

## **Jubilee+ Voices Liverpool Short Report**

**Jubilee+ Voices**, an advisory group made up of people living on the lowest incomes, held its seventh and final session in Liverpool in April 2024. The group's purpose is 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.

Eight people from Liverpool joined us for two sessions, describing some of their experiences with church and social action projects. Below are some of their suggestions for improvements and ideas of opportunities for the future. Thank you to everyone who took part.

People showed us that building trusting, lasting friendships and relationships can make all the difference to people's sense of identity, mental health, well being and sense of purpose. They valued having positive role models and mentors, those who will show them a sense of living rightly, or a good structure to daily living. Being in a church and social action community can make a big difference. People had lots of ideas about how church can make a bigger impact in their community.

### **What we learnt...**

#### **1. Relationship building through trust, honesty and mutual respect**

Honesty is needed for relationships to flourish so that 'we don't feel alone'. People want to be trusted, and Jubilee+ Voices provided the group a safe space to 'air how poverty affects our physical and mental health'. One said 'let people take their time' to feel safe around others; connecting weekly enables people to find belonging and be refreshed spiritually. They also want to develop and rebuild skills such as cooking, budgeting, or finding ways to adjust to major life changes.

**Insights:** Opportunities for people to come together outside of regular church activities can reduce the sense of stigma or isolation, as can being included as part of the volunteer team.

## **2. Showing the equal worth of everyone**

Some people were greatly impacted by being treated as an equal, especially where they have experienced inequality, including in a different culture as women. Warmth and kindness break through cultural differences. Although poverty is 'demeaning ... we are pushed into alms', people have found that where others 'just show love', form positive relationships, and 'slowly introduce the word of Jesus', these actions bring benefits that last.

**Insights:** How we communicate that men and women are of equal worth in church and the wider community is vital for people's dignity, impressions of church, and even how they feel about the Gospel.

## **3. Family growing out of a community**

Treating people with dignity helps to remind them they are not 'service users' – one person's church pastor told him: 'You're more than that, you're family.' For some, coming to the foodbank meant their children could eat, others however felt 'emasculated', embarrassed and that they lost their independence. Many spoke about a strong sense of solidarity in church, feeling 'loved', 'safe', and finding new opportunities such as parent groups and family support.

**Insight:** Could your church do a wage swap where 'leaders live off food bank for a week'?

[Answering our questions...](#)

**a) What can you remember from your first experience of church or social action project?**

'I remember when I had just arrived in England and we had no money. A church gave food and clothes and that made us very happy,' one person said. Others told us about the friendliness of 'people in charge', the 'very nice atmosphere'. Being treated with respect was important, and others recalled the informality of church. They have loved things like trips, practical help and compassion. What has been hard is 'living [in the same property] with people still active in addiction', poor mental health and inadequate housing.

**b) What has made the biggest impact on you while living on a low income?**

Being in a 'safe space' at church was very important. But living on the edge of poverty has a major impact, for one person it 'destroys my self-esteem'. What can help is getting support with budgeting, accepting generosity from others, having 'hope in life'. The reality of how scarce resources are hits hard as one person described: 'When I unexpectedly found 10p in my coat pocket and being jubilant about it. I cried after that 'cos it made me realise how badly off we were.' Positive things that are invaluable are 'children's entertainment in church classes' and 'creating a fund for helping people on a regular monthly basis'.

**c) If the church could change one thing about how it supports people on low incomes, what would that be?**

Church-based childcare and low budget cookery courses, as church premises are underused. Better communication around what is available across churches/the community, as 'not everything is shared'. Things like running a budgeting course or putting together a booklet of 'free days out in your local area' can help, as well as community building activities such as walking groups, growing groups for plants, vegetables and fruit 'you can grow anything in any space'.

#### **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 access to a short break away, a car, a house. Escapism through drugs and alcohol. Lack of care for one another and 'neglect by the church leader'. People feel dragged down by injustice in society, as well as family breakdown, divorce, loneliness and isolation. Poor parenting was identified as a challenge, as well as shortage of finance, unemployment, and 'bad planning'. Pressure to join in with others' lifestyle where they 'don't understand your situation' all make things harder.

Ladders - 'Local resources like community centres, libraries' and 'skills training, further education' can help people to make improvements in their own lives. Practical help in a crisis such as warm spaces and CAP can make a difference, as well as ongoing support such as 'a good mentor', compassion, 'love, prayer and encouragement'. Discipleship and spiritual encouragement can be life-changing. 'When I got baptised I felt God take 10kg off each shoulder - I felt alive.'

**Thank you to all of the participants who made this report possible. A more detailed report will be available later in 2024.**