Your Voice, Your Say: Let's Talk Inequality
Inverclyde

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August 2020

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The UWS-Oxfam Partnership and Your Voice Inverclyde

Project partners

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership

The Partnership brings together the academic expertise from the University of the West of Scotland, the social justice and anti-poverty campaigning strengths of Oxfam Scotland, and the local knowledge and capacities of a wide range of civil society organisations to conduct research and inform policy debates with the overarching objective to work together for a more equitable and sustainable Scotland. Find out more about the work of the partnership here: http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/

Your Voice – Inverclyde Community Care Forum

Your Voice - Inverclyde Community Care Forum (ICCF) is a not-for-profit organisation set up in 1992. At that time, our aim was to bring together all local voluntary and community groups to build a collective voice in relation to community care, and enable the voice of service users and carers to be heard in the planning and provision of community care services in Inverclyde. For more information about our current work, visit our website: http://www.yourvoice.org.uk/index.html

About the project

Prior to the 2016 Scottish Parliament election, Oxfam Scotland produced policy priorities for the Scottish Parliament.[1] Ahead of the next Holyrood election in May 2021, Oxfam was keen to talk with people across Scotland to discover the issues they believe the next Parliament needs to address to help create "a just and equal Scotland, in a just and equal world."

To achieve this, we went to communities around the country to find out what mattered most to them. The project sought to build upon the Policy Forum model run by The UWS-Oxfam Partnership; this brings together decision-makers, policy professionals, community organisations and individuals to discuss key policy agendas. Critically, the workshops – *'Your Voice, Your Say: Let's Talk Inequality'* – were delivered in partnership with local organisations, and could not have happened without them. The focus was on the depth and quality of discussion, rather than the scale.

The conversations explored the meaning of inequality in Scotland today – including the gap between rich and poor; geographical inequalities; and inequalities between groups based on gender, race and ability – and what levers can be used at a devolved level to tackle inequality in its various forms. There is welcome political attention on tackling poverty in Scotland, but these conversations took a deeper look at the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and what can be done about it.

The aims of the workshops were:

- To engage with people who don't always feel heard and gain an understanding of their perceptions and priorities around tackling inequality in Scotland;

- To use these valuable contributions to help shape what we ask Scottish political parties to commit to in the lead up to the 2021 Scottish elections;

- To support participants to explore practical actions that could be taken locally to tackle inequalities or injustices in the local community.

> *"Inequality means not being able to pay bills when some people live in mansions" – workshop participant*

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[1] Oxfam Scotland (2016) *Even It Up: Scotland's role in tackling poverty by reducing inequality at home and abroad - Oxfam's policy priorities for the Scottish Parliament.* Available here: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/even-it-up-scotlands-role-in-tackling-poverty-by-reducing-inequality-at-home-an-579309?utm_source=oxf.am&utm_medium=ZmmX&utm_content=redirect

What we did

Workshops across Scotland

The workshop which took place at Your Voice, Inverclyde Community Care Forum in Greenock on 2 March, 2020 was just one part of a much bigger project.

This project aimed to deliver eight workshops between January and April 2020 in the eight electoral regions of Scotland. Two of these workshops were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, and an additional workshop was carried out with refugee and migrant women in Glasgow. The locations of the workshops were:

- **Central Scotland** – Cumbernauld, in partnership with Cumbernauld Poverty Action

- **Glasgow** – Paisley, in partnership with STAR Project; and Springburn in partnership with Saheliya

- **Highlands and Islands** – Inverness, in partnership with Inverness Foodstuff

- **Mid Scotland and Fife** – Kirkcaldy, in partnership with Fife Centre for Equalities

- **North East Scotland** – Dundee, in partnership with Dundee fighting for Fairness Commission

- **West Scotland** – Greenock, in partnership with Challenging Inverclyde Poverty (CIP) Group and facilitated by Your Voice, Inverclyde

- **South Scotland** – Dumfries, in partnership with Citizens Advice and Dumfries and Galloway Tackling Poverty Group [cancelled due to lockdown]

- **Lothian** – Edinburgh, in partnership with The Grassmarket Community Centre, Cyrenians and Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council [cancelled due to lockdown]

Participants

The workshops were open to the public, however, through our project partners we particularly sought to engage with low income groups, marginalised communities, and those with lived experience of poverty in recognition that they are too often under-represented within policy-making. The workshop participants tended to be a mix of people with direct experience of poverty and professionals or service providers with an interest in the topic (for example Health and Social Care Partnership and NHS workers, Riverclyde Homes workers, grassroots/community organisations and policy professionals)

The workshop held in Greenock had 30+ participants in attendance, with an equal mix of male and female. This workshop had a slightly older age demographic than those in other parts of Scotland, with most participants aged in their 40's, 50's & 60's. All participants were white Scottish (or British), and seven of the participants were disabled.
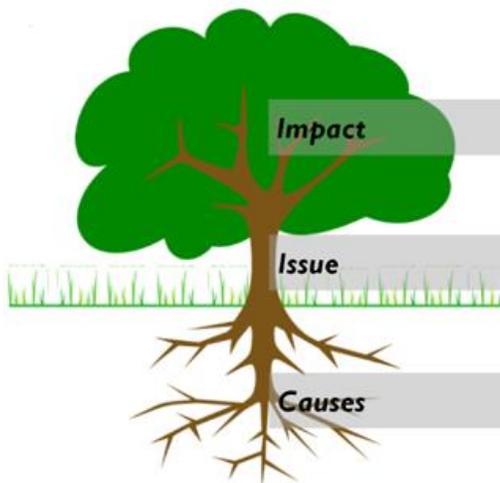
At this workshop we also had a local Councillor and a local MSP and his staff in attendance to hear what the community had to say.

Format of the workshop

The workshop was split into five stages:

1) **Exploring what is meant by 'inequality'** – Inequality is a complicated topic and means something different to everyone. The first ice breaker exercise aimed to help people to get to know one another and begin to explore this topic. The workshop began with a brainstorm around the question "what does inequality mean to you?"

2) **Inequality of what between whom?** – In the second stage, participants were presented with some information about income and wealth inequality in Scotland and asked to choose one topic per group to explore in more detail. To do this, participants were asked to think about inequality *of what* (for example, income, wealth, health, power) and *between whom* (for example, the population of Scotland, women and men, or countries of the world).

3) **Exploring the causes and the impacts –** When groups had decided on a topic to discuss, they were asked to map the causes of that kind of inequality, and the impacts resulting from it, using a 'problem tree' visual aid.

4) **Exploring the solutions –** Following the mapping exercise, groups were asked to think about any changes, big or small, that could make a positive difference to the causes or impacts that they had mapped.

5) **Local action –** Choosing one of the solutions they had identified, groups then spent the final part of the workshop brainstorming actions that could be taken at a local or national level to achieve change.

Impact

Issue

Causes

Goal
Longer term change you want to make

Outcomes
Changes would be required to move towards that goal

Campaign tactics
What can be done locally or nationally to achieve those changes

What we heard

What participants wanted to get out of the workshop

At the outset, participants were asked to introduce themselves and write down something they hoped to get out of the workshop. Here's some of what they said:

- I am a pensioner, wheelchair user – disabled from birth and fed up of campaigning every time I leave the house. I want strategies for effecting change without struggling to educate people who should know already.

- I am a volunteer and I want to gain a greater understanding and awareness of types of inequality and how I can help change in any way.

- I am a caseworker and I hope I can get a sense that something practical can be done to reduce poverty in Inverclyde.

- I am a long-time community activist and I want to gain some hope that Inverclyde can move out of the poverty situation.

- I am a grandparent and I want to tell my grandchildren how things will be better for their future.

- I am a local Councillor and I hope to gain ideas to take forward to tackle poverty and remove stigma.

- I used to be a nurse, which I loved as I enjoy helping people to regain good health. I want to listen to people's different opinion and come to an arrangement in the best way forward to achieve the proposals mentioned today at this meeting.

- I am a child poverty officer at Inverclyde Council and I want to hear what's working in the community and what change would help support people.

- I am a frontline welfare worker with vulnerable groups (some of the most multiple disadvantaged in Inverclyde) and I want citizens stop talking the talk and start walking the walk. Challenge to community attitudes.

Causes and Impacts

Inequality is a complex concept, which may refer to inequality of wealth or income, inequality of opportunity, health inequalities or educational inequalities. It may be driven by inequalities between

groups based on gender, race, education, or generational cohort, or it may be driven by inequalities within these groups. It is important to ask ourselves: "inequality of what, amongst whom?"

To unpack some of this complexity, the workshop began with a brainstorm based around the question: what does inequality mean to you?"

Based on their brainstorm, the groups were asked to choose a theme so that they could explore the causes and impacts of inequality in more detail. To do this, the groups were given stickers which read: "inequality of [BLANK] between/in [BLANK]." The themes chosen by the groups were:

1) **Inequality of DISPOSABLE INCOME in INVERCLYDE**

2) **Inequality of POWER between DECISION-MAKERS AND CITIZENS**

3) **Inequality of WEALTH in INVERCLYDE**

4) **Inequality of HOUSING between WELL OFF and LOW PAID**

5) **Inequality of HEALTH between RICH and POOR or PRIVATE vs NHS**

The groups used a "problem tree" visual aid to map the causes, impacts and solutions to this particular manifestation of inequality.

1) Inequality of DISPOSABLE INCOME in INVERCLYDE		
Causes	**Impacts**	**Solutions**
• Increase in cost of living • Shops moving to Port Glasgow – transport costs • Need transport – particularly single parents • Lack of jobs in local area and lack of investment • Lack of choice • Welfare Reform – UC legacy benefits. Particular impact on families e.g. two child cap • Negative attitude to claiming benefits leads to lack of claimants	• Lack of aspiration • Lack of opportunity, lack of "future" • Poverty • Brain drain – particular to Inverclyde. "for those who have careers, we've just got no jobs" • If your entire day is taken up with managing poverty, you just can't think straight. Your decisions are limited. Very few options. • Health issues • Unable to see out of hours GPs – withdrawal of services locally	• Transport – more subsidised; nationalising some transport • Changes to local taxes requires a change of mindset around tax • Trial for Universal Basic Income (small population, high poverty)

• Dietary requirements not met • Increased mortality/decreased life expectancy	

2) Inequality of WEALTH in INVERCLYDE

Causes	Impacts	Solutions
• Benefits system i.e. Personal Independence Payment, Universal Credit • Budgeting skills • Prioritising spending • Transport barriers – cost, inaccessibility • Poverty of aspiration – lack of role models • Expectations on education/university i.e. middle class/working class • Social class divide • Percentage of jobs – dependent on skill set • In-work poverty • Low pay • Cost of living • Lack of after school activities, peer group pressures • Lack of opportunity and clear process/pathway for people with learning difficulties/ difficulties seeking employment /meaningful skills	• Educational attainment/positive destinations • Increased crime • Poverty • Obesity e.g. cheaper to buy readymade meals than fresh food • Mental health/depression • Less social mobility • No aspiration to work/to education/to apprenticeships • Low pay • Higher proportion of people living with disabilities • High proportion of drug use • Poor health	• Early learning and childcare: 1140 hours, increase in pre-school hours. How are they implementing this? What is the uptake? Is it working? • Increase work opportunities for people with learning difficulties e.g. participating in the community • Free university tuition fees – what percentage of people leaving school go on to higher education? Why?

3) Inequality of POWER between DECISION MAKERS AND CITIZENS

Causes	Impacts	Solutions

• Higher earners have no concept of poverty • Lack of equality impact assessments • No voice except from election time • System makes it difficult to complain • Excluded from consultation • No work being done to educate people on how to challenge on equality issues • Removal of advocates • Cuts to services • Activism – restricted by employer to speak out in different circumstances • Income underwrites poverty • Zero hours contracts • Benefit cap! • Two child limit and rape clause • Fuel companies not processing Warm Home Discount • Indirect discrimination delivered by DWP • Discriminatory ways that DWP troll disability claimants • Scottish Welfare Fund limited to three claims. Judged on previous [claims] rather than from the crisis.	• Poor working class • Social isolation/stigma • Being encouraged to be a sick society • Mixed-age couple poverty • Levels of child poverty increasing • "We've got a sick society – you see people begging outside Tesco and then you see gated communities, even here" • People accept their own stigma e.g. drug addiction	• Living Wage • "You used to be able to get a job, everyone in the class… we need to bring back industry"

4) Inequality of HOUSING between WELL OFF and LOW PAID

Causes	Impacts	Solutions
• Government grant money; past industry; Council decisions	• Intergenerational inequality • Foodbanks • Poor mental health	• Sheltered accommodation – build it! • Retirement village

• Can we anticipate the future? Wait for crisis • Universal Credit – not paying rent • Balance of sectors: social housing and private housing • High demand of "sheltered" accommodation. Sell to move, can't do that. Repairs… • Corporate directors in Council • Stock undesirable – downward spiral • Poor quality housing • Small Council – problem. • Income pressures: low pay/pensions; high costs of utilities/bills; fuel costs; transport costs. • Gender	• Crime • Drugs and alcohol	• Better resource management – repairs • Social housing by government (not council) • Future proof vision – showcase • Young people in politics • West End mixed

5) Inequality of HEALTH between RICH and POOR or PRIVATE vs NHS		
Causes	**Impacts**	**Solutions**
• Government political will • Austerity • Not looking after staff well • Closure of local hospitals • Stopped out-of-hours GPs • Shortage of: nursing staff/ GPs/ midwives/ psychologists • Transport: travel to Paisley and Glasgow (bus, taxi – access, monopoly of McGills) • Low care ownership in Inverclyde • Lack of ambulances	• Disenfranchises people • Deprivation • Poor health • Depression/anxiety • Lower life expectancy • Struggling • Weather impacts mood, less opportunities • Poor poorer, rich richer – class system • Poor help the poor for many generations – food banks donations etc.	• Community spirit • Communicate more • Keep in touch • Family support networks • Listen • Hear what people are saying • Tenants should have a say • Stay grounded – keep it real • Local Authority – stop giving pay rises to management, put money into making Inverclyde great again

- Financial difficulties – isolation and impact on recovery
- No money to access healthcare outwith area
- Disabled/elderly – challenge to access transport and hospitals out of area
- Trauma – Paisley – transferred to Inverclyde Royal Hospital (IRH)
- Local – IRH specialism. Community access
- Inequality – local people travel outwith the area; Glasgow people won't travel. Staff aren't here
- Town vs. City
- Rural vs. Town
- Demographics – small local area, less access
- Profit before patient
- Private business profit
- GPs self-employed – who are they accountable to?
- Who gets access to sports, is it affordable?
- Who is Inverclyde Leisure answerable to?
- Healthy food costs – need filling up.
- Access to leisure costs
- In-work poverty
- Pay day loans
- Cuts to services – austerity – political careers and wages

- Community need to come together to affect positive change
- Inverclyde Facebook Freebies
- Challenge and reduce stigma
- Good neighbours
- Community peer and support groups – assist loneliness, isolation and joint ownership
- Caring is sharing: give soup to neighbours
- Less management men – prioritise patients
- Balance books – less to people in positions of power, on grand workforce – grassroots, start at bottom
- Organise all aspect – get rid of layers of management
- Need to meet local need
- We got the power: "people power"
- More money invested in children's mental health services
- Mental health services review – local people will inform
- More money should be invested in health – nursing bursary should be accessed? Look after staff

"If your entire day is taken up with managing poverty, you just can't think straight. Your decisions are limited. Very few options." – workshop participant

Solutions

For the final exercise of the workshop, participants were asked to focus on what needs to change and how to change it. Groups were asked to decide on one solution to the problems they had identified, and brainstorm some of the steps that would be required to achieve that goal.

Solution 1: Health, self-care

What steps need to be taken to achieve this goal?
- Access to healthy food and leisure for all, including young and old and disabled
- Swimming, walking, keep fit etc.
- Mindfulness, gardening, adjustments etc.
- Community centres, support groups
- 1% participatory budgeting

How can we take action to achieve these steps?
- Evaluate what we are doing
- Benefits of support groups – e.g. reduce isolation, increase confidence
- Provide/raise awareness of group – let people know the detrimental impact if this group were to not be available
- "It's good to talk" these groups enhance and support local services
- Get local authorities and GP's involvement on side
- Social media, Facebook, Twitter, so that people will vote for you!

Solution 2: Challenge discrimination in the benefits system (UC)

What steps need to be taken to achieve this goal?
- Reduce or end discrimination in decision making
- Equalities Act 2010
- Disabilities Act
- Human Rights Act

How can we take action to achieve these steps?
- Educate population on what their rights are
- Educate them on how to challenge
- Empower them to challenge

Solution 3: Increase in employment opportunities for people with additional needs

What steps need to be taken to achieve this goal?
- An increase in local employability programmes
- Not just life-skills – based on individual's interest
- Equal pay for equal skills
- Commitment/pledge – partners working together to establish clear pathways and programmes:
- West College Scotland; Skills Development Scotland; Potential employers.

How can we take action to achieve these steps?
- Explore/investigate successful programmes elsewhere: England; Charities
- Identify/promote positive investment e.g. tax breaks
- Make the argument that this will lead to fewer people needing to claim benefits

Solution 4: Change mindset around tax so people more willing to have more progressive taxes

What steps need to be taken to achieve this goal?
- Gradually and honestly taking public along with you
- Link to universal services – if people can see the benefit to society, they will be more willing to pay
- "The more universal you make services, the less divisive it becomes"
- Ring-fence locally? Pros and cons; bring powers to local councils

How can we take action to achieve these steps?
- Engage local people in focus groups and engage employers
- Ensure local employers are paying their tax contributions
- Encourage local employers to reinvest locally

Summary

The workshop held in Greenock on 2 March 2020 involved a lively discussion amongst participants, facilitators and local service providers about the causes and impacts of inequality in Scotland today, and what can be done about it. The groups were engaged and passionate about the issues they discussed and fed back that they enjoyed the sense of community spirit, listening to one another and "having a chance to talk about the things that are important."

Although conversations touched on many policy areas, cutting across both reserved and devolved powers, there were some threads that ran throughout the discussions and some clear priorities emerged:

1) **Education, opportunities and fair work –** the educational attainment and the positive destinations available to people from different areas or family backgrounds. Participants spoke about different expectations regarding higher education depending on social class and a lack of after school activities and peer group pressures leading to a "poverty of aspiration" and "lack of future". They also discussed difficulties seeking employment and acquiring meaningful skills for people with learning difficulties leading to a lack of opportunity. With regards to employment, it was felt that there was a lack of choice and a lack of jobs in the local area due to lack of investment which led to 'brain drain' – with a participating stating: "for those who have careers, we've just got no jobs". More than one group spoke about in-work poverty, low pay, security of work and zero hours contracts. In terms of the impacts of educational inequalities and lack of job opportunities, participants discussed lower social mobility, a widening class divide and increased crime. One participant said: "if your entire day is taken up with managing poverty, you just can't think straight; your decisions are limited." Participants wanted to see: wider commitment to pay the real Living Wage; increased work opportunities for people with learning difficulties; widening participation of higher education; and an increase in early learning and childcare.

2) **Health** – Participants spoke about the role that physical and mental health play as both a cause and an impact of inequality in Scotland. On the one hand, they spoke about the health impacts of poverty and inequality including dietary requirements not being met, poor mental health and depression, a higher proportion of people living with disabilities, increased drug use, increased mortality and decreased life expectancy. On the other hand, they discussed how health inequalities can be exacerbated by lack of investment in services including: closure of local hospitals; closure of out-of-hours GP services; shortage of nurses, GPs, midwives and psychotherapists; and poor working conditions for health and social care staff. It was felt that this lack of service provision was caused by austerity policies and political will, putting profit before patients, the GP contract, and a concentration of resources at managerial level. Access to health and leisure services was discussed at length, including the financial impact of moving

services out of the local area and participants asked: "who gets access to sports and leisure, is it affordable?". In terms of solutions, they wanted to see: more money invested in health to meet local need; patients prioritised over management; better pay and conditions for the "on-the-ground workforce"; a mental health services review and increased investment in children and adolescents mental health services; and community peer support groups to assist with loneliness and isolation.

3) **Housing** – One group chose to focus on housing inequality, although housing came up in other group discussions too. They were concerned about the balance between social and private rented sector housing, and discussed issues around affordability, quality and access to housing. They felt that housing can reproduce intergenerational inequalities and that when social housing is poor quality and undesirable, it leads to a downward spiral as councils withdraw investment. They discussed difficulties meeting the cost of housing including Universal Credit not covering the rent, and how this can exacerbate poverty and lead to poor mental health and food bank referrals. Their conversation also touched on sheltered accommodation and retirement accommodation. They wanted to see: more sheltered and retirement accommodation built; better resource management and repairs; and social housing provided by the central government rather than the local government.

4) **Transport and access to services** – several groups mentioned barriers to accessing services based on cost and inaccessibility of local transport. This was felt to be a particular problem for single parents, disabled people and the elderly, who need transport to access health services outwith the local area. One group discussed this as an area-based inequality between cities and rural areas, and they were particularly concerned about the closure of out-of-hours GP services locally, and shops moving to Port Glasgow – which increases transport costs for low income groups. One solution offered was to use local taxes to raise revenues which could be spent on local services, but it was felt that this would require a change of mindset around taxation.

5) **Adequate income –** Participants discussed income not meeting the cost of living and said that "income underwrites poverty". They touched on low pay, the benefits system, the high cost of utilities, transport costs, the cost of healthy food and budgeting skills. In terms of social security benefits, topics that came up included: stigma; Universal Credit; the Benefit Cap; the two child limit and the 'rape clause'; the "discriminatory ways that DWP treat disability claimants"; and how the Scottish Welfare Fund is limited to three claims, regardless of the circumstances. However, they also mentioned private companies, including problems associated with high interest credit and fuel companies not processing the Warm Home Discount. They wanted to see: an adequate benefits system that is easier to navigate; an end to discrimination in benefits decision-making; and a trial of Universal Basic Income in Inverclyde.

6) **Power voice and participation** – Discussions touched on inequalities of wealth and power, with one participant saying, "higher earners have no concept of poverty". Participants discussed barriers to participation including: limited consultation and opportunities to share your voice (except at election time); not knowing the route/s to make complaints; and a lack of equality impact assessments. It was suggested that more needs to be done to educate people on how to challenge inequality issues and more solution focused grassroots community activity and "people power" as well as diversifying political representation and getting young people into politics.

Since this workshop was held, the country and the world has been shaken by a global pandemic which has had – and will continue to have – far reaching health and economic consequences. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated and laid bare existing inequalities in our communities, making it all the more vital that we take steps now to mitigate a widening gap between rich and poor. Next year's Scottish Parliament election presents an opportunity for political parties to renew their commitments to tackling poverty and inequality by making bold commitments which prioritise the health, wellbeing and financial security of all of Scotland's people. In doing so, the findings of this workshop – and those held across Scotland as part of this project – provide valuable ideas to support the creation of a more just and equal Scotland.

"We got the power: people power!" – workshop participant