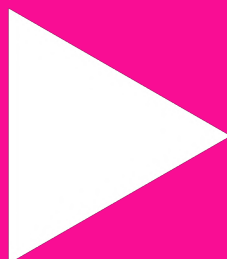


**DEAR  
PRIME  
MINISTER...**

**LETTERS TO SIR KEIR STARMER FROM  
15 PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY**

**LET'S END  
POVERTY**



This collection of letters written by people at the sharp end of poverty is being delivered to Sir Keir Starmer to mark his hundredth day in office. A new government brings the opportunity for new ideas and new voices to drive the change that people experiencing poverty desperately need.

The voices in these letters must be central to that change.

For too long, people who experience poverty have been excluded from the process of creating policies that affect their lives.

These letters vividly demonstrate the wasted money and human potential that flows from policy that is blind to the reality of people's experience. However, these letters are not a cry of complaint.

They offer the key to lasting solutions, if the Government chooses to listen.

Each letter is honest and challenging, and many make for painful reading. They detail how, too often, services and systems fail to recognise the complexity of people's lives and so entrench, rather than alleviate, problems. Hardship and trauma often goes unaddressed, and many of the letters testify to the years of painful and avoidable cost this can bring.

Many of the systemic failings illustrated by these letters have been outlined before. What is offered here is a view of how these systems actually work from the perspective of the people who need them most. More money is needed to tackle many of these issues, but it will not be spent well unless those it is intended to help are part of designing how it is used.

Some writers have shared how positive change has happened when policy makers recognised their potential and experience. They show how co-designed, practical changes to policy and procedure have been created across the UK because of real relationships characterised by mutual respect. We welcome the Government's ambition to tackle the root causes of poverty. The first step must be to respect people who experience poverty enough to include them.

The new government is aiming for a decade of national renewal. The people who need that the most - the authors of these letters and the millions who share similar experiences - must be invited to be partners in that change. We invite the Prime Minister to meet with the authors of these letters, to hear in person the wisdom and insights they bring, and to find ways to bring the expertise and insights derived from lived experience into the heart of policy making. Together, we can build a poverty-free nation, and we are eager to play our part.

**Tyra, Glory, Jess, Ashleigh, Gareth & Niall**

**The Let's End Poverty Enabling Group**



**Dear Prime Minister,**

First of all, congratulations. You know how much power you wield now, and I'm sure that you want to make change.

You could even change the lives of some of the 900,000 children living in food poverty. Make their lives more than a fight for survival. Make it so that whole families aren't living on the yellow stickers in supermarkets. Make it so they are not climbing the ladder of success on an empty stomach. You could make it so children without food security could have one meal a day at school. Extend free school meals to every family in receipt of Universal Credit.

You must have a lot on your mind, one of those being the pressure on the NHS. Some of that pressure is coming from childhood obesity, with levels sky high. When I was nine, the NHS came to my school. They weighed every child in my year and I was one of two children pulled aside and told to my face that I was obese. Eat less, they said.

They missed the fact that I couldn't eat less. Most days, I wouldn't eat breakfast, at school I had an average packed lunch of a sandwich, snack and drink. We didn't get free school meals. Dinner was pasta - it's cheap and filling, and easy to feed a family of four. Like hundreds of thousands of children in the UK, it didn't matter how many lengths of the city I walked - I was obese. I needed to eat less than the little that my parents could afford.

You could change children's stories, they haven't been written yet. Extend free school meals to every household in receipt of Universal Credit. Change what food is 'affordable', make it something other than processed, frozen and beige. You would decrease pressures on the NHS, but most importantly - you would save lives.

Food poverty is life or death. It hurtles you towards an early grave.

Could you imagine doing all you did to get here on an empty stomach?  
Would you have still made it?

**Yours sincerely,  
Saf, Portsmouth**

Saf is an ambassador for The Food Foundation, where they campaign in their own community and on a national level for the right of all people to be able to access healthy and affordable food.



## Dear Prime Minister,

I want you to truly understand the extent of what people are going through.

Six years ago, when I was 17, my family and I were evicted from our home. My mum had to come out of work and was hit with the benefit cap. She was left with the choice of either feeding her children or paying the rent. You can probably guess what she had to choose.

We went through months of being placed in B&Bs and hotels outside of our local area, with no cooking facilities. My sisters missed their first day of nursery and high school, but we were told that education wasn't a priority at that time. I was doing an apprenticeship. I was so excited - it was meant to be the start of my career. But when we were moved out of our area, I couldn't carry on.

This is happening all over the country, and it's getting worse. The trauma and impact on children often goes unnoticed. I lost friends as a result, my mental health deteriorated and it still affects me. Never feeling safe or like I'm not good enough affects every aspect of my life - work, making friends or building relationships.

I worry that at any point my whole world can come crashing down like it did when I was 17. What should've been a time where I didn't have to worry was quite the opposite. Why should young people and children experiencing poverty have to be punished? We are not just a statistic, we are people.

Since then, my mum and I joined the Poverty Truth Commission in West Cheshire. We also set up our own community group called Thrive to Survive, where we support and advocate for people who are experiencing poverty and financial hardship. I am a strong advocate for the ethos "Nothing about us, without us, is for us!". People with lived experience of poverty need to be at the very heart of decisions, and be around the table sharing what will make a difference. Co-production...that's what will influence change.



To me, a future without poverty would mean people being treated with respect and dignity, not labelled and put in a box. The 15 foodbanks in my area would close! Parents would be able to have a meal rather than going without so their children are fed. People who work tirelessly all week would be able to afford not just the basics, but some luxuries too. People who are homeless would have a place to call home, and would no longer be overlooked on the street. Children, and hopefully one day my future children, would be able to live their lives without stress, or anxiety about where their next meal is coming from. They would not have to use candles to see in the dark because the electricity has run out and they can't scrape enough together to cover it.

A world where people have enough money to live on would mean compassion, empathy, kindness and, most importantly, people would be happy rather than just trying to survive.

My final question to you, Prime Minister, is: are you going to stand with us, to improve people's lives by taking action to end poverty?

**Yours faithfully,  
Tyra, West Cheshire**

Tyra co-founded Thrive to Survive. Their mission is to advocate and support families living in their local area who are experiencing financial hardship or crisis. They believe everyone should be able to thrive and not have to simply just survive.

**Dear Prime Minister,**

I'm writing this letter to you to show my frustration and anger at the state of housing in this country. If your government is going to bring down poverty, ending the housing crisis must be a priority.

When I moved to my place, I was lucky to get an assured social housing tenancy. But now the system has changed, and thousands of people are stranded in temporary accommodation, or being evicted from social housing because they can't keep up with the rents. We need more social housing so everyone who needs it can have a roof over their head and be self-sufficient.

As someone who has worked in the construction industry for over 10 years, I know how quickly housing can go up if there is the will for it. But all we build is luxury flats, so when people find themselves in need of housing, there's nothing for them. Gentrification is capitalising on poverty.

No one expects to end up homeless. A lot of homelessness happens through evictions, family breakdowns, or drinking and drug dependencies, so it can be incredibly hard to get out once you're in it. Homelessness is a spiral into poverty, and when you're in the centre, you can't see the way out.

Access to housing is the first thing you need to get back onto your feet. But I want to see social housing go further than that, and create self-sufficient communities where people can live and earn. I want to see jobs available on your doorstep, where you can do work that helps you and your neighbours. Things like tending allotments and community gardens; providing nurseries for children; caring for elderly residents; and doing maintenance in the building. This work would allow you to secure your own future, contribute to the cost of living, and give back to your community.

There also needs to be more education on health care to help people break the spiral of poverty. We need people to better understand the dangers of smoking and drinking, make support available to help them quit and deal with relapses, and provide access to mental health services.

The moral of the story is that no one should be sleeping on cardboard under bridges in a country this rich. We must have better housing provision. Your government needs to make the system work for all of us, Prime Minister.

**Yours sincerely,**

**Matthew, Big Issue Vendor, London**

Matthew's letter has been supported by the Big Issue, a growing social enterprise working to help people in the UK affected by poverty to earn, learn and thrive.



## Dear Prime Minister,

I'm writing to you as a father of two lads, who are 18 and 22 years old, about their future under your leadership. As you will know, being a parent yourself, we have to explain that sometimes life throws curve balls at anyone. Things don't go the way you plan on and being able to adapt is essential to live a better life.

My eldest is part of the Covid-19 education crisis. He wasn't able to sit his A levels, relying on predicted grades to secure a university place - which he got! After studying for three years, mostly online, he's accumulated £60,000 of student debt. We're not a rich family, and we supported him as best we could from our own hard earned wages.

His brother is due to complete his college education in the next year and he's excited to get his opportunity to go to university, and follow his dream of becoming a musician. We've shielded the cost reality to him. We can't shatter a dream that's not even had a chance to flourish.

What is their reality under your leadership, I ask myself? Look for a job with a debt of £60k already? Even securing a first job at, say, £30k won't bring enough money in to cover staggeringly high rents, alongside utilities and transport to get to work. Never mind starting to repay student loans, however minimal, each month. The bank of mum and dad are as tight budget wise as is possible, having used up any savings they once had, so no go there. Don't work then, ask for state support - which is even worse, and forces people into minimum wage roles just to get you off the books and claim success!

So, Prime Minister, please answer my plea to:

- Scrap student debt, or taper the expectations on repayment.
- Introduce a legal maximum rent cap so people can afford to work.
- Set up a minimum annual benefits income for basic living costs, irrespective of age. Last time I looked, utilities and rents weren't cheaper the younger you are.

I totally appreciate it's an unenviable job you hold. I certainly wouldn't apply! But I'm asking you, father to father: give me actual things that will give my lads hope and inspiration to go and live the best life they can, and have the future their hard work deserves.

**Yours sincerely,**  
**Pedro, York**

**Dear Prime Minister,**

I am writing to you to call for action to tackle the systemic creation of poverty in a more holistic way. There is a saying that each time we lower our standards, there is a price to pay.

This applies to everything we can do to make UK society better.

When I first arrived in the UK, I could not work, study or better my life because of my immigration status, until after wasting 10 years of my life. Even though I had a certificate in marketing, I could not gain employment with it here. I decided to train as a nurse. However, I could not – or rather, I was not eligible for funding or access to a loan to do so. I found charities to go through to access my course in college.

This impacted my mental health. I struggled to take care of my child and take care of other needs. I proceeded to my university nursing training, but again I was told I could not access funding or a loan, even though I had to do many hours of placement in several wards of the hospital, during Covid-19 and after.

Prime Minister, I want you to look into the Immigration Act of 1971. This Act has now become a thing of the past in Scotland, following a campaign and court verdict that sees the Act as discrimination. Here is the thing Prime Minister: if Scotland can do it, why can't you? The price to pay is an uneducated, unskilled workforce, poverty and reliance on benefits, to mention just a few of the impacts.

As you know, migrants are not allowed to work whilst they await their immigration status. After waiting 10 years, I was given a 10 year parent route. We have to pay so much money to renew this every two and a half years. It causes me great anxiety as I have to decide between eating well, taking care of the costs of living and saving for my next renewal. If this is difficult for just a family of two, what happens for a family of five or more? Two and a half years is such a short period of time to save for the next renewal. Prime Minister, every year, the UK Government spends so much money bringing skilled workers from overseas to the UK, when in fact, this money could educate migrants that are already here, leading to their contribution to society.

Prime Minister, for me, these are the root causes of poverty. I am asking you to look into the policies that have made it impossible for people to thrive, be relevant, contribute and better their lives. I think that people should not have to be here for 20 years, be born here or married to a British person before they can become who they want to be.

**Yours sincerely,  
Glory, Scotland**

## Dear Prime Minister,

My name is Steve. I have been a volunteer at my local foodbank in Hammersmith and Fulham for nine years. Before that, I used the foodbank myself. I had been injured at work, and had to leave my job, and I went through a lot of difficulty. Then, and now in my role as a volunteer, I have seen why we desperately need to end poverty, and what could be done to help us build a better future.

Foodbank use here is rising faster than in most of London, and most of the country. We need a change in direction. We urgently need to rebuild and resurrect vital support services linked to education and physical and mental health. So much of the rhetoric in the election campaign was about people who 'can work'... but what about people who cannot, due to disability or health conditions? Let's reinstate supportive health services, which could lead to more people actually being in a position where they can work. But we need to also acknowledge that some people cannot work, no matter how much they would love to.

We need a social security system where benefits are enough to live on, and we need to improve the benefits processes, which are ridiculous. If people are going through poor mental health, anxiety and stress, having a 40-page form is going to make it worse. The UK's benefit levels are inadequate and the system is a major barrier to many people. When you first move to benefits, it takes a long time to get sorted. I was on the most basic level for a year, which is not enough by any stretch of the imagination, and I had to go through the gruelling appeals process.

In this community, we have severe housing issues and the wealth divide is very visible. We have massive, expensive places next to estate blocks. Similarly, where I grew up in Cornwall, people buy second homes and holiday lets, and that pushes people out of the housing market. I hope your Government will invest in green energy, with a determination to build greater social justice. If we build more renewable energy facilities, that should lower fuel prices as well as pollution.

And I hope your government will take action to end poverty, and to change people's lives for the better. People should be able to get back on their feet and if the country acts to end poverty, people will be able to. Debt is all consuming and takes up people's whole focus. But by ending poverty, people will be freed to make a difference in their life and in their community.

**Yours sincerely,  
Steve, London**

Steve is part of Trussell's participation programme, working alongside people who have firsthand experience of struggling to afford the essentials to help shape their work.



## Dear Prime Minister,

We know that you have set out your desire to reduce poverty and tackle social injustice in the UK. Together we have been part of something proven to work which we believe will help you in your quest.

Poverty Truth Commissions - in Morecambe Bay and nationally - are a way of bringing people who have experienced the struggle against poverty together with civic and business leaders, who through their positions can affect change. Poverty Truth Network has developed an approach which breaks down stigma, fear of change and power differentials to generate trusting relationships, shared purpose and actions, leading to improved outcomes for communities and economic savings for the public sector.

We write this letter to you as two Commissioners from the Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission who are now friends and companions in this important work.

**Karen:** “Undeserving scum”. “Disgraceful failure”. As a child suffering severe emotional abuse and neglect, I grew up hearing that financial success, coupled with social status, was all that counted in life. The pressure of these expectations and damning criticism for perceived underachievement led, unsurprisingly, to mental health issues which remained untreated for decades.

Having had a well-paid job and a nice house, my mental health worsened and, at 39 years old, my descent into poverty began. I was divorced for spending too much time working, I had five consecutive operations on my legs, my head began to shake with incurable spasms, my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and I was forced to give up my job as my ex-husband declined any contact with our four year old post-divorce. We had to move in with my mother and the old abuse resurfaced. By the time she passed away, I was barely functioning and had not succeeded in finding work. My daughter became ill and could not attend school for over a term. I lost my house and we began renting. You may wonder what benefits I was receiving... well, none. There was a reason I started this story with my childhood - I couldn't claim benefits because I already felt a disgrace. There were times I didn't have £1 to give my daughter for school charity days. We used foodbanks, couldn't buy uniform and built up huge debts. Eventually a charity worker helped me with benefits and finally we moved into social housing.

I had to tell that story for you to understand the person that arrived at Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission. No voice or confidence, hopeless, ill mentally and physically. Feeling a failure as a member of society, as a parent, judged by everyone.

In the Poverty Truth Commission, I found a space to speak, hope and a burning desire to be at the forefront of making changes at every level to ensure that others wouldn't experience the utter shame and degradation I did. Lasting relationships were built. Civic Commissioners who would never have understood the relentlessness of poverty or the barriers to getting out of it, listened and joined with us to make things better. The NHS, the Council, energy companies and more - changes have been made to the way things are done in Morecambe Bay and are still happening.

**Andy:** As a GP, I have the privilege of meeting people like Karen every day. But with an overwhelming number of people coming through the door, long days and a huge workload, it can be hard to find the time to listen in a transformative way. The Poverty Truth Commission creates the space and time for me to do this, leading to changed thinking, mutual relationships and co-created solutions to the real problems people are facing. It's no good putting a sticking plaster over the deep wounds in our society. As the great economist, Marianna Mazzucato tells us, "Society is a manifestation of our values and who, or what we value."

The Poverty Truth process exposes our values and ensures that all involved are unconditionally loved, seen and respected as precious human beings, and become part of a community and movement for a kinder and fairer world. We have worked on many initiatives together and are seeing real change. It's an approach that could make politics more effective, locally and nationally.

We would be happy to meet with you to expand on how we work differently. You would be welcome to visit Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission, or we can come to you. We can make a real difference in developing and implementing both small local tweaks and national policies to help those experiencing poverty and end it for good!

**Yours sincerely,**

**Karen**

Community Commissioner, Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission

**Andy**

Civic Commissioner, Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission

Associate Medical Director, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Author of *Sick Society*

Poverty Truth Network believes that any talk about poverty must include people who experience the struggle against it. They support Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK.

**poverty  
truth  
network**

## Dear Prime Minister,

My name is Christopher, and I have autism and a fixed cognitive impairment. I am currently on new style Employment Support Allowance as I am trying to recover from swollen feet. I face an extremely hard and long journey back into work. I have been a foodbank user in Cornwall, where the main industry is tourism. This means insecure and low paid work for lots of people.

I want to ask you: what are your government's plans for disability? There is a problem in how we see people with a disability in Cornwall. Our abilities are not recognised, and we are ignored by significant parts of the population. Special educational needs and disability education must improve to a point where parents are not worried when their child goes past 25 years old, a common concern I have heard for at least 15 years. As you already know, Prime Minister, people are experiencing lives bad enough to warrant a damning condemnation from the United Nations, who said that it was a "human catastrophe". People with disabilities now face being one of the groups most at risk of homelessness, and homeless charities are not equipped to cater for some of our needs.

There are also crushing and devastating gaps in social security provision, which leaves people with nothing. It creates lives which are just filled with despair, in a county of considerable wealth. I fractured my toe recently, and when I asked Disability Cornwall to see if there was any help they could give me they said that there wasn't any. A local social prescriber said the same thing a couple of weeks before them. Being told consistently that there is no help is frustrating and soul destroying. It destroys dreams and goals.

Recently, Learning Disability Awareness Week was held. Like autism awareness month, it has grown and grown over the years, and I have been taking part in them virtually since I first started being involved in disability work (I feel very old now!). Still, after all this time, there are some people whose lives are brilliant and show what those of us with disabilities can achieve. I have had the pleasure to know some of these people. But other people's experiences are downright degrading, extremely painful and awful. Why is this when the United Kingdom has considerable resources? Please can we not make the same mistakes that have happened in my lifetime. More austerity measures will reduce our chances to live with dignity and respect. We must create change.

**Yours sincerely,  
Chris, Cornwall**



**Dear Prime Minister,**

I am writing to you as a working mother of three young children to raise my concerns about poverty in the UK. I believe ending poverty in the UK should be your number one priority, as too many families are struggling to make ends meet.

My main concerns in ending poverty will be the current housing crisis. I currently rent privately in London and I am faced with rent increases yearly. The housing industry needs change straight away. Private renting is out of control. Myself and many others around me are faced with the same difficulties in affording to pay extremely high rent. The housing allowance does not cover the current rental rates. This needs to change as this is a main factor driving poverty in the UK.

The cost of living crisis is still ongoing. I am affected massively by the two child limit, and I would urge the new government to support low income families that are affected by this policy.

Please take this opportunity to support and help relieve the stress of families around the UK.

**Yours sincerely,**

**Anonymous**

**Save The Children parent campaigners group**

Save the Children's Parent Campaigners Group brings together parents to raise their voices to advocate for changes that will help every child have the best chance in life to be happy and healthy.



**Save the Children**

**Dear Prime Minister,**

I am writing this letter to explain why ending poverty should be a priority in your new government.

I have experienced poverty on and off most of my life. As a child, I remember going to bed hungry and my parents really struggling to afford my school uniform and shoes. Even though I am very blessed to have a council property in a relatively nice area, and I'm able to access the foodbank, I live in constant fear of homelessness or not having enough food. It has caused me at times to feel suicidal. Living with long-term poverty and housing insecurity has a devastating impact on a person's self-worth and ability to move forward in life.

Due to finding life incredibly insecure when I was a teenager, I developed anorexia and bulimia which I used and still do use to cope. I also have long-term health conditions including fibromyalgia. I was a carer for my grandparents for 10 years. I'm now a carer for my daughter (due to a traumatic event), so I also see the impact that carer's allowance has on self-esteem and finances.

As well as physical needs, people need love and community, to be accepted and valued, to have purpose and especially hope. I feel a lot of mental health problems are caused by lack of hope, by constant bad news and by the way the Government seems to penalise people. If people had hope that things could improve, and the support to cope with challenges, it would give people the strength to carry on and to live life in more fullness.

It feels as if a lot of government decisions are based on what you think you should do with the less well off. I would like the Government to actually start listening to real people, as has happened in local projects like Feeling The Pinch in Lewes, where people with real life experiences can make their voices heard.

People have their own thoughts and feelings and are often just trying to survive, living in fear of whether they can pay basic bills (rent, council tax, electricity etc) or the cost if a washing machine or fridge breaks down. Do more research on the mental, physical and financial effects of childhood poverty, caring, and insecure housing on people's ability to live a life worth living. Make the benefits system easier to navigate and able to meet people's individual circumstances.

But above all, come and meet real people in different areas of the country. Listen, and I mean really listen. Have people in Parliament that have or are living in these circumstances and let our voices be heard.

**Yours sincerely,  
Anonymous, Sussex**

**Dear Prime Minister,**

I'm writing to tell you why ending poverty for people in this country is so important to me and to many members of my community.

I was homeless at the age of 57 until I was 60. I lived in my car then I lived in a caravan in a field with no toilet facilities, no running water and no electricity. I still kept working. I ended up in that situation because I could not afford the high private rents being asked for.

My experience of being a single parent and being sole bread-earner for me and my daughter was very difficult, but I made it work without a great deal of help and not much empathy.

I believe that you have plans to reform the DWP. Training for staff needs to be so much more empathetic. Our situations are all quite unique and one size does not fit all. Please remember to consult with people who rely upon these services because wages do not cover our bills - not because we are lazy or "feckless". I would love to meet people from your government and really be able to speak with them and explain our difficulty. We are human beings with lived experience and we deserve a chance to say how things need to be reformed and rethought.

I was able to join a local project called Feeling The Pinch, a part of the Lewes Food Alliance. It offered participants a seat at the table and a voice. We brought a visual and spoken display together where we were able to showcase and highlight local issues from local people. We joined forces and spoke with local councillors and community leaders. It was enlightening and educational for guests and participants. It has gone a long way to closing the gap of understanding between local politics and us, the community and electorate. We would be happy to share our results and display boards with you all.

Here are some of the ways that I would like people like myself to be included in your policy making:

- Please listen to people and consult with people and communities who suffer this appalling lack of support and understanding as to how they are in this situation.
- Invite us to Downing Street. Let us address Parliament ourselves. We are not nut cases or scroungers who you can't speak to.
- Have people like me in discussions, with our ideas and our experiences of the system.
- Come visit our foodbanks - you'll meet good hard-working people who are friendly but just want a voice and a fair go at life for ourselves and our children.

**Yours sincerely,  
Clair, Sussex**

These letters are supported by the Lewes District Food Partnership, who bring people, communities and organisations together to create better food systems for everyone.



## Dear Prime Minister,

Congratulations on your successful election. As you are more than aware, our nation faces many challenges, one of which is poverty. Poverty is not just about a lack of money - it is a major contributor to stress that leads to physical and mental ill health. The costs to our nation of not resolving this issue and leaving people struggling in the pit of despair is huge. This is not just in terms of the cost of benefits, but also costs to the health, education and criminal justice systems. As Martin Lewis has said, the link between debt and mental ill health is a marriage made in hell. I can tell you from my own personal experience that this is absolutely true.

When our central focus is having to work out each day how to survive on an income less than the amount we need just to pay bills, food, housing and heating costs, we are at our least creative and productive. It is expensive being poor - energy, food, travel and mobile phone bills are higher. The constant pressure and shame destroys our self esteem. It is not just that ending poverty is morally and ethically right, it is also economic common sense.

Navigating a pathway to redesign our current system that brings out the best in people, provides a secure safety net but doesn't create dependency is a challenge - but one which many people would love to be involved with. It is something we can come together to deliver.

For me, the greatest challenge is one of belief. There has never been a time in recorded human history that poverty hasn't existed. But just because it has always been with us does not mean that we cannot create a world without it. As Frank Buchman has said, 'there is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed'. Greed is rooted in fear and loss of control. These are the deeper issues that we need to address.

It is time to believe that ending poverty is possible. The Labour Party founded the welfare state. As time has moved on the system has become no longer fit for purpose. You as a leader and a party have a track record of meaningful change. As Nelson Mandela said, "Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom." We can and should be the generation that removes the stain of injustice and ends poverty once and for all!

**Yours sincerely,**

**Val McKie, Lancashire**

Val is part of Trussell's participation programme, working alongside people who have firsthand experience of struggling to afford the essentials to help shape their work.



**Dear Prime Minister,**

I want to bring to your attention the detrimental increase in poverty in the UK. We have an increased number of young people and adults affected by low mental health, and the root of this problem is poverty, and all the factors that accompany it.

My name is Ashleigh May and I have also been a victim of homelessness, and that homelessness led to me having a breakdown. Despite the number of services involved, the only way that I could get a home to provide for myself and my children was to move 200 miles across the country with no support. Leaving your loved ones is not a nice thing to have to do, but this is happening to thousands of people across the UK, who are being relocated due to the lack of affordable housing.

This does not just impact the parents of the household; it impacts the children. It has a detrimental effect on young people and affects things like knife crime in our communities. I would really like you to take this into account and sit down to have a discussion on how the Government can work together with people with lived experience of this issue, to discuss how we can find solutions together.

In the borough of Calderdale, where I live, there are thousands of young people living in poverty, or on the brink of poverty. This is affecting education, mental health and communities. People do not know how to cope, and the social care systems are exhausted because of the cutbacks. Some people are waiting 18 months or more to get support, for children to be able to access mental health services.

Recently, a teenager here took his own life because he was failed by the system and could not get the support that was needed. There are many other children and adults across the country who are also losing their lives in the same way.

In the cost of living crisis, we have seen prices rising, but salaries are not rising in the same way. Average working families are having to rely on foodbanks, which they have never had to do before. But it can be solved. So, Prime Minister, what are you going to do about the increased poverty happening in the UK – and will you come together not just with people in your Government but with people who are working on the front line, to bring about solutions?

**Yours sincerely,  
Ashleigh May, Calderdale**

Ashleigh is co-founder of Mums on a Mission, who aim to create healthy, happy and fruitful families within their community, and to support families to break free from generational poverty.

## Dear Prime Minister,

“The measure of society is how it treats the weakest members” - Thomas Jefferson

I write to you on behalf of families in poverty with children who have complex and life limiting disabilities. As a mother of a child in palliative and hospice care in our society, for whom you have chosen to take up the reins of responsibility, I feel strongly that life is measuring pretty poorly indeed.

The constant threats of cuts to the support available to disabled people and their families is just the start. There are cuts to support for education, a lack of funding for children's hospitals and neonatal intensive care units, and onerous and humiliating processes that are barriers to any support. Unless you have experienced it first hand, you probably can't imagine what it's like. So here are a few examples:

Did you know children's hospices are charities? Why does the government not believe that families should have support when their children have very short lives?

Did you know that in neonatal intensive care units, not only are many of the incubators funded by charity, but all of the chairs are charity funded? As a mother, who had just had major surgery myself, all I wanted was to be able to sit next to my baby, who was being transferred across the country for brain surgery. Without charity funding, I would not have been able to sit and sing to her. Without charity funding, she would not have had an incubator, and without charity funding, the specialist team who transported her to a larger hospital would not have existed.

Did you know that to have a child on medical equipment at home is costing me £700 a month in electricity? The cost for additional medical supplies not covered by the NHS and travel to hospital appointments costs me an average of £500 a month. In order to be assessed for any kind of grant or financial support, every single financial decision I make is scrutinised under a microscope. I am treated like a loser, who must be up to no good. When really, I just want to keep my child alive. It is humiliating.

If you want to make change, here are my calls to action:

- Create a paid lived experience panel to inform decisions on poverty and benefits, and to inform decisions on children with complex disabilities. It is long overdue that people with disabilities are seen as worthy and equal.

- Abolish the insane notion of disability benefit vouchers. Am I really screwing the taxpayer over by spending my child's disability payment on her ventilator and the cost of travelling 200 miles to her hospital appointments? I spent a month in the pediatric intensive care unit with no choice but to buy £4 sandwiches and £2.50 bottles of water. Why is food subsidised in parliament, but they are allowed to charge monstrous prices in hospitals?
- Massively increase local authority budgets to families on direct payment/ self directed support so that they can actually maintain employment and properly care for their child without destroying their own health, and are empowered to support their child's education even when there are no support staff in schools.
- Stop trapping 'unpaid' carers in poverty by restricting their ability to earn. If someone is providing 30+ hours a week of care, they deserve to earn more than £2.30 an hour.
- Massively increase the funding to children's hospitals across the country. They are propped up by amazing charities, which is not something as a nation we should be proud of.

**Your sincerely,**

**Taliah Drayak, Orkney**

Taliah is a member of ATD Fourth World, a human rights based anti-poverty organisation, with more than sixty years experience of tackling inequality and promoting social justice in the UK.





## Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you as a mum of two children, who is working hard to support them in the best way possible. I want to share with you how I believe that truly listening to people with experience of poverty can make a real difference.

Things aren't easy. I am a lone parent without family support due to bereavements. I struggle every day due to my ill health, and the side effects from my cancer treatment. Both of my children have special educational needs. I feel that many people don't want to truly understand our struggles. Some of the schools they have been part of are not understanding of our situation. They don't follow plans made with early help, or really listen to what we need to support us as a family. I do not receive disability living allowance benefits for my girls as I struggle to fill in the forms.

I feel let down by the whole system at the moment. I am stuck between a rock and a hard place, having to make difficult decisions about how to care for my children and get the income we need. The stress of always having to make tough decisions has a really big impact on us. People in positions of power need to learn to really listen to people's circumstances and offer support, not restrictions.

Over the last few years, I have been part of the first Poverty Truth Commission in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and it's changed my life. I think every council should run one. Lived experience voices should be heard in government. A Poverty Truth style programme at a government level would bring MPs and people of lived experience of poverty into the same circle. MPs should attend Poverty Truth Commission launches and celebrations in their area and take part!

So, Prime Minister, I am writing to ask you to take the first step to really listen to those of us with experience of poverty, and to work with us for change.

**Yours sincerely,  
Carrie-Ann, Poole**

Poverty Truth Network believes that any talk about poverty must include people who experience the struggle against it. They support Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK.

**poverty  
truth  
network**

This publication has been produced by Let's End Poverty, a diverse, growing movement of people united behind a vision of the UK where poverty can't keep anyone down. The movement brings together grassroots activists and national charities, faith groups and unions, taking action together for change.

Join in with the movement at [letsendpoverty.co.uk](https://letsendpoverty.co.uk)

With thanks to the organisations who have supported this campaign:

ATD Fourth World  
The Big Issue  
Church Action on Poverty  
The Food Foundation  
Lewes District Food Partnership  
The Methodist Church in Britain  
Poverty Truth Network  
Save the Children UK  
Trussell

Please direct any media enquiries to [hello@letsendpoverty.co.uk](mailto:hello@letsendpoverty.co.uk)

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