

Jubilee+ Voices, an advisory group made up of people living on the lowest incomes, began last year (the first reports can be found [here](#) and [here](#)). The third session took place in Bracknell in May 2023. The purpose of the group was to hear about people's experiences of church-based social action and regular church activities, so that we can listen, learn and share lessons with churches across the UK.

Ten people from Bracknell, Reading and Woking joined us for the session, telling us what was helpful, making suggestions for improvements, and offering ideas for the future. Thank you to everyone who took part.

What the participants taught us

Listening to the participants showed us more about resilience, and the power of coming together to share common experiences to solve problems. They shed light on how it feels to ask for support, specifically when you are young, or escaping from domestic abuse.

1. Ensuring voices are heard locally

Participants in J+ Voices session 3 saw great value in coming together to share their stories, experiences and what has been helpful to them. They wanted to set up a similar Voices group locally, to meet regularly, with a guest speaker, with opportunities to volunteer and get involved.

Recommendation: Invite people you know who have recent or current experience of poverty to set up a monthly or fortnightly Voices group in your church / social action project for people, and offer the support and hosting necessary for this to thrive.

Recommendation for Jubilee+: During year 2, develop ways of equipping local churches to replicate J+ Voices in their local settings.

2. Young people showing courage and being role models

It takes courage to ask for help. This is especially the case when younger people feel judged or looked down upon because they are asking for help from the church. We learnt that people know there is kindness and support in the church, but sometimes there needs to be better signposting.

Recommendation: Make it more widely known that help is there for young people who are struggling financially and pray specifically around the challenges facing them.

3. Build more partnerships in the community

Participants want more churches to work together in unity, for example the Catholic church and Baptist church with their local church. They are proud of what their church and project offer, and saw the church and projects as giving something that others don't, including prayer.

Recommendation: Reach out to other churches locally, help others know more about what is offered, and work together to change your community.

4. Churches and projects are a refuge for those fleeing domestic abuse

Some people found safe, caring and non-judgemental help in church and social action projects. Being from an overseas heritage can deepen the effects of isolation when people are fleeing domestic abuse and losing their community. Church friendship and community offer solace and safety.

Recommendation: Connect with Christian organisations such as thirtyone:eight and Restored so that they can help you to meaningfully support survivors of domestic abuse.

Answering our questions

a) If you could tell us one thing, what would it be?

Many were proud of their church and social action community. They told us 'keep it up', have a group in every church to learn about 'the reality of living day to day on low income', they wanted targeted help for men, children and young people 'to feel it's ok to ask for help'.

b) How you felt the first time you visited

Comments ranged from 'overwhelmed', and in 'despair' to 'I came in broken and I left happy'. People spoke about being given hope, welcomed, and feeling safe 'like I mattered'. No-one felt judged.

c) What needs to change in church / church-based social action?

More awareness of the 'reality of being poor' and importance of 'building a community of people on benefits'. People wanted the church to be more out in the community, building partnerships and greater promotion of what they do to help.

d) Snakes and ladders

We also asked people to describe what factors pull people down into poverty (snakes), and what factors help to lift people out of poverty (ladders). This is what participants told us.

Snakes – Lack of resources and ill health were major factors that cause people to feel trapped, such as increasing costs of food, bills, debts and loss of income. People were grappling with tragedies like suicide of family members or 'losing my home after hubby died'.

'Meeting a boy when moved here and he broke my arm and hands etc. ...domestic violence as I was vulnerable.'

Ladders – Food banks, having someone to listen, and understanding from debtors helped to address issues and make people feel supported. Finding better paid work, cost of living payment and help from church programmes helped to directly impact people's finances for the better.

'Having courage and support to take the first step.'

Thank you to all of the participants who made this report possible. A more detailed report will be available later this year.

To find out more about upcoming Jubilee+ Voices sessions, please email Rosie.Hopley@jubilee-plus.org. Thank you.