

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**

2023

Lauren Roberts-Turner

# YOUTH POVERTY

UNDERSTANDING & CHALLENGING THE NARRATIVE



# Table of Contents

**01**

Introduction

**03**

Space for Leaders  
Unlocked in  
Campaigning

**05**

Challenges posed

**07**

Successes and  
failures

**09**

Benefits to the  
cause

**11**

Youth poverty  
lessons

**13**

Conclusion

**02**

The current state of  
UK poverty

**04**

Positive context for  
campaign  
establishment

**06**

What we tried to do  
about it

**08**

Benefits for the  
participants

**10**

Campaigning  
lessons

**12**

Reccomendations

**14**

Appendix





‘Everything's got a story in it ...Change the story, change the world.’

TERRY PRATCHETT

---

## Forward

When I first met Lauren, I was struck by how eloquently and passionately she spoke about the systemic issues facing young women. When she approached me about her internship with Leaders Unlocked and the focus on young people and poverty, I was excited to see what she'd do and crucially what she'd learn.

What Lauren has managed to do in her internship, many policy and campaigning organisations struggle to do well- genuinely involve people with lived experience. Through this project, she has embodied the clarion call first made by the disability rights movement in the 1990s and now invoked by a range of moments that centre those with lived experience of injustice - "nothing about us without us is for us".

It was a pleasure to be able to work with Lauren and the group at Leaders Unlocked to share JRF's Talking about Poverty research, undertaken in partnership with The Frameworks Institute. Through the workshop we unpacked how people in the UK think about poverty, the impact this has on stigma and public perception and the strategic communications tool that supports people in talking more effectively about poverty.

In this report, she identifies that raising awareness of the impact of poverty and then generating action to solve it is indeed an uphill climb. Her report humbly outlines the ambition of the project and aptly finds that time, relationship and skills sharing are the necessary building blocks for campaigns by and for people with direct experience of systemic injustice.

**Camille Furtado, UK Campaigns Manager, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

# Introduction



My name is Lauren Roberts-Turner, and I am an activist and researcher whose work mainly focuses on ending poverty. I am passionate about this area of work because I am painfully aware of the suffering it causes and how completely unnecessary and damaging this is. I refuse to accept a world where so much suffering is allowed to exist, and this has guided much of my work.

Over the last year, I have worked as a strategic intern at Leaders Unlocked. I have used my internship to look into the possibility of Leaders Unlocked using our expertise to campaign on the issues we know to have a big impact on young people's (those aged 16-25) lives. This report gives an overview of my project starting with why I consider poverty to be one of the biggest issues currently facing the UK's young people, what I tried to do about it, my successes and failures and what you can do too.

Over the past year, I scoped the campaigning and political landscape and led a project with a group of young people with lived experience of poverty in which we discussed the issue in-depth and considered what to do about it. The issues we kept returning to were twofold:

- **The group emphasised the gruelling harm of living in poverty.**
- **They focused on damaging narratives which made this experience harder and enabled the status quo.**

---

## The current state of UK poverty, the narratives that surround it and where Leaders Unlocked can have an impact.

According to a report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2022, 'more than one in five of the UK population are in poverty in our country'.[1]

This number is huge, set to increase and is of course very worrying. However, as well as suffering the harms of living on a very low income, people living in poverty also face a specific narrative told about them by a largely unsympathetic society. These narratives either deny the existence of poverty in a modern United Kingdom or conceptualises poverty only in terms of material needs ignoring physical and psychological ones. Worse still some variations of this narrative put those in poverty's experience down to personal moral failing; suggesting those who struggle financially and seek help are not taking enough personal responsibility. According to this latter narrative over a fifth of our population is simply too lazy, stupid or feckless to pull themselves out of poverty and willingly choose to suffer the harms of a life lived in poverty. Whilst this is largely applied to adults and parents, children are not seen by some as 'entirely innocent' and young people in poverty seem not to exist at all.[2]

The narratives I have outlined here are problematic and based on specific ideas perpetuated by both the government and the mainstream media. They make it harder to tackle poverty even for those established by society as needy groups such as children; a category from which young people are excluded. Furthermore '[d]iscussions about poverty in the UK has largely focused on children and pensioners' and overlooked young people, despite the fact young people are the age group which faced the highest rate of poverty. Data on poverty is currently not being routinely desegregated to show the impact on young people. One of the few bits of research we do have, highlights the worrying reality that almost half of young people are "unable to make ends meet each month, are only just managing to [...] or have a financial situation that changes significantly [and...] are sometimes unable to make ends meet". Furthermore, it finds that '[a]t a national level, many policies actively restrict the safety net available to young people.'

Uncovering, understanding and mobilising the hidden stories and experiences of young people is where I felt Leaders Unlocked had the expertise to make a difference. There is real evidence that 'concerted efforts to reduce pensioner poverty [an issue that was in the public consciousness as unjust and wrong] have gone a long way in improving living standards for this age group'. I thus felt that if Leaders Unlocked could be part of changing the story about poverty, and establishing youth poverty as an issue of public concern, it could be part of changing the response to and indeed reducing youth poverty.

## What space is there for Leaders Unlocked in the campaigning sector and what sort of sector is it to join?

To develop a sense of the current state and scope of the campaigning sector I began my project with a literature review on poverty, followed by a series of conversations with those established in the sector. Overall, I found the sector to be under immense pressure, due to the anti-campaigning stance and legislation pushed by the government and the media, but nonetheless resilient and willing to work together strongly to survive.

Recent research found campaigners ‘have faced an increasingly hostile political environment.’ However, it is not all gloom and doom. The research quoted also found the attacks persuaded many charities to re-examine their mission and refocus on campaigning and revealed heartening public support for social activism. A third of charities said they were now “more likely to speak out” and since RNLI was attacked by the right for saving the lives of those trying to cross the channel, they have received a huge ‘surge in donations’. In the same research, 94% of respondents said that they thought ‘there will be a need for more campaigning by civil society in the next 12 months’ and that ‘they would like to collaborate more’ with other campaigners and campaigning organisations. This suggests there is both a need and room for more campaigners in the field. Furthermore, the desire for increased collaboration within the campaigns sector could be very beneficial to Leaders Unlocked if it did decide to fully establish itself in this field.

As well as this, there is currently a generational shift happening as Gen Z replaces the ‘boomer’ generation as the most engaged generation in campaigns and social movements. This is a shift that could potentially benefit Leaders Unlocked. As a generation, Gen Z tends to want to be actively engaged by those involved in the campaign if they are going to support it. They are focused on receiving ‘reciprocal value’ from their involvement. GenZ doesn’t want to just donate to any charity connected to a particular issue, to fund them to make the change, they want to be sure that the organisation shares their values and be a partner in creating that change. This is something Leaders Unlocked has experience doing.

---

## Positive context for establishing a campaign around poverty when we did

The increased public support for those trying to bring about change since the pandemic has been considerable. It is partly a reflection of the increasing hardship faced by growing numbers of the population and increasing awareness of social issues by the public. This could be seen in the public support for Marcus Rashford’s campaign to extend free school meals over the summer holidays in 2020 which ensured its success. As well as this, the evils of poverty are well known to those working in the public and non-profit sectors as it is an issue which intersects with many other social issues. There are many valiant efforts being taken across the charity and campaigning space and this was partly reflected in the beneficial collaborations I was able to make with organisations such as 4in10 and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



## Challenges Posed

Whilst increasing public support for campaigning and increased awareness around poverty is positive, 'mainstream narratives [blaming poverty on] individual choices' and not the result of systemic issues makes public attitudes to poverty generally tepid at best. 'Political choices are underpinned by public narratives. The view that welfare makes families in poverty dependent on support and less likely to work has taken hold among a significant proportion of the public, paving the way for damaging political choices.' This can be seen in the reduced public buy-in to the 'Keep the Lifeline' campaign despite it being driven by the same issues as those that drove the need for free school meals over the summer of 2020 and it being one of the biggest collaborations in modern UK campaigning history.

There is a lot of positive work happening within the anti-poverty sector but despite successes such as the free school meal campaign, organisations face negative media and government narratives, a fairly apathetic public, and the aftereffects of austerity which have now been compounded by the pandemic, Brexit and the surge in the cost of living. It is in the face of their efforts that child and pensioner poverty is rising.

Poverty amongst young people is also on the rise but this is a specific demographic often missed by the sector. Increasing emphasis on the need for youth voice and youth activism in the last decade is changing that slightly. However, the awareness of youth poverty as an issue is still far behind where it needs to be. This is where Leaders Unlocked has a role to play.

---

## What we tried to do about it Stage 1

Having recognised the lack of specific campaigning work on youth poverty I decided to run a project that piloted campaigning and utilised Leaders Unlocked's skills of engaging with young people affected by the issue. I recruited a group of young people who had previously engaged with us and cared about using their lived experience of poverty to create change. We met online to enable us to connect people from across the country and run the project on a small budget. Initially, I facilitated three two-hour sessions in which we got to know each other and talked about the different things in society that got us enraged, introducing some general information about poverty in the UK and current activism on the issue.

The main focus of these sessions was to get the group to start thinking about and discussing their experience of poverty. A key tool to support this was the use of a mentimeter in which people can submit answers anonymously, creating an infographic that can then be seen by everyone as a mind map. The Menti was entitled 'what words do you associate with poverty' and sparked an engaging debate that I kept returning to throughout the project (see appendix).

The second session focused on getting the group to think about what solutions would change their experience for the better. This involved an activity called 'changing your characters life' in which they designed characters that lived in poverty and thought about how this impacted on different aspects of their lives such as school, interactions with others, family relationships, relationships with self and interactions with public services. The group then took a step back and thought about what big individual changes could positively impact each of these areas. This led to a focus on universality as a principle for change. There was consensus on the idea that we should all have good lives and that this principle would be a way to ensure no one is excluded and reduce stigma. One specific solution the group came to was the introduction of universal basic income.

The third session focused on taking the solutions to the next stage of campaigning and thinking about how we can articulate our ideas for change and break down the stigma around poverty as well as discussing what the group wanted the campaign to look like.

Over the three sessions, the young people were successfully supported to discuss and understand their experiences of poverty, to locate the causes of their experience of poverty outside of themselves, and to think about what changes they would like to see.

## Stage 2

As some of the young people I was working with had exams or were preparing to start or return to university, we took a break from June to September, during which I endeavoured to plan a short campaign based on the themes of universal basic income and breaking down the stigma which had been raised by the group as the most important. Our initial plan was to focus on Conservative MPs in (so-called) 'red wall' seats and those in the young peoples' constituencies and create an email campaign in which we requested a meeting in the hope of giving the young people some political exposure to MP's and a chance to get their message across.

However, by the time we came back from the summer break, the lockdown parties' scandal had reached its conclusion and Johnson was on his way out leaving a power gulf and MPs scrambling to reposition themselves. As the power gulf persisted and the leadership battle was fought, I went back to my group and we decided to shift our focus from influencing MPs to creating a narrative shift within the public. We hoped this would make ignoring the issue of poverty harder for whoever was next to take office. We decided to create blogs to publish on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on the 17th of October.

We were very fortunate that Camille Furtado, campaign lead at Joseph Rowntree Foundation, kindly delivered impactful training to our group on how to write in a way that dismantles negative stereotypes of those in poverty and engages those without lived experience of the issue. The group also got to work with a writer on staff at Leaders Unlocked who supported the young people to improve their first drafts of their blogs. The young people were able to draw on their lived experience, the group discussions and the technical support provided, to craft very powerful pieces of writing which were published on the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. I have included the blogs in the appendix and encourage you to read them. They can also be found on Leaders Unlocked socials and the Blogs and Reflection section of the London Challenge Poverty Week 2022 website.

In the second stage, the young people received education about politics and activism and created powerful blogs about their experiences.

---

## Successes and failures

The period of April to October 2022 saw three prime ministers take office in quick succession, an ongoing war in Ukraine and the start and deepening of the cost-of-living crisis. This made it an incredibly volatile time for an organisation to pilot its first-ever campaign with a group of first-time campaigners. Although we didn't manage to launch a fully-fledged campaign aimed at MPs, the project was able to adapt and still be successful. We shifted the focus to the skills, knowledge and capacity building of participants. The project was still able to contribute to the wider anti-poverty movement by writing blogs, that received good engagement on social media and trying to shift some of the negative narratives around young people in poverty. The general response from the campaigning sector to the project was positive and I was invited to two in-person speaking events and interviewed for two podcasts during my time running this project.

Online working had many positives such as enabling a geographically diverse group to work together. Conversely, it did make engagement more stilted and provided additional barriers for some. However, I was able to work on a one-to-one basis over the phone between sessions for those for whom this was the case to ensure they were still able to participate fully.

The seven months during which this project ran saw a period of big change for many of the young people and included events such as moving or returning to university. Furthermore, as the cost-of-living crisis created additional pressures in what is for some already a high-pressure day-to-day existence it became harder for some young people to engage. It speaks to the unjustly ironic situation that those who face the worse poverty by virtue of this fact often do not have the time or the resources to advocate for change. Despite some drop-off, the pivoting of the campaign to a written narrative project made it more manageable for many of the participants and even those who were unable to contribute to a blog gained much from being on the project.

## Benefits for the participants

One of the things that I cared about most was that participating in my project was a fun and beneficial experience. I aimed to ensure my sessions had moments of fun as well as provide a safe space to share their experiences of living in poverty.

A strong bond was created between a group of people with disparate experiences and is reflected in some members of the group endeavouring to stay in touch after the project finished. This bond was fostered through the openness of the participants to sharing their life experiences and listening to the experiences of others which reflected trust in the workshop process and the project itself. The project was inclusive and supported those with very different skill and experience levels including neuro-diverse young people and people with learning difficulties to have a voice on the issue of poverty.

Those involved gained a substantial amount of knowledge, skills, and information about poverty in the UK and learned about different peoples' experiences of poverty, campaigning and advocacy and what it means to be an activist. They also learned more about Westminster and how it worked, including who their MP is and how to contact them. The project also included invaluable training from a senior member of staff from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on how to communicate effectively for change.

The group had the opportunity to work with a writer on staff at leaders unlocked to develop their writing ability. Those who completed the blogs developed their experiences into a piece of work both blog writers were incredibly proud of and which they received positive feedback for on social media and over email.

Most importantly though, through sharing their experiences and in doing so hearing the experiences of others they were able to identify common struggles and common causes of these struggles as being outside of themselves. Poverty went from being an issue of personal failure to one caused by structural issues such as a punitive unfit benefit system and low-paid work. This enabled them to move beyond a personal narrative of blame, own their struggles, and begin to think about dismantling both the structures and the narratives that entrap people in poverty.

With young campaigners such as these active in this sphere, I think the future of anti-poverty campaigning is in safe hands.

---

**With the current cost of living crisis, the conversation around poverty is more important than ever which I hope our project raises awareness to."**

**YOUNG LEADER**



## Benefits to the cause

Through speaking engagements such as podcasts and at the London Child Poverty Summit and blogs I raised awareness of the impact of poverty and why it is imperative we focus on solutions that aim to end poverty not just reduce it and embrace universality. I increased Leaders Unlocked's organisational knowledge of how poverty impacts young people which they can take forward in their work and I have been able to raise the issue of youth poverty with other organisations that work with young people but might not focus on this as a specific issue. Both I and the young people involved in this internship project have increased knowledge and understanding of youth poverty as an issue and more skills to take forward in the fight to end poverty. Our efforts have also increased Leaders Unlocked's profile and introduced the work we do to a wider audience, a key aim of the overall internship programme.

---

## Lessons for those considering taking up campaigning

The best successes on my project came from collaborations with existing campaigners, e.g., the success of the blogs was derived in part from the training we received from Camille Furtardo at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation whom I met when I was working on a previous campaign that was focused on youth employment. These blogs were amplified by Katherine Hill, who leads 4in10 the London Child Poverty Network, who posted them on the London Challenge Poverty Week website helping them reach a larger and incredibly relevant audience. So, my advice is to collaborate, collaborate, collaborate and put out lots of feelers. Most campaigners I met were incredibly friendly and supportive but, by the nature of the job, campaigners tend to be incredibly busy and so not everyone will be able to respond and support you, even if they want to and your projects are aligned.

Many campaigners and third-sector workers gave me a lot of their time. Sam Gregory from UBI labs kept me up to date with the current state of the campaign for universal basic income, Fran Landreth-strong and Toby Murray provided me with insight into their Cost of Independence report and Katy Goldstraw updated me on the academic thinking on youth poverty. On top of sharing their knowledge and insight, these meetings with professionals in the field shaped the project and provided me with vital support and encouragement throughout its completion. I also got a huge amount out of the Shelia McKechnie Campaigns Carousel training and cannot recommend enough whatever your level of campaigning experience. As well as considerably increasing my skills and knowledge of campaigning it also provided me with a supportive network of campaigners.

Secondly, build time for capacity building and education. This ended up being the bulk of this intern project and it was time spent incredibly well. In order to think about challenging wider societal messaging and challenging existing structures, these narratives needed to be recognised and shifted within the participants themselves. One of the things I am proudest of was the notable shift in many of the young people. They went from being angry about poverty, but simultaneously making statements about needing to work harder or manage money better to get out of poverty, to focusing their anger on decision-makers and thinking about poverty as the solvable and hugely damaging injustice it is.

This was only possible because we had built trust as a group which took time and a lot of listening, the importance of which I cannot emphasise enough. Being part of a campaign means sacrificing things, at the very least that includes one's time, but it also includes emotional energy thinking about emotive issues that affect lives. Campaigners are more likely to stay the course if they feel and can engender a sense of community and fellowship with the group which our group did.

**Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate and put out lots of feelers...**

LAUREN ROBERTS-TURNER

## Lessons about youth poverty

A key piece of work that our group kept returning to and adding to during the project was the mentimeter. It answered the question 'what words do you most associate with poverty' (see appendix). The top three most common responses, isolation, loneliness, and struggle, really highlighted a concurrent theme of the huge psychological effects experiencing poverty can have on people. This is potentially exacerbated if you experience poverty at a young age whilst you are still developing and trying to venture out into the world. Not having enough money to get by means that your ability to meet your basic needs is severely compromised, let alone your ability to do things that bring joy and fulfilment. Human beings need social connections. They need the opportunity to work towards their aspirations and realise their ambitions and they need a safe place to come home to. Poverty removes this from people, leaving them lonely, isolated, and struggling, something that was certainly reflected in the experiences of the young people I worked with during this internship project.

Our group found that some of their feelings of isolation came from not being able to afford the activities enjoyed by their peers. Even if the activity itself, such as hanging out at the park, initially appeared to be free, the travel costs or restrictions on time caused by work or caring responsibilities and trying to live as cheaply as possible prohibited this. However, the main driver of isolation raised by these young people was the shame associated with visibly being in poverty. Learning about and shifting the narrative formed the backbone of our work. If you are interested in learning about negative poverty narratives and how to shift them please consider reading the very insightful paper 'Battling The Blame Game' produced by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children which looks at research in this area.



### The Cycle of Isolation

- Unable to afford activities
- Feelings of shame



### The Impact on Mental Health

- Struggling to survive
- Lack of social connections

# Recommendations

## Collect data

One of the key findings of this project is that we simply do not know very much at all about the phenomenon of youth poverty and so it is integral that more research is done in this area. This does not necessarily mean commissioning poverty-specific projects. Another aspect of the project highlighted was how much poverty impacted all areas of a person's life and how much it intersects with other social issues, including those that Leaders Unlocked works on. Collecting data on poverty could include having a section in a survey for example when doing a project about education or mental health and includes either gathering perceptions of poverty, how people feel poverty impacts the issue or at the very least where appropriate asking whether or not the respondents consider themselves to be living in poverty or to be from a low-income background.

---

## Centre youth voice **and then actually listen to it**

When collecting data/undertaking research on youth poverty it is integral that youth voice really is centred and young people are able to shape and lead the discussions. This is important from both a morale and research standpoint. Young people deserve to be heard but they are also the experts of their own experience so the best research will be led by them. Centring youth voice is integral when working on any issue and something Leaders Unlocked specialises in. However, it remains especially important when working on an issue such as poverty where young people's experience of it often isn't even acknowledged let alone misunderstood.

---

## Narrative matters

This is especially true for poverty but holds for gaining public and ministerial support for most systemic issues where the trend is to portion blame to the individual. Therefore, when writing reports, creating social media content and when discussing such issues with groups or the public it is always important to think about which narrative your language fits into. Who benefits from how this is framed? and are we contributing to creating a helpful narrative to push for change on this issue? One simple first step is to think about whether a sentence or an idea individualises an issue or makes it the responsibility of a collective.

---

## Remember: Poverty can and must end.

Always remember that poverty is completely solvable and utterly harmful. What it is not and never will be is a sad inevitability.

# Conclusion

This project has successfully enabled young people with lived experiences of poverty to create work that lets them define their experience rather than the world negatively defining them by theirs.

The great strength of the project comes from the learning and development of the young people and the willingness of existing members of the anti-poverty civil society to listen. To both those groups, I am incredibly grateful.

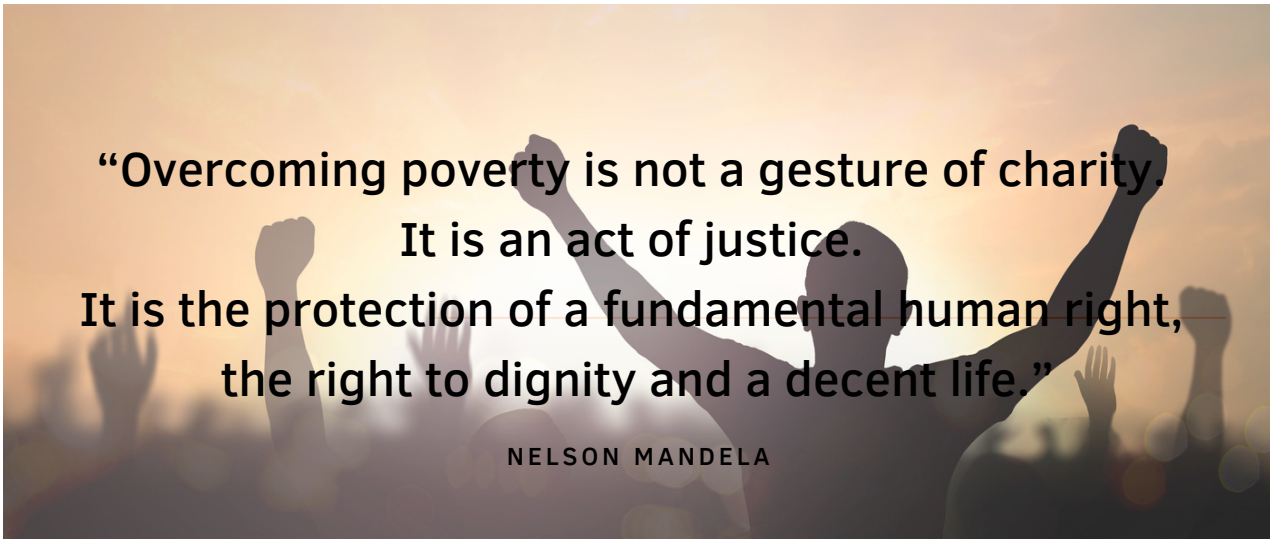
In terms of taking this work forward, the long-term ambition of the group was the establishment of a universal basic income that would eradicate poverty and universalise income support thus ending the stigma about 'hand-outs'. To this end, I signed an open letter on behalf of Leaders Unlocked calling on the new Prime Minister (Sunak) to introduce basic income which received almost 300 signatories from, MPs, peers, councillors and members of civil society.

This is important work to continue if we are to see the eradication of poverty and a welfare state that meets the needs of our modern times. There are many organisations and existing campaigns you can link up with such as Compass, UBI Labs, the Poverty Alliance (based in Scotland), the Bevan foundation (in Wales) and the RSA and the Child Fair State Inquiry which are all pushing for a poverty-free future. The last two focus specifically on young people and bringing their experiences and perspectives to the fore.

When asked how they would like to start making a change in the short term young people spoke about wanting to meet 'up with grass-root organisations and mak[e an] impact in local communities' specifically focusing on the 'de-stigmatisation of poverty in our communities and creating enough awareness around poverty especially [given the] recent housing + cost of living crisis.' These comments may provide organisations and individuals pointers on how to begin a campaign and what to focus on, especially young people with lived experience of poverty.

I implore all those who read this to remember we can and must end poverty and the longer we fail to do so the more people there are that face intense preventable harm for longer. In order to prevent such harm, we must listen and be led by those with lived experience as we work towards a poverty-free world.

In the words of one of the young leaders, "With the current cost of living crisis, the conversation around poverty is more important than ever which I hope our project raises awareness to."



**“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity.  
It is an act of justice.  
It is the protection of a fundamental human right,  
the right to dignity and a decent life.”**

NELSON MANDELA



**All that is left is for me to thank those who supported my project.**

**First and foremost, I extend my thanks to the young leaders who worked so hard and without whom the project would not have existed.**

**Secondly, I extend my thanks to all the amazing campaigners and other professionals who were incredibly generous with their time and without whom the project would not have been a success.**

- Rose Dowling, CEO of Leaders Unlocked
- Suzanne Kay, Senior Manager Internships and Scotland, Leaders Unlocked
- Daniel Knag, Project Manager at Leaders Unlocked
- Folade Lawan, Project Coordinator at Leaders Unlocked
- All the interns who have been such an amazing support, Louise Edwards, Nairn McDonald, Romaine Murchison, Aaliyah McLaughlin, Mair Williams, Fatoumata Bayo Diba, Adam Elliot, Abdul-Moiz Siddiqi and Chris Kelly
- Colleagues across Leaders Unlocked who made me feel so welcome
- Camille Furtado, Campaigns Lead at Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Mark Paul, Evidence and Impact Office, Become
- Katy Goldstraw, Senior Lecturer, Staffordshire University
- Sam Gregory, UBI labs
- Hannah webster, Head of Insight Turn to Us
- Toby Murray, Senior Murray
- Kathy Evans, CEO Children England
- Chloe Darlington, Director of Policy, Campaigns and Communications, Children England
- Katherine hill, 4in10, London Child Poverty Network
- Shelia McKechnie Foundation for their amazing campaigning training

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**

# Appendix – Blogs

## The reality of rising Bills, Lauren J

I am a young person who represents my area and young people from the north, and I have seen first-hand the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on my community.

I like sticking up for people if they can't get their say out. When I was at school I used to take the bullying but now if anyone says anything bad to another young person I'm there to defend them. It's not okay to bully people and I think it is important to stick up for those who can't always stand up for themselves.

The government also need to stick up for those who can't always stand up for themselves but at the moment I don't think they are doing a good job.

Recently I was in my bank, and I saw a woman who had visibly not showered for days. Her clothes were dirty, and it didn't look like she had any money.

The other people in the bank were rude about the fact she smelled and said nasty things.

I think it is really sad that we let people get so low that they aren't able to access basic things like a shower and clean clothes.

We need more compassion in our society.

We shouldn't judge people for being poor. There are always reasons people get that low. Often, bad things have happened to them, and they haven't had the right support. We must help people and make sure no one else is in her position.

One of the ways we can do this is by making the benefits system better. Currently, there are lots of problems with it, and it is letting my community down.

One of the biggest problems is that it doesn't give people enough money for the basics and to live good lives.

When I talk about the basics I mean we've got a lot of food banks. I go down the road for biscuits and tea at the church. People go if they're cold.

One of my friends has to make impossible choices. Once he's paid council rent and water he is left with £170 to last him a month. His cooker, fridge and shower have broken. He has to choose between hot water or buying a cooker. Or paying off his electric... He has a good family around him but it's not enough.

We can't leave individuals or families on their own. The government must help people that is what they are there for.

Those with big families will have to spend more money on bills and I am worried about how this winter will affect them. We should be encouraging everyone to heat their homes to a safe level. No person, especially not if they are a child or disabled, should be forced to live in a cold home. We must support those in need, not let them be harmed by lack of support.

# Appendix – Blogs

I worried for when it gets a lot colder and by how much bills are going up. It is not right that people are spending so much of their income on a basic thing like staying warm.

The government has given out some money for energy, but this money will soon run out.

What then?

It is not right that people will have to go into debt with their bills. If the government continues not to give more help, people will end up being cut off from society because they can't afford the internet or to charge their phones. In an increasingly online world, that is not right and a very scary thought.

Also, the benefit system doesn't work for people with disabilities

People with disabilities often find it harder to understand how to navigate the benefits system and to remember what they have been told or when they need to do things. I know that if some people didn't receive support from voluntary organisations, they wouldn't be able to access benefits at all. The state itself isn't at all clear about how to claim. I think it is disgusting how hard it is to claim benefits, and it means that right now, those without support are stuck in poverty.

We shouldn't be trapping those with disabilities in poverty. We should be making sure everyone has the right support and people to look out for them so everyone can have a good life.

The government needs to make sure everyone has a decent level of income, so situations of children and young people growing up in cold homes without enough food that are currently happening in my community never happen again

This means providing people with enough money that they can afford everything they need. It means providing benefits at a level that means it isn't all spent on bills, and there is some leftover afterwards for other things like school trips and birthdays and to spend on the things that make people happy.

I am very afraid of the coming winter in Britain. This is the case for lots of people where I am from and not just me. Change is needed now.

# Appendix – Blogs

## Poverty and Mental Health, Lauren J

I am a young person who represents my area and young people from the north. I want to make things better for people where I am from. A lot of young people from my area are afraid to speak out. I try and understand their point first and then speak on their behalf so that we can make my community a great place to live

Issues around Mental health are big the northeast of England. People have clothes on their back but there are unseen issues. People commit suicide because of poor mental health. Being able to have the confidence to speak out would help. But bullying and waiting lists stop people from getting help.

Where I live is not like London. I'm used to a quiet town. But in a quiet town, there's a lot of bullying in schools. This is because of people's different backgrounds: different ethnicities and rich and poor families. Some people can only afford the basics of life: hot water and heating. Others can't relate to them. We need to increase empathy in communities.

Recently ,young man in my community killed himself, and I still see his mum most days. I would like to be able to say to her that the government is now taking issues around mental health seriously and making sure every young person is supported I'd like to be able to say that, but I can't. He is not the only one. Where I am from lots of people have killed themselves. We need more support. We cannot go on like this.

Men, especially in my community in the north, sometimes don't want to come forward for mental health support because of feelings of shame or of being a failure. Being in poverty can make some men feel that this means they have let their family and their community down.

This isn't true.

We must provide men, and everyone who needs it, with income and mental health support to help them survive this cold expensive winter.

I am very scared about the coming winter and the rising bills, and I know other people in my community are too.

It's not right that there is so little support for poor people that their fear of how to survive the cold winter is making their mental health worse.

We need to make sure everyone has the support they need so poor mental health doesn't ruin lives. More needs to be done. Westminster needs to invest in support within my community so that people who might find it harder to access support, such as young people, men and people with disabilities, complex needs, and autism are supported to live good lives.



# Appendix – Blogs

People with disabilities and autism can struggle to access mental health support. We need to make sure they are listened to and have as much control as possible over their lives. People are experts about their own experiences and need to be trusted and listened to otherwise professionals won't be able to understand what help they really need. One way we can make sure this happens is through more training on how professionals support those with learning difficulties, complex needs and, autism, especially as they now may be more affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

I really care about this happening when it comes to things like being put in the hospital for their mental health. People shouldn't be removed from their home unless absolutely necessary because places like hospitals aren't always very nice environments to be in.

As a society we need to make sure people have enough money to have a good life, to loosen the grip poverty has on people. If we don't, we'll continue to see people continuing to struggle with poor mental health.

The current high level of poverty and poor mental health in my community is very bad, and it feels like it's growing. The government can and must make things better for those struggling with mental health issues and poverty.

With the right level of income and mental health support we can change these problems.

This needs to happen now.

## Poverty, John Brazendale

Everyone should be in a dignified position where they are able to work with the opportunity to improve their skills and be able to meet modern demands. Unfortunately, this is not the experience of many young and older people entering the job market. The lifelines which were once there to help people have since been turned against them and create barriers for those trying to work their way out of poverty by finding decent work.

When I was signing onto unemployment benefits, I met a whole range of people my age who had doors closed on them. There were many employers who just had no interest in employing anyone who didn't currently have a job, including young people. We were so worried about losing what we had that the prospect of education or self-improvement was not something we had time to consider.

After years of struggling to find work, I am now a university student studying graphic design in the hope I will someday be employed. I have stayed in touch with people who were in the same position as me. For a lot of them, not much has changed, even five or ten years on. Still on benefits, still struggling. More needs to be done to allow us to shape our lives for the better.

The education system has not been preparing young people for the job market. In my experience, schools are more focussed on encouraging students to go to university, sometimes making it seem as if that is the only route into employment, but going to university is no guarantee of a job and doesn't necessarily provide young people with the skills they need for the outside world. Often graduates are competing for the same minimum wage jobs as those who have not gone to university, which leads to a sense of unfulfillment for many.

# Appendix – Blogs

Young people should be trying to figure out their place in a fast-changing job market where technology is replacing a lot of in-work tasks. Yet in the current system, the job centre is more focussed on making claimants apply for as many jobs as possible and less interested in supporting young people to take meaningful steps towards building a fulfilling career path.

Furthermore the world we live in is turning faster than most of us can keep up with the advances in technology we are seeing. A lot of the economy is moving online, and as positions become dependent on the internet, it is vital that everyone, especially young people, have full access to technology and the internet so they can find their place in this new fast-changing economy.

Free universal basic internet is already working in Estonia, and should be considered by governments in the UK to bridge the digital divide and give people in this country the opportunity to develop and participate fully in society regardless of income.

Now could also be the time to reinvent existing social security and create a new system to allow people to work on themselves without being held back by financial insecurity. Providing everyone with a basic income could be one way to tackle this. Universal basic income would filter the flow of wealth back to those currently in the most precarious positions, giving people the restbite needed in order to plan out their futures and make practical steps towards them without the fear of sinking.

And when it comes to preparing young people for the future, let's not limit the creativity of students by having an education system obsessed with statistics. For this to work schools, colleges and other institutions would need to receive a greater share of direct funding so they can adapt to their students needs without being wholly dependent on grants and tick box exercises. The out-of-hours work teachers do needs to be accounted for as many are not being paid enough for the effort they put in.

If we are to function as a decent society, young people in Britain need to be supported to reach their full potential. We can break poverty's grip and give young people the space and opportunities needed to have a worthwhile future by reforming our education system, introducing free public broadband and trialling universal basic income.

