

# My generation

**Involving children and young people in decisions that affect them will be the only way to ensure meaningful solutions to address poverty. Professor Joan Forbes and Dr Daniela Sime share findings from their recent project gathering young people's experiences of poverty and inequalities**

The statistics are stark. Latest figures identify one in four children in Scotland living in poverty.

Our programme, which explores young people's experiences and views of poverty and inequality, hopes to change this by listening and sharing knowledge, understanding, insights and expertise.

With an equality-based approach, viewing poverty as a human rights issue, and linking to the social contexts in which children and young people living in poverty in Scotland find themselves, we set out to understand policies aimed at tackling socio-economic inequalities and their effectiveness.

'Inequality' has been central within the debate on poverty in Scotland and other countries. However, inequalities-focused approaches to improving policy and practice with children and young people in poverty need evidence of what works.

The programme explored the intersecting dimensions of inequality as experienced by children and young people and provided them with a platform for debate to identify solutions to current challenges. It also aimed to:

- **Facilitate a range of activities to engage diverse groups** including children and young people, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers, about the disadvantages experienced and best approaches to increasing equality
- **Create opportunities for networking and sustained collaborations** between practitioners from a range of services and engage them in discussions about best practice
- **Raise awareness of the multiple inequalities experienced by children and young people and help tackle social stigmas** by engaging with the general public through a children's arts exhibition on poverty.

## Programme outputs

Over the lifespan of the programme, partners produced four policy briefings, summarising existing evidence on what works in reducing the impact of poverty on children and young people's education, health and wellbeing, access to services and social participation, rights and civic and political engagement.

Two seminars involving both young people and international practitioners were held exploring the role of services in mitigating the effects of poverty and looking at how to strengthen children's voices in the debate.

More than 140 children in primary schools in Glasgow and Aberdeen participated in drama workshops led by Scottish

Youth Theatre to explore issues of poverty and inequalities, and children worked with students from Glasgow School of Art, mentors and school staff to produce an exhibition; *The art of getting by: Young people exploring poverty*. Held at Scotland Street School Museum, Glasgow, it attracted more than 2,500 visitors over two weeks. A podcast and e-version of the exhibition are available online.

## Outcomes and implications

The programme outcomes have important implications for policy and practice and for children's services' leaders and practitioners.

Through this project we have increased understanding of poverty and inequalities issues by developing active networks involving a range of children's services providers, researchers, students and young people to share expertise. By actively encouraging and facilitating the participation of children and young people, we can better understand their experiences of poverty and how services can be better tuned to address these needs. This approach could help develop grassroots practitioner knowledge and capacity and more responsively inform future policy and practice.

Sharing research internationally and sector-wide should stimulate evidence-informed practice in Scotland, and promoting cross-Scotland and international exchanges of expertise creates a unique platform to share current thinking and developments on children and young people's participation.

The programme has been innovative in its use of a range of activities with a wide range of audiences. Most exciting for us has been recognising the rich opportunities this small-scale project has given us to understand and reflect on the issues with children, from their perspectives.

Our partners continue to give talks on aspects of the project, and in particular on the efforts to design-in children's participation and agency. All the while, the research network continues to grow, promoting sustained collaborations between policymakers, practitioners and those with first-hand experience, making real progress on tackling the issues associated with poverty and inequality.

**Professor Joan Forbes is an Honorary Professor in Education at the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection at the University of Stirling.**

**Dr Daniela Sime is a Reader in the School of Social Work & Social Policy at the University of Strathclyde.**

*The research project is funded by a Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII) award. The project report, policy briefings, and other materials are available at [www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Equality2015/ChildrensViewsofInequalityPoverty.aspx](http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Equality2015/ChildrensViewsofInequalityPoverty.aspx)*