Lane there is a lot of knife crime that's happened there. In the last year there was one murder and three stabbings (parent)

People in our panel, and the people we spoke to, are frightened about drugs and knife crime. Parents are scared to let their children out in case they fall in with the wrong crowd, and young children are scared to go out in some parts of Harehills.

Every time I go around there I see a fight it's scary you feel like uncomfortable you don't want to go there no more (young person)

We think that one of the reasons people turn to crime is a lack of job opportunities and role models in our area – people who get good qualifications and jobs move on, and don't put anything back into the community. We also think this comes from the way that the education system works, which we talk about later in this report. People who don't know Harehills judge it on what they hear about it, so some people don't want to move here because of the reputation. There's also a lot of short-term tenancies which means that there's a high turn-over of people. This can make segregation within our neighbourhoods even worse.

Our services

Whether rich or poor, we all rely on services like doctors, businesses, schools and shops in our day-to-day lives. But for people living in Harehills these aren't always easy to access. Lots of people we spoke to had stories about long waiting lists before they could see their doctor or dentist. We think that health services should be available to everyone, when they need them – but in our experience if you don't have the money to pay for private treatment,

you're often left for a long time without any help.

If you're in pain and in poverty you can't afford private but funnily enough if you have money you get seen straight away (young adult)

Lack of access to doctors isn't the only way that poor services impact our health. Many people we spoke to noted that the rising cost of living means that it is increasingly difficult to afford healthy food. This is made worse when cheap and unhealthy food outlets are allowed to open in our neighbourhood.



Who gives permission for all these chicken shops? My head started spinning when I tried to count how many there were, just in that little bit there. And I was thinking all the chicken shops, all the betting shops ...why do we have so many in the area? (parent)

We want good jobs, and we want our children to be able to get good jobs when they leave education – but we don't see big companies offering work opportunities in Harehills. Instead we see places like gambling shops which encourage people to throw away the little money they have. The people who do get good qualifications end up leaving the area – so we don't see any of the wealth coming back here.



When people manage to get qualifications and get better jobs, they move and never come back, they don't help the community (parent)

Our high streets are full of places and spaces that do not encourage us to live a healthy lifestyle, and there's no space for our children and young people to go. This can lead to anti-social behaviour when young people get bored and feel hopeless. We think that all these things can discourage people from investing time, money and effort into Harehills – but we need to turn this trend around.








Our snakes

-  Being surrounded by people and places that encourage you to make bad decisions can trap you in poverty
-  Negative perceptions of our area can make us feel ashamed of where we live

Our ladders

-  We are proud of the diversity of Harehills
-  Places like CATCH are helping us to break down barriers to education and employment, and to understand and respect people from different backgrounds

Our plan

-  We want to carry on working with Leeds City Council to make sure that people from all walks of life and levels of income get a say in how Leeds develops
-  We want to see high quality provision like sports and health facilities in all neighbourhoods – this will change how people see the area, and encourage businesses to invest here
-  We want to change how people talk and think about Harehills – for example, by educating people about the history of the area, and showing all the good there is here
-  We want to see more investment in social cohesion – spaces where people from different backgrounds can come together and get to know each other
-  We want more outdoor spaces which are safe for children and young people – including measures to control traffic so that our streets are safe
-  We want to see more diverse services – there should be limits on the number of unhealthy food shops and bookies
-  We want better trained police who understand our community to help reduce crime and make us feel safer

What we do

We do the same things as everyone else – we go to school, we go to work, and we spend time with family and friends. But living on a low income affects how, where and when we can do things, and restricts the range of options we have.

Poverty and school

In Harehills, 33.9% of children attain key stage 4, compared to 57.9% across Leeds. We know how important education is – but as children and as parents we face barriers at school as a result of living in poverty. Teachers sometimes don't understand that parents might not be able to offer support with homework – for example, if there are language and literacy barriers; and children might sometimes need extra support because we don't have the resources we might need at home like access to technology. Because we don't have the resources that better-off children have, our hard work is sometimes not recognised, and we don't get the support we need to achieve our potential. Local organisations—like CATCH and Community Leeds After School Study Support (CLASS)—are really helpful, but some people might not get that support, and we still need teachers to understand us and give us the support we need in school.

Teachers focus more on people that is having better grades, because it looks better for them, rather than people that is getting bad grades. They concentrate on the group of students who is pretty good, so the average is better. They don't put hope in you (young person)

If your family doesn't have much money, life at home can be difficult for a number of reasons. Sometimes we might come to school sad, angry or frustrated because of what is happening behind the scenes. At these times we need support – but often we're made to feel like criminals instead. Some of our worries are about money, but some are about other struggles that come from living in poverty, like trying to juggle working or caring for family

alongside our studies. A lack of support and understanding from school can make these difficult situations even more challenging.

They [children from low-income families] don't get recognised... I found that myself cos when I was at school the girls who came from wealthy backgrounds... they had careers made for them, they got that extra moral support. I never missed school... I had the ability and I wanted to achieve and only one teacher recognised that... the others didn't really care... it didn't mean nothing to them (parent)

School and education cost money – it's a struggle to afford school uniforms and trips, but there are also hidden costs. Parents know that children will be bullied if they don't have the latest fashions and don't fit in, and children know that this puts a strain on the family budget, so we are all stressed about the cost of going to school and fitting in. But even things like food and drink are a problem – free school meals aren't available to everyone and aren't always enough. When there's not enough food at home, school should be a place where children know they can eat – but this isn't always happening. When we can't afford the things we need to go to school in the right uniform, with enough food, and without being bullied, this makes us feel angry, misunderstood and depressed – and some people drop out or get isolated because of this.

Life after school

When the people you know are mostly in poverty, it's hard to find a way in to the kinds of opportunities that are available to better off people. In Harehills, 25% of young people are not in education, employment or training—compared to 6% across Leeds. Children and young people we spoke to know about university but some people don't know anyone who has been, so they can't get help with working out if it's the right choice for them. Lots of people worry about the costs of university, and about getting into debt. Our panel met at CATCH, and that's a place we can learn about university and apprenticeships – but people

who don't come to CATCH might not know about these, because we don't get that information from school.

If you don't know about those opportunities out there you can't use it... if there's no role models to show you opportunities then you won't really be able to access them... you might go off the radar (young adult)

Growing up in poverty means that we can't afford the same range of experiences as better off children and young people. This makes it difficult to explore career and educational paths. We all look to our families and friends, but when you live in poverty you are less likely to know people who can tell you about university. As a result, we are made to feel like this isn't for us, and that keeps us out of high-skilled jobs – so we end up in poverty too.

When you're already on a low income how are you supposed to survive or think for the future or provide for your children or buy your own property? You can't, it's just impossible to do it unless you've got a really, really good job but to have a good job you need a good education behind you right from the beginning (parent)

Life and work



Work should be a ladder out of poverty, but when you don't have the education you need for a good job, and when there aren't good jobs in your local area, it's not always easy to get work and to remain in employment. Work needs to be well-paid and secure so that we can rely on having enough money to get by. Sometimes things we've had to do to survive – especially if we've broken the law – stop us from getting jobs. Some of the people we spoke to have also experienced discrimination because of who they are.

If you wanna get a job... racism... people think that all black people are gang related so they don't want no gang influence in our workplace or we don't want no terrorists (young person)

For migrants new to the country, working illegally can sometimes be the only option to survive, but this is not secure and can be unsafe. For some, turning to crime can be a short-term solution but this then compromises opportunities in the long-term. Being a single parent can also restrict the employment opportunities you have because you need to be at home to look after your family at the same time you are expected to go out to work all day. Childcare costs are so high that we cannot afford it, so finding work that fits around all our responsibilities to our families is difficult.



Even when we find work, more and more often the jobs we can get are insecure and don't offer a fixed number of hours – and it's difficult to manage when you don't know how much you have coming in each week. There's also a problem with part-time work—we want to work but we need enough hours to earn the money we need to survive. Changes to the benefits system can make it difficult to manage without a stable and secure income. Lacking a secure income has led to some people we spoke to relying on credit cards and getting into debt, which just causes more problems later on and traps you in poverty.

Our snakes








-  Being excluded – formally or informally – from experiences at school, at work and in our leisure time, because we don't have money or material resources
-  Being pushed into doing things to survive which harm our long-term futures – like dropping out of school or getting involved in crime



Our ladders

-  Having teachers, employers, and other people in our community who believe in us and support us
-  Having places we can go to learn about our options and to meet other people in our community from different backgrounds

Our plan

-  We want teachers who are better trained in supporting kids living in poverty – they need to understand the reality of our lives and give us a fair chance
-  We want school to be affordable and inclusive – schools need to think about all the costs involved like uniform, food, trips, technology, and social belonging, so that everyone can make the most of their education
-  We want schools to listen to us about how to spend money like Pupil Premium – we know what will make a difference to our ability to succeed
-  We want training in life skills like managing money and how to avoid getting into problem debt
-  We want good careers advice, which covers things like how to handle the cost of university
-  We want good quality, stable and secure jobs available in our community
-  We want employers to understand the needs of parents in low income families with caring responsibilities – we need work to be flexible so that we can do our best for our work and for our families

How we feel

Looking at the different sections of this report so far, we know that who you are makes a difference to how likely you are to experience poverty. We know if you are living in an area with lots of poverty, this affects the opportunities available to you. And we know that living in poverty affects the things that you can do. But something else that came up in our discussions was how poverty feels. Poverty doesn't just impact practical things in our lives – it affects how we feel, and this affects who we are and who we become.

If you live in poverty you don't get a choice... but you still feel bad about it and feel responsible that you must change it. Sometimes is not just you; the whole government, the whole council needs to change, is not just up to you to make all the changes. We need to make some changes to get better outcomes, but you can't do everything (young adult)

We don't choose to live in poverty. We want the same opportunities as everyone else, and we have the same ambitions as everyone else – but it is harder for us to reach our goals because we don't have the same resources, support and networks. This isn't the message we hear from some politicians and from the media, who say that it's because of our choices. This makes life even more difficult – we're isolated from our friends because we can't afford the same clothes and material goods; we're excluded from school and social activities because they cost money; then we're blamed for being excluded. Sometimes we even start to blame ourselves.

Sometimes we put the blame in ourselves too much. Sometimes you can't afford everything and you feel bad. Blaming yourself impacts on your self-confidence (young person)



A life in poverty can make us feel neglected. We feel neglected by teachers who don't understand what is going on behind closed doors and by potential employers because they hold stereotypes about what someone from Harehills or from our different cultures might be

like. As children and young people we can sometimes feel neglected by our families because they are working so hard to provide for us, leaving little time to spend with us – then we feel guilty about this because we know how hard it is for our parents to get by. As parents we feel pressure from society, media and school about what we should be providing for our children, but we often have to choose between paying for electricity or paying for food—it’s hard to tell our children that we can’t afford to buy the other things they need. As a society we feel neglected by local and national government who blame us for our problems and don’t invest in our local area. We need more money – but we also need to have the services, resources and opportunities available to people who live in richer areas.

You need attention for a good life... you don't always need money... if you're a kid and your parents might not be around [because they] have a job and they work every day and work long shifts and don't really get to see them and you don't really get that attention at home (young adult)



As parents and as children, we feel that poverty takes away a part of who we are. Too often, we are seen as ‘different’ to other people – and this makes us feel excluded and stigmatised. We want to be and do the same things as everyone else. But because we don’t have the money and resources we need, it’s a constant struggle.

Our snakes





-  Being made to feel responsible for being in poverty, and being made to feel ashamed and embarrassed about who we are and what we have
-  Being stigmatised by other people including politicians and the media, who blame us for our situation instead of understanding the impact of poverty



Our ladders

-  Places we create that include everyone – poor or not – and make everyone feel welcome and valued
-  Bonds we have with family and friends across a diverse range of different backgrounds

Our plan

-  We want to see more inclusive spaces in our community where everyone's unique skills and contributions are valued – no matter who they are, where they come from, or how much money they have
-  We want powerful people and organisations (like politicians and the media) to be held accountable for how they speak about people in poverty – they should not be allowed to spread misinformation which creates negative feelings for us and about us
-  We want professionals (like teachers, social workers, police and employers) who work with us to understand the challenges we face and help us to break down barriers – not put more barriers in our way
-  We want everyone to have a good range of choices for how they want to live their life, and to have information about the options that are available to them


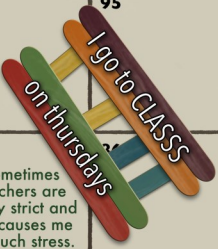


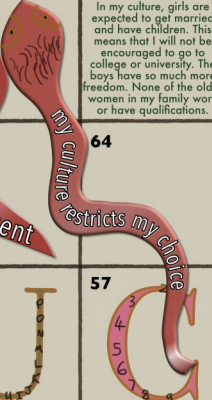








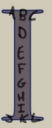






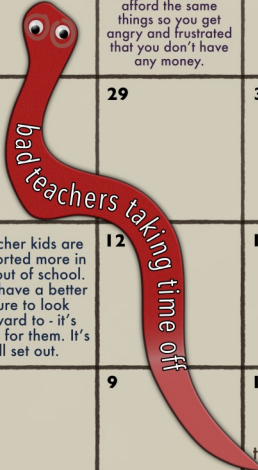


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The University of Leeds: email g.main@leeds.ac.uk

Leeds City Council, under the Thriving Child Poverty Approach: email thriving@leeds.gov.uk


CATCH, a charity based in Harehills, Leeds: see www.catchleeds.co.uk

Please turn this leaflet over to play a snakes and ladders game that we designed based on our experiences of living on a low income.

100	THE WINNER 	99	Nearly there	98		97	Schools in inner cities have a lot more issues which are based on the needs of the local community. Hard to achieve with so many issues.	96	 I go to CLASS on Thursdays	95		94		93	I get blamed for things I didn't do.	92		91		
81	We do not have a lot of positive role models... who can we look up to?	82	 Others laugh at you bad clothes no equipment	83	Some people can't afford uniforms. It's too expensive.	84		85	Sometimes teachers are really strict and this causes me so much stress.	87	People in charities help me with tutoring after school. This helps me to build my confidence up and be strong in difficult situations.	88	 Language barriers for pupils & teachers	89	Teachers that listen to you	90	A teacher saved me from getting kicked out numerous times. He is the safest teacher in the school.	91		
80		79		78	 my culture restricts my choice	77	In my culture, girls are expected to get married and have children. This means that I will not be encouraged to go to college or university. The boys have so much more freedom. None of the older women in my family work or have qualifications.	76		75	Poor children don't get recognised by the teachers. The other kids get more support - their abilities are recognised. Only one teacher saw my potential - I was a young carer at the time - only one teacher cared. The other teachers did not care about me.	74	 being bullied in school	73	In school, other children are quick to put you down if you don't fit in with their idea of what you are supposed to wear, or how you speak. Some kids will bully you just because your mobile phone is not a well known brand.	72		71	Good future	
61		62	It's hard when you want to go on a school trip but you know your parents can not afford the cost.	64		65	Poverty relates to behavioural issues. Others don't know what's happening behind the scenes. Instead they just judge people. People who live in poverty become angry and frustrated by this.	66		67		68		69		70				
60		59		58		57		56		55		54		53		52		51		
41		42		43	For year 9 we just watched movies and played games in English. We didn't learn anything.	44	 getting support for education outside school (Catch)	45	Lots of children from poor families / disadvantaged areas like Harehills are excluded from school.	46		47	If you have a big family, they really struggle to feed and buy uniforms for the kids.	48		49	Not being able to go on a school trip would make students feel unhappy and excluded.	50		
40	Sometimes you have to wear other people's clothing because your parents can not afford to buy brand new things.	39		38		37		36		35	 excluded from school	34	 trips are too expensive	33	You can get into arguments with other people. You can't afford the same things so you get angry and frustrated that you don't have any money.	32		31		
21		22	Having no opportunity to buy school food would make me sad, hungry and embarrassed because others would laugh at me.	23	Walking to school with holes in my shoes because my mother can not afford a new pair	24		25	Some people / teachers don't understand. They don't get how poverty affects people.	26		27	My parents don't speak English and do not come to my parents' evening.	28		29	 bad teachers taking time off	30		
20	 I can't afford school food	18		17		16		15		14	 expensive transport	13	Richer kids are supported more in and out of school. They have a better future to look forward to - it's easier for them. It's all set out.	12		11				
1	I feel like I'm getting judged because of my race.	3	My mum can't afford enough sanitary products so sometimes I use loo roll... I always say that I'm ill in P. E. because I am embarrassed.	4		5		6		7		8		9		10	I couldn't express my feelings to my teachers all the times when I felt upset.			



Who we are

Our young people

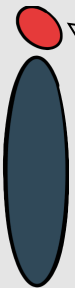


My name's Aman, I'm 15 and I live in Gipton.


My name's Elona Gangal, I'm 15, and I'm originally from Romania.




My name's Rayhan Ahmed. I'm 14 and I live in Harehills.



My name is Kamil Price. I'm 20 years old and I've been brought up in care.




I'm Dawid, and I'm from Harehills. I moved to the UK in 2013, and I've lived on a low income all that time.




I'm Patrik Pompa. I'm a family man and I want the best for everyone.


Our parents



I'm Elaine, I'm a single parent of two children and I work full time.




I'm Gina, I was born in Harehills and grew up here.




My name's Faiza, I'm from Pakistan and I volunteer at CATCH.

Our colleagues at Leeds City Council




I'm Amelia Gunn, I work in Leeds City Council and I'm one of the Volunteer Development Leaders at CATCH.

Our colleagues at the University of Leeds



I'm Camilla McCartney. I'm a Research Fellow at the University of Leeds, in the School of Education.



I'm Gill Main, I'm an Associate Professor of Childhood Studies at the University of Leeds.