



# In Our Words

by participating collaborators from **CHANGING REALITIES**

Compilation of Submissions curated by Laura Lindow





### **Our Hands... (compilation)**

Our hands have...

... have baked, lifted, pat-a-caked, waved and pulled. We have made heart shapes and eagle shadows.

Held partners' hands. And children, from first moments to marriage.

Have lifted awards gained through learning and achievement.

Shared food with family and friends.

Cared for patients. Handed over passports. Felt the sea.

Planted seeds. Stroked dogs, cats and fancy rats. Picked up pebbles and pushed a swing.

Given comfort. Lent themselves. Finished jobs. Lost control.

Cupped a face to kiss. Foraged for food. Washed a face. Built a wall.

Felt our way through life.

Our hands still hope to...

To go on holiday. To say 'I do'. And to meet grandchildren.

To build on life experiences. Keep doing what we're doing, making a difference.

Create own business and applaud the heroes who got us here. Open doors to the future with better education for our kids so they learn what to do. To drive a steering wheel. To touch and be touched.

These hands can fix things. And build our space. Waving away bad times. Shaking in the good. Hands reaching to bring our families out of poverty.

A lowered hand will ALWAYS lift another living being, higher than any raised hand can ever do. Can seek and offer calm, comfort and connection. Hands that hold others make a community. Each unique.

And with these hands I write my truth

One finger tap at a time

To fight for the future all families deserve

I pinky swear I'll continue,

Campaigning to hitch-hike us to a better world.

**From words and poetry by**

**Debbie F, Dotty G, Faith Angwet, Izzy G, Jo Barker-Marsh, John, Joseph, Mahabuba, Shirley Widdop and T**

### **Writing about Poverty and Cold**

I lost the ability to read my own body, the first time I was past almost starving. It was as though the relationship between my mind and body had been shut down. I still don't fully have that back. I am projecting onto my son, because I can't avoid it. How can I shield him when we don't have the things and experiences other people have? I can't. So I make it as positive as possible. I juggle my finances, I save where I can and there, when it's really needed, I deliver.

We laugh a lot about being poor at times, and we do a huge amount of stuff around being grateful. Not expecting too much. My boy has learned compassion, he has experienced hardship. He's beautiful and comedic, and I love that. That doesn't always stop the tears. Freezing, being hungry, no breaks, no let up ever, takes a huge toll on your body. I never knew that at all. That everything could be so hard. I'm so afraid of what is coming but I really do count my blessings in amongst the worry. The birds after all are free.

**by Jo Barker-Marsh**

A cold home in winter is literally shortening our lives, making the time we do have unbearable, my daughter and I both have medical problems that are worsened by extreme cold but there is just no possibility that I can use any sort of heating due to the cost.

This is a situation I blame on the government and mental health services. My family is made up of one adult plus a child in full time education, yet for the past seven years we have been surviving on legacy benefits that I receive as a single person / child benefit, with no other help or support.

Nobody seems to understand or care.

We need a society that is fair to all. Many people are unable to work through no fault of their own, but are made to suffer and lead a meaningless life which also affects the future of their children.

WE NEED HELP AND SUPPORT  
WE NEED IT IMMEDIATELY  
NO MORE PROMISES!

**by Brian**

### **My Lived Experience: Support/absence of support through the mental health crisis**

Where can I start? My marriage broke down, I rarely see my children, I was at a point of being alone and didn't want to be around anymore, got involved in a scam, and got threatened to be beaten up by so-called friends, my life was ebbing away and I felt so alone.

I saw my children once every other weekend and saw my best friend when I didn't want to be alone. I had to reach out to the mental health support line and ask for help, but as with everything, constraints, etc., I was told what and how was I feeling, if was I feeling safe, if was I able to cope, if could I see my doctors to get help. I was also asked what my plans were, I was told I could call back at any time and that they were going to send the police to make sure I was ok. No help was offered in regards to my mental health as they said it would be easier for me to wait till the following morning and speak to my GP. The problem is it took days to get hold of my GP due to the number of people calling their GPs.

It was not easy to see a future, I was struggling financially as I had just gone over to Universal Credit, which they mucked up for 3 to 4 months, the first month was not even enough for my rent. How was I meant to get through? If it were not for my friend I may have lost my home, and my ex-wife was telling my children to take advantage of me and get all they could from me.

The mental health support was lacking, and it has taken so long due to waiting lists, etc., to get any help, I have had some counselling for my mental health and also had my medications looked into to help me cope with things, I met my present partner who has been my rock, I got my divorce, and now I am getting help from a wellbeing coach who is trying to get me peer to peer support and also into something called recovery college, to help with anger and trauma. To help me see that I am worth living and being around for myself, not just for others. This is hard to write as how can I say in a few paragraphs how my life is being thrown in all sorts of directions due to family and relationships, broken friendships, and having a broken mental health system?

Why do I ask you to listen? My aim in life is that if another person doesn't have to go through what I have, then it's all been worth it for me to have gone through it.

**by Joseph**

## **Mind The Gap**

Anyone can suffer from poor mental health  
Take my son, for one.  
Not ill enough for hospital  
Not well enough for home.

Newly diagnosed Autistic,  
Plus ADHD  
Atop OCD and complex PTSD –  
Keen companions since his tweens.

No money for mental health services  
CAMHS eviscerated to the bone  
He slipped through the gaps in provision  
And retreated from this world

Two weeks 24/7 in the darkened sanctuary of his room  
With me, his only support  
Had to take him to A and E –  
He no longer wanted to be;  
Too scared to stay.

Thankfully, still, he clings on  
Waiting ... waiting ... waiting ...  
Waiting for a consultation  
That never seems to come.  
It shouldn't and doesn't have to be this way.

**by Shirley Widdop**

### **Why Must Those Listening Sit Up & Take Notice?**

Mental ill health can strike anyone at any time at any point in their lifetime. My family have all been affected at various points in their lives due to family breakdown, homelessness, surviving domestic violence, poverty, illness and disability. The recent Covid-19 Pandemic and austerity policies for the last 13 years have exacerbated the situation. It has, quite simply, been devastating, not just for me and my family, but EVERYONE, nationwide.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the mental health sector have always been the Cinderella service even before my time as a second-year student nurse in 1987 on placement on a local psychiatric hospital ward. They have always been short of funds, staff, and most importantly, beds. I know of the most vulnerable children and adults being sent over 200 miles away to access the care they need – cast adrift from the support of their families.

Quite rightly, the Government, whosoever is in power, always wants their policies to stimulate a healthy economy and a prosperous flourishing country. BUT without a population healthy in both body and mind, with safe, secure homes to call their own, this ideal will never be achieved.

By solving poverty through index-linked living wages, building enough housing for everyone to have a place to call home, strengthening the Social Security safety net to catch those cast adrift due to circumstances beyond their control and funding the National Health Service, Social Care and Education, renationalising transport and utilities, you will bring much needed security and stability and see healthier, happier and (hopefully) more loyal and productive citizens.

Some people may suggest this utopia is naive and idealistic. They are wrong. It's been done before after World War Two. Beveridge (1942) was keen to destroy the 5 great "evils" of society: Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness, to secure the health and prosperity of all UK nations "from the cradle to the grave". Labour's Prime Minister, Clement Atlee and Health Minister Aneurin Bevan knew what they had to do. You can do it too – if you can stop this current Tory government wreaking war on the electorate, you and our country will reap the benefits. Have courage. Be bold. It's time for a new manifesto.

**by Shirley Widdop**

### **Universal Credit Poem: The Conversation**

Being on Universal Credit is certainly no farce, 'are you having a laugh!' my young teenage daughter turned to me and said, whilst taking off her scarf.

'You've got it all to come' I said, and she replied 'please don't say that mum!' whilst continuing to walk from the front door to the kitchen chewing her gum.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' She said, before I sat down on the settee, to which I replied, 'no, not right now for me'.

But, yet, what I would like you to 'see' is that nothing in this life is for 'free', not even the cup of tea that you kindly offered to me.

In fact, the cost of living these days is so high that it often makes me want to cry, but I'm worried that even if I tried, my tears would touch the sky.

'Oh, come on, surely mum, being on Universal Credit sounds like such fun, because I've seen so many claimants spend time in the sun'.

'No, no,' I replied, 'that may well have been in the past, because nowadays the system is a lot more daft!'

'Oh my golly gosh mum,' (she replied) 'in that case it seems, that I may well have to "mask" my fears for the "task" of having to claim Universal Credit myself one day, because it sounds like it could be so "vast!" and that being happy on it won't "last!"'

At this point, I 'gasp'd', because I then realised that we had just 'embarked', upon a whole new conversation that would need to take place later on that day, and preferably after 'dark'!

**by Dotty G**



I am poor  
I am lazy  
I am uneducated  
I am a freeloader  
I spend my money on cigarettes and alcohol.  
I have no morals or standards  
I've never worked a day in my life  
I have a council house  
I'm a bit of a chav.

Is that how you see me?

In reality

I have a university degree  
I own my house  
I worked from 21 to 41, mostly 12 hour days.  
I have multiple sclerosis  
I have had chemotherapy twice  
I lost my sight for 4 months  
I am a survivor of domestic violence  
I am a single mum and my kids are my world  
I believe God is my saviour  
I have been in pain every day for 11 years  
I would do anything to be able to work again.

I am funny  
I am clever  
I love Shakespeare and rap music  
I am a warrior  
I have pride  
And I am much more than poor.

**by Lorenza**

### **Support from your Council**

I feel so deflated, let down and tired. I tried 3,4 times to get access to the Housing Support Fund, and eventually gave up. Why is money allocated from the government to a council, supposedly to support those in hardship, but then the accessibility is virtually impossible? I get the feeling now, it is the luck of the draw - a 'postcode lottery' which will determine if you are fortunate to get advisors who will actually help. My words sound angry - and I am - because why is it that the people who offer this 'support' are never held to account? We need politicians to follow through with promises. We need a system which successfully communicates to councils EXACTLY what is needed and how it can be EASILY ACCESSED. I do think most councils have good intentions, but I do not feel looked after by mine whatsoever. The website which is supposed to show all the information about financial assistance is 'broken' so I cannot even access the web-page. I am tired beyond belief and just wish we could get some answers.

**by Ella Michalski**

Lived experience - voice is everything - knowledge is power - advocate change through these experiences - real people with real inner experiences.

SEE ME  
HEAR ME  
HEAR MY CHILDREN'S VOICE  
SEE THEM  
HEAR THEM  
STOP AVOIDING THEIR CRIES  
POVERTY AFFECTS  
POVERTY CONCERNS  
POVERTY IS NOT THEIR FAULT  
A SQUASHED GENERATION  
OF A FUTURE GENERATION  
STOP CRUSHING  
START BUILDING  
START INVESTING  
STOP SMASHING  
SEE THE POTENTIAL

When society suggests that we are all separate - whether it be colour, religion, if you grew up in this country or not - we are ALL connected. We are HUMAN.

**by Deirdre McCausland**

No money, no change, no hope in society.  
Was told to look after my young children but look what career-wise that did to me?  
Scrambling for meals in foodbanks, mending old second-hand school jumpers, it is like  
society counts us like a number.  
What help is there? Everyone thinks the government is always there, but I can reassure you,  
I have yet to find them anywhere ...

Children, childhoods and developmental stages. All these are becoming impacted by  
inflation and budget failures. Education was once key for all, now it is freefall, what are you  
waiting for? Please answer when we knock, and open your doors.

**by Faith Angwet**

My world was falling apart and I would dart  
around the place to find some healing grace  
I'd go here and there looking for help and get  
Nowhere  
I was desperate and in despair  
I'd see black holes in life and the deeper they  
got the more  
I was in strife.  
There's no one to talk to  
There's nowhere to go  
The lists in services are endless  
It's all a bit of a mess  
I'm in agony I'm in pain  
But my torture my experience my trauma  
cannot be in vain  
I try to get help  
I try to reach out  
Is closed doors what my life is all about?  
I want to talk about my problems to express  
my fears  
So that I can be there to catch other people's  
tears  
And I hope that things will turn around so  
people don't feel eternally bound to their past  
traumas and hurt and pain  
I'm telling you now nothing is ever in vain  
There is a window there is a way I'm worthy  
and I'm not made of clay  
You cannot mould me into something you want  
me to be  
I'm unique and different and that's just ME.

**by Deirdre McCausland**

## **Dream**

Always I have a dream to go to abroad  
First time in aeroplane when I was onboard

As soon as I landed  
I was stranded

London, the big city in the world  
To see the underground gone bold

My hardship started from the very first day  
Weather, women and work are the bitter true in a tray

Faced some racist behaviour from the local  
Couldn't raise my voice as a vocal

Spring came to my life when married  
Leaving all my tensions buried

Building my family with three children  
Wish for them to shine up like Big Ben

Now a day squeeze my life with living cost  
Worrying for everything that had may be lost

Ruling party and opponent  
Have a duty to fix this as permanent.  
We deserve better. Britain should be better.  
Our lives are at stake now. Our futures are at stake now.  
Need to raise our voice!

**by Emdad**

We definitely need to fight for what's right.

**by Gascoigne**

Cold homes ... steamed up windows ... Black mould ... drafts to block ... gaps to plug ... Shiver  
and sneeze ... Do what you please ... take all our spare cash ... we only eat mash ...

This is me!!!! Where are you?!!! ... where were you when the roof was ripped from over our  
heads ... ? Where were you when we needed more ... where were you when we knocked at your  
door?

**by Bev**

Born into poverty, a little boy supposed to eventually become a man ... born into an expensive world with an excruciating dad, giving him only a little mam ... 14 years old given a surprise dual AuDHD diagnosis, new identity to view and see the world differently also gives the world a different view of how they see you ... anxiety and the world both feeling even bigger, heavier, darker and crueller ... children rights European Union is to respect protect and promotion, it's about time you all get that into motion!

**by T**

I once found myself facing the harsh reality of living in a cold home due to energy poverty. It was a situation that left me feeling vulnerable and exposed to the unforgiving elements.

As winter settled in, I realised that my home lacked the necessary insulation and heating to keep me warm. The frigid air seeped through the cracks in the windows and doors, making it almost unbearable to stay indoors. The lack of proper heating meant that I had to rely on blankets and layers of clothing just to ward off the biting cold.

Living in such conditions not only affected my physical well-being but also took a toll on my mental state. The constant struggle to stay warm became a source of stress and anxiety. Every day, I would wake up to a chilly environment, dreading the long hours ahead spent in discomfort.

The underlying cause of this predicament was energy poverty, a situation where individuals or households struggle to afford adequate energy services. The high cost of energy and fuel made it impossible.

**by Harry I**

The rumbling of the stomachs, the grumbling of the people. The washer rattling, the electric meter ticking, the fridge is on the flicker so me and my family are well in the shi++er

The government have a more than comfortable home, yet they still groan and get expenses for a 2nd home ...

We don't have anywhere to call home. All cold, worried, scared and in fear, the house disrepair and nobody to hear ...

Services stretched beyond belief, signposted or tick boxes is all they can seem to bear.

**by T**

### **... The Poverty Pool ...**

Treading water ... Sink or swim.  
No life guards or life buoy.  
It's an absolute sin

Treading water ... Nowhere near shore!  
Couldn't afford to buy an oar.

Treading water ... No hope of a boat,  
All we can do ... To keep afloat.

Treading water ... The current's too strong,  
Waves of poverty, drag us along.

Treading water ... The ships have sailed.  
Everything we've tried, has failed.

Treading water ... SOS!  
Rescue us from this mess ...

**by Bev**

### **Rolling Stones**

... A rolling stone may gather no moss ...  
But our words together, have power  
With Sisyphean labours  
Our rolling stones will crush austerity  
One rock at a time.

**by Shirley Widdop**





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REALITIES**