

POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

Transcript of the 23-minute tape of the 21 March event.
(Excerpts from a 3-hour program.)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

BOB WINTER – LORD PROVOST OF GLASGOW

Good afternoon everyone, Moderator, Your Grace, Ladies and Gentlemen. It certainly is an immense pleasure to welcome so many of you to the City Chambers for this inaugural meeting of the Poverty Truth Commission. And I would like to thank all who have been involved in the organisation of it, especially Faith in Community Scotland. We are gathered here today to talk about poverty and more importantly to hear directly from people who are experiencing it or who have had recent experience of it.

DAVID LUNAN, MODERATOR OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

You are the main players here today and we thank you in advance for what you have prepared for us, using song and humour and speech -- all different forms of media -- to present your story. So I thank you Testifiers for your honesty, your courage and your humanity in speaking to us about your own experience. The real process that we want to address today is why people are still living in poverty in the 21st Century.

TRICIA MCCONALOGUE, CHAIR OF THE POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

I'd like to give a brief summary of how the day's going to go. It's in this wee booklet. It's made up of three parts. First, we'll hear the Testifiers; then we will have a 45-minute break. The Commissioners will go away and they will confer and what they will do is they'll come back and give a response. And then there'll be a summing up at the end.

Decision makers seem to think that they are the experts – they have their ideas and their solutions. That's because they get their information by being on the outside and looking in. The Testifiers today will show you that they are the experts because they live it and have lived with poverty day in and day out.

TESTIFIERS SPEAK OUT

LOKI WITH OTHERS

Today we will be speaking with some young people from Ruchazie which is one of Glasgow's most deprived areas I would like to introduce the winner of over 100 awards, commending her fantastic dedication and talent - Ruchazie's very own Jamie-Lee:

JAMIE LEE SMART - RUCHAZIE

Modern dance

WILLIAM BARROWCLIFFE - RUCHAZIE

The biggest change for me, when I came back [from three in Malawi], I kind of realised I don't need the latest clothes, the latest phones, or technology to be happy. What I should be doing is be myself and go for the aims in life that I want to achieve. Like over there – it's hard to say like, even though they've not got a lot of resources they still had high expectations in life. They all wanted to be like doctors, nurses, priests – they all wanted to be like that and I think to myself, "Well, they want to be that so badly, they stick in and quite a few of them actually do achieve it". And myself, it also taught me I could have high expectations of myself, because I have got resources available and if I use them and I put my mind to doing my own thing I could achieve anything in life.

DONNA BARROWCLIFFE AND JAMIE LEE SMART - RUCHAZIE

Donna : It's like a postcode lottery. If your numbers fit, then you'll get the job. And it's been proven – if you stay in the poorer areas you're less likely to get a job.

Jamie-Lee: Aye, that's if you even get the chance to go to school. Did you hear about the kids starting the new secondary school? They got chased home by the local gang.

Donna: That's terrible, I mean...

Jamie-Lee: First years

Donna: First years and that – Who would have thought? First years don't get caught up in gang-fighting.

Jamie-Lee: I know. It seems one of them even got stabbed in the thigh trying to run away.

Donna: Did you hear what happened when Ruchazie School got pulled down? They built a new school five minutes away. The kids tried to move from one area to another to get to their new school, but on the way up some guys decided they didn't like to see the children walking through their community, so they went and chased

nine- and ten- and eleven-year olds – they chased them home. But they got a fright. The next day all the mothers got together. So they all walked up to the school, so they didn't get chased after that.

LOKI'S RAP

Childhood leaves a million minds engulfed in abuse
I'm not an artist on the fine line between fine lines of substance abuse or any other misuse
Far from recluse
Just privately unravelling while others peruse the daily news
And the horrors ensue
I'm trying to see around corners for the unspoken warning I'm assured will ensue
Psychological spew
To many viewed as a nuisance
Too honest for your crew

WE KNOW THAT OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE GOOD PLACES TO LIVE AND THAT THE MEDIA PROTRAYALS OF THEM ARE UNJUST AND DAMAGING. WE CALL FOR THE MEDIA TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS AS WELL AS THE BAD. IN OUR EXPERIENCE IT IS SMALL, LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS THAT MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE. WE CALL FOR A GREATER CONTRIBUTION AS WELL AS LONG-TERM FUNDING.

GHAZALA HAKEEM, GOVANHILL

Poverty ensured that my daughter couldn't get the birthday party with all the trimmings in a children's play area like her peers.
Poverty's ensured that I haven't been able to take my daughter on a holiday to places like Benidorm or Majorca which some people consider very cheap.
Poverty ensures that I can't buy my daughter the toys that she desires or even ensure that she has the appropriate school uniform with the school logo, instead having to suffice for a version that is merely the same colour.

WE ASK FOR GREATER ASSISTANCE WITH CHILD CARE COSTS NEAR TO PLACES OF WORK AND FOR THIS NOT TO BE A SHORT TERM MEASURE

NICOLA BOLAND, BLACKHILL

JAMES ALISTER THOMPSON

Born: 09/03/1989

Died: 20/07/2007

[Victim of a neighbourhood murder]

I miss James every day and always think of him and I will never forget him. But I know he would want everyone who loved and cared for him to get on with their lives and be happy. The biggest part of the community were affected by James's death and me myself give all my sympathy to his family, who still to this day are in so much pain and are going through so much heartache and misery. James has been dead two years on the twentieth of August of this year. It seems only yesterday he was still here. It's amazing the things you learn when you lose someone you love and care about. So many people in the area have learned that life's too short to sit around. Get out there and enjoy it while you can; you never know when your time is up

TEENAGER 18,
KILLED IN THE
PROVANMILL AREA
OF GLASGOW

GANG VIOLENCE IS DESTROYING LIVES AND COMMUNITIES. WE SEEK GREATER RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE. WE KNOW THIS INVESTMENT WILL HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL, ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY AND DEVELOP LEADERS

MARIE SHANKLEY, BRIDGING THE GAP

And all they security guys – they all think they’re the boss and that. They just wouldn’t help me at all and there’s no privacy. When I was standing in the queue, there was this guy in front of me, and I’m sure he didn’t want anybody to know his business. “What is it?” “Can’t hear you – you’ll need to speak up”. The guy was embarrassed. I was embarrassed, everybody was embarrassed.

IN OUR OPINION THE CURRENT WELFARE REFORM LEGISLATION WILL NOT WORK. PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO WORK AND WE CALL ON OUR GOVERNMENTS TO WORK WITH THE UNEMPLOYED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN. PARENTS AND CARERS ARE DOING A JOB. WE CALL ON PEOPLE IN POWER TO WORK WITH US AS WE TRY TO MAKE LIFE AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE FOR THE PEOPLE WE LOOK AFTER AND LOVE.

JESSIE HARVEY, KINSHIP CARERS

I’m here with all the Kinship Carers. Not only in Glasgow, but we’re now amalgamated all over Scotland. We’ve got 50 to 55 children in our care. This is through addiction, bereavement, mental health issues. My own personal situation was that I was asked to take my grandson at four months because he was at risk. I did not hesitate, but I didn’t know the struggle ahead with this. He was born a methadone baby and he has never slept properly in four and a half years.

I was at a meeting recently with one of the main funders for addiction. Very nice gentleman. He turned round and said “Jessie- You’ve got to start embracing it, hen.” I was a bit bemused. I went “Embrace it?” I said “From when I could say the word ‘mammy’ I embraced it.

I’d a father that I loved but he was an alcoholic. I’d a son who was a heroin addict for 18 years that I loved and I embraced that. I beg your pardon. I’m embracing this wee grandchild who I dearly love-- that’s what I embrace today. I’m no sitting back any longer watching a government pour millions into a legalized substance, i.e. alcohol and turning their back on our weans ---- No more.

JEAN FORRESTER, KINSHIP CARERS

There are thousands of children in Scotland that are being raised by grandparents and other extended family members. Family members have taken these children on to care because the children are at risk. In many cases the Social Work Department have asked family members to take over the complete care of these children until the parents show signs of recovery. Statistics show that in the next six months there could be as much as a 20 percent rise – increase in children in Kinship Care in Scotland. It takes a weight off the social work department to know that these kids have been placed in a safe environment. But there is no financial support and no emotional support.

We are here today to ask you to try and understand the poverty in some of these families and see if we can make a difference in these children’s lives because they are most certainly due that.

WE KNOW THAT IT IS WRONG THAT WHERE YOU LIVE DETERMINES HOW MUCH SUPPORT YOU GET. WE CALL FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF A UNIFORM POLICY OF DISTRIBUTING MONEY ACROSS LOCAL AUTHORITIES. WE KNOW THAT CHILDREN ARE BEST CARED FOR BY THEIR OWN FAMILIES. WE CALL UPON THE UK GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE KINSHIP CARERS WITH THE SAME SUPPORT AND RESOURCES AS THEY CURRENTLY OFFER TO FOSTER CARERS.

CAROL TURNER, STAR Project

Put yourself in my shoes...

I am eight years old.

I am hungry

I go round to my friend’s back door and eat the bread put out for the birds.

Put yourself in my shoes...

I am twelve.

I feel so ashamed of the holes in all my shoes.

It’s a constant worry.

I can feel the grit in between my toes during PE.

I wish I had a pair of nice white sandshoes.

Put yourself in my shoes...

I am a teen ager needing my first bra.
Nobody notices;
I steal one from someone's bottom drawer.

Put yourself in my shoes.
I am 21 years old.
A young bride, hoping the future will be different,
But he will give me my first black eye three weeks later.

Put yourself in my shoes...
I am 26
With three young children and three more to come.
He has just told me that Myra Hindley would make a better mother than me.

Put yourself in my shoes...
I am 32.
Another wedding, the same man.
Another borrowed dress, no shoes, bare feet.

Put yourself in my shoes...
I am 40.
Although I have paid a heavy price to break free and am now on my own,
I am still reduced to tears by the bullying behaviour of staff at the Benefits Agency.

I am now 45.
It's taken a long time, but
Despite everything, I believe in myself.
I am finally able to buy myself a new pair of shoes.

My name is Carol.
Put yourself in my shoes.

WE KNOW THAT PEOPLE OFTEN CHOOSE TO LIVE WITH ABUSE BECAUSE THEY ARE TOO AFRAID TO DO ANYTHING ELSE. WE PLEAD FOR ADEQUATE SUPPORT SERVICES SO THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO SPEAK OUT THEY KNOW THEY'LL BE SAFE AND SUPPORTED.

STEPHEN LYNCH, HAMILTON

Let me tell you about Maggie:
When she was a child she was always encouraged to drink milk because it helped to make her grow. It helped your bones; it helped your teeth. TV adverts were always telling us how important milk was for us all, especially children. When she had her own children she took all the advice and made sure her boys had plenty of milk to drink. Over the past few months the price of milk has soared so much so that things in her house have changed. Her son's freedom of drinking milk by the glass has been taken away and is now limited. They are now drinking cheap fizzy drinks.

WE CONGRATULATE OUR GOVERNMENTS FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO END CHILD POVERTY. WE CALL ON THEM TO PUT AS MUCH ENERGY INTO THIS TASK AS THEY HAVE INTO THE CURRENT BANKING CRISIS. POWERFUL PEOPLE SIT AROUND TABLES AND MAKE POLICIES ABOUT US. WE ASK FOR THE RIGHT TO BE AROUND THOSE TABLES AND TO HELP TO MAKE THE BEST POSSIBLE DECISIONS.

BLAIR GREEN, DRUMCHAPEL

We had to try to get a Council house. We had a couple of months to get things sorted out before we moved. I was still working constantly on the buses trying to bring money in to pay for everything. The flat the Council offered us was in a right state. Diane went to see it and was in tears. There were big holes in the walls. If you've ever seen the film, *Trainspotting*, with the toilets, then you'll know exactly what I'm talking about. The stench of urine when you walked in was unbelievable. It was just disgusting, but what choice did we have? The Council weren't prepared to do anything to it. We'd done everything, put our whole heart and soul into our old flat, and then to walk away from it with nothing, to be put in a place where you wouldn't even have a bath, with Olivia our beautiful baby just three weeks old. She sat in a bogging kitchen in her wee car seat while we spent most of our time trying to decorate the place and do something to it to make it a home. The week after we moved in we had drug dealers move in next door to us, and there were needles all over the close, people banging on the door at all hours of the night, at the wrong door, looking for drugs. Diane answered the door at 4 o'clock one morning in desperation as she was trying to get Olivia to sleep. She was dragged out by the hair. I was going out to work not knowing what I was going to be coming back to, knowing my family didn't feel safe there. It was unbearable. I nearly cracked in two with the stress of it all.

**WE KNOW THE CRIPPLING IMPACT DEBT HAS ON PEOPLE'S LIVES. WE CALL ON ALL WHO CAN TO TAKE TOUGHER ACTION TO OUTLAW PREDATORY LENDING TO LOW INCOME CONSUMERS.
WE CONGRATULATE GLASGOW'S CITY COUNCIL ON ITS DECISION TO COMMIT TO PAYING ALL EMPLOYEES A LIVING WAGE OF AT LEAST £7 PER HOUR AND CALL ON OTHER EMPLOYERS TO FOLLOW SUIT.**

WE WANT TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION AND NOT CONSTANTLY IDENTIFIED AS PART OF THE PROBLEM. WE CALL ON PEOPLE TO RESPECT US AS PEOPLE AND TO LEARN FROM

COMMISSIONERS RESPOND

DAVID LUNAN

We could have spoken a lot longer as Commissioners than we were given and we now intend to reply very briefly. Four of us are going to speak for ninety seconds. If it goes beyond ninety seconds, put your hand up so the speaker knows. And the first is the Archbishop who is going to say a few words

MARIO CONTI, ARCHBISHOP OF GLASGOW

It was in February of 1907 – 2007 that we had under the auspices of the Royal Society of Edinburgh a gathering here. It was academics – giving us the history of poverty, the analysts telling us how it had developed, there were psychologists talking about that angle. We had a lot of academic input which was very valuable in trying to understand what the statistics were telling us. But at the end of that, I remember very clearly and it is within the report. “A delegate highlighted the lack of representation at the conference of groups from poor communities” – I'm quoting, -- “And without further work to empower such groups to bring forth solutions from within these communities, it would be unlikely that appropriate solutions would emerge.”

BOB WINTER

I would just want to begin by saying that what was heard today is from very competent, capable people. People with talent and people with courage.

JOHN CARNOCHAN, HEAD OF THE VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT OF STRATHCLYDE POLICE

We need to make sure that children are nurtured in homes where there is no violence because if you bring children up in a war zone you'll create warriors, and that's what we have. We need to do that. We need to understand the connection of all of this together because nobody's safe until we're all safe. And that's a truism. But one of the things that I think is really positive – because I always try always to be positive about things. and I am an optimistic cynic. Vaclav Havel said that that hope is not the belief in a particular outcome but the certainty that what you are doing is the right thing. And what this is happening today, this is the right thing to do.

JEANETTE HARKESS, DEPUTY EDITOR, GLASGOW HERALD

Thank you sincerely for your stories. They were hard stories to listen to, but they are not stories of gloom. The fact that you are here today and telling them makes them stories of hope. Margaret Thatcher once said, “There is no such thing as society.” Keep proving them wrong.

MARTIN JOHNSTONE, PRIORITY AREAS OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

I think one of the things which was evident amongst all the Commissioners in the room where we were meeting this afternoon for that brief 40 -45 minutes was that while there may be a great deal of intellect and creativity and knowledge and passion, there were people missing from that room that needed to be there. So the specific recommendation of the Commission would be that its 40 minutes was not its life time but rather its 40 minutes was its starting point. And we would want a number of the Testifiers to join us over the next period of time as together we tackle the issues which you have so wonderfully and eloquently raised, not just for the Commissioners but for all of us.

TRICIA MCCONALOGUE

I'd just like to thank everybody for coming, but what I would like to say is it's not just about the government – you can make a difference. Thank you.

**Nothing About Us
Without Us
Is for Us**

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