



# PUSHING BACK

Our take on life in poverty in London



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



# **Pushing Back:**

## **Our take on life in poverty in London**

A report from the A Different Take London panel

This report was written collaboratively between the A Different Take (ADT) London panel, the Child Poverty Action Group, and the University of Leeds.

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\*These names have been changed at the panel members' request to maintain their anonymity.

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## Introduction

### Pushing back: Our take on life in poverty in London

*All you're doing is pushing the problem onto someone else*

This report has been developed by the A Different Take London panel. We are a group of children, young people and parents with experience of living on a low income, and people from the Child Poverty Action Group and the University of Leeds. Between January-June 2019 we have been discussing our own experiences and priorities and talking to the people in our communities, to develop our own agenda around the most important issues affecting the lives of people in poverty and what we think should be done about them.

There were 4.1 million children living in poverty (after housing costs) in the UK in 2017-18<sup>1</sup>. That's 30% of all children, or 9 in a classroom of 30. And this is set to increase by 1.1 million over the next five years meaning that by 2021-22, 5.2 million children will be living in poverty<sup>2</sup>. Yet so often the voices of children, young people and parents who live in poverty are unheard. In this report we present the outcomes of some of the most important topics that came up in our discussions – knife crime, housing and local area, education and employment, and work and benefits. We have tried to give a sense of what we see as the problems in these four areas of our lives, why this is happening, how it's affecting us, and what we think the solutions are.

One thing that came up over and over again in our discussions – within our panel and with other people we spoke to – was a feeling of being pushed out. Crime is being pushed into more and more neighbourhoods as poverty rates are increasing; rising house prices are pushing us out of central London; children and young people are being pushed out of an education system that doesn't recognise their talents and their needs; and young people and parents are being pushed out of opportunities for employment by a social security system that is not fit for purpose. We're used to people talking about us – but it's rare that people talk **to** us. As a result, the systems that are meant to help us often make things worse. It's time our expertise was heard and taken seriously. This panel – and this report – are one of the things that we're doing to push back.

**If you're interested in being part of the solution, and in helping us to push back against a society which is trying to push us out, we'd love to hear from you. We want to keep working to have our voices heard and taken seriously, so that we can improve the lives of everyone in poverty. You can find details of how to contact us at the back of the report.**

## Serena's story

Serena (11) was 5 years old when the family last had a permanent home. She has asthma that she feels is a result of her living situation.

*"In all the accommodation we've stayed in I've had to share a room with my mum and sister. It's very overcrowded with little space to move. I have no privacy. I feel that this situation has robbed me of my childhood – this should never have happened.*

*I once had to share a bunk bed with my mum for five months, when I was nine, as they only provided us with a small double bed with a top bunk. Under all the bunk beds it was very dark for me to read as there was only one bare lightbulb in the middle of the room. It made me feel sad and forgotten.*

*The worst thing for me is being at school and hearing people complaining about their bedrooms – having to share, not enough room or whatever. I just keep quiet about my situation. If I have a sleepover with friends they will be saying 'when can we go to yours?' I have to keep it a secret – it feels like a little lump in you.*

*I hate sharing a kitchen, bathroom and toilet with strangers... living with people you don't know and hearing their noises, dealing with their smoking and drug-taking. We'd get woken up in the night by people coming and going and cigarette smoke drying out our throats. I don't even know who they are. Some are people with mental health problems, but it's scary living in a room with strangers in the next room.*

*There's no support in place for children living in temporary accommodation to help them thrive, in every aspect, especially academically – and not becoming just another statistic. I've found it extremely difficult to study due to my circumstances. What if I wasn't so determined to succeed and didn't have a supportive mother to push me?*

*Moving a lot means there is no point unpacking – we may have to move again. Sometimes the room we are given is very dirty. We've had rodents, bugs, cockroaches and bed bugs. Mum always has her spray ready and we can't even sit on the bed until we have covered up the mattress with something."*

# KNIFE CRIME

**What's happening:** In 2018, there were 168 knife crimes for every 100,000 people in London<sup>3</sup>. That's more than twice as many as in any

other UK region, and government statistics show that knife crime is rising. Everyone in our group – parents, young people, and children – had a story to tell about knife crime. Whether it was someone we knew, something we heard about at school or at work, or something we heard about on a news report, this touches all of our lives.

*It's picking up...it's literally like a hurricane that's picking up speed*

*They need to keep on top of stuff - but they're not really keeping on top of stuff, they're just looking as though they are*

**Why it's happening:** Since 2010, government policy has been to cut the funding available to families on a low income, and to the services which our families need. We've seen cuts to housing, schools and youth services. It's more and more

difficult to live in central London – we're being pushed out. If we stay, there's less and less for children to do – clubs and activities cost a lot of money, and even 'free' clubs charge for extras. This means children are left out of activities, and parents are pressured to pay for things they can't afford. Even in school, children are now meant to stay until they are 18, but there is no extra money to pay for the costs of this – and if our children aren't doing well at school they are not getting the support they need, so often they are dropping out.

When we're pushed out of our neighbourhoods, clubs, and schools, we're left without a social network. Joining a gang can start to look appealing, because it's a way that we can be accepted and protected.

*If you have nothing in your life that's going for you, what's telling you not to join a gang?*

*All the things that are meant to be holding up society, they're taking them all away, it's like you're a nothing*

If you do start to get into trouble, it's difficult to escape. We spoke to people who have been refused help when they've asked for things like being moved to a new area because they're trying to avoid or escape gangs. Youth workers, counselling, and psychological support are not available when we need it. This makes us feel like no-one cares, so the cycle

continues. No-one pays any attention to why this is happening when we see knife crime and gangs on the news – and no-one pays attention to how hard we have to work to avoid it.

*You're supposed to raise your child like you don't work and then bring money in like you're not a single mum. You're trying to be a present mum in a community where your child is trying to fit in with their peers and then you're trying to make sure they're not out on the street. How are you supposed to do all that when you're working a 40-hour week?*

We're meant to be teaching our children to be more independent as they get older – but we aren't let them out alone because we're scared they'll get into trouble. Parents are often blamed when young people turn to crime. But especially for single parents, it's a no-win situation. No-one respects a stay-at-home mum – the public judges you, and the government expects you to go back to work when your children are still very young. But it's often when our children are teenagers that they need us the most – so that they can avoid getting into trouble. If we go out to work and our kids get into trouble, we're blamed because we're not there to set a good example. But if we stay at home to keep our kids out of trouble, then we're told we're lazy and setting a bad example.

*They're just there and they've got that kind of skin, and when it comes down to it...*

**How it's affecting us:** We are proud of the diversity of our city, and as parents we want to be able to bring up our children to enjoy and appreciate the people and places around them. But the ways that the media and some politicians talk about us make it hard for us—parents or children—to feel safe. We're told we should be scared of the people around us, and they're told to be scared of us. We're judged for the colour of our skin, for our age, for being in single parent families, and for being poor – but we think we should all be working together to stop the violence. We don't care what colour someone is or whether they are poor – we don't want to lose any more young people to violence. We don't want the stereotypes we see in the media to make anyone feel like gangs and violence are their only option.

*We shouldn't be feeling frightened for our children going anywhere*

We're terrified about knife crime. But we're overloaded too, and there's nowhere that feels safe. When we see the news, it's easy to think 'another one'. We don't want ourselves or our children – or anyone's children – to be 'another one'.

*My son's not allowed to walk the streets, he's gonna be 16 in June, he's never been allowed to walk the streets*

Whether they're in gangs or not, our young people are vulnerable. When we ask for help, there's none available – and parents are blamed rather than

supported. As parents we can't be there all the time to stop our children getting into trouble – parents and children need to know that young people have options, and that society cares enough to support them to stay on the right path. If there's nothing going for you and no-one to support you, gangs can look like a way of getting respect, belonging, and security – but we don't want that to be our only route to these things.

#### **What we want to do about it**

- We want to see **investment** in resources for young people—young people need things to do, but all too often youth clubs become recruiting grounds for gangs.
- We want **help** from professionals who can work with us to keep young people out of trouble, and help them escape if they get into trouble.
- We want to be **heard**—young people have great ideas about how to tackle these issues, but all too often we're ignored.
- We want **accountability** in the media and from politicians in how they talk about us—they're judging our young people before they've even started in life, and they're inciting hatred and racism so we don't get a fair chance.

# SCHOOL AND EDUCATION

*You're supposed to just be able to do things... there's an assumption that people have access to these resources, people just don't get it*

**What's happening:** Every child should have the right to a quality education and to make the most of their school days. But children in poverty face disadvantages, including being nearly four times more likely to be excluded<sup>4</sup>. We've all experienced a lack of understanding from schools and teachers about the challenges that prevent us from reaching our potential. Schools sometimes expect us to have access to expensive technology and equipment so we can participate in daily activities and homework; and we're sometimes punished if we have, through no fault of our own, been unable to do so. Teachers say we're lazy, but it's simply that we don't have what we need – whether that's expensive technology, parents having the time to help us out, or even something as simple as a quiet place to study at home. We are also aware of the disadvantage we face when better-off children in our class have access to people and organisations who can help them with things like work experience – we don't have these opportunities. This also goes for school trips – these often cost money and even if they don't, there are extras we have to either pay for or miss out on.

We'd love to be able to try doing lots of different out-of-school activities, and we want the opportunities to develop new

*If you're late you get charged a pound a minute so if you're running five minutes late, that's just cost you a fiver! That's extortionate...that's on top of what the club costs, a pound a minute?!*

interests and skills. But when money is tight this is not possible; to make things worse, unexpected or additional costs to this can discourage parents and children from engaging with such activities at all. A lack of understanding from schools around the cost of extra-curricular activities and the financial pressures this can put onto our families mean that children and young people from poorer families are more likely to miss out on these experiences, and this has knock-on effects in other areas of our lives.

*What is a free school meal? I need something on the side, so it's not free anymore*

Every child and young person needs to feel healthy to thrive and to make the

most of school. Even if food is scarce at home, or there are other difficult circumstances that impact on the health of children and young people, they should feel assured that school will be a place where they can get at least one good meal. Unfortunately, in our experience 'free' school meals are not adequate. We've experienced getting reduced portion sizes and lower quality food because we're on free school meals – and there are not enough options, especially if you have a specific diet like not eating meat. Some of us have had to choose between eating lunch or breakfast because we only get one free meal - and this has a knock-on effect on our concentration levels, especially when we're under pressure to do well in important exams.

*You know these people who are designing free school meals have never had a free school meal and don't know what we're going through - and will never know*



**Why it's happening:** The people who are making decisions around school policies for children in poverty have no idea of the reality of our lives. Policies are out of touch with the challenges we're dealing with every day.

*We need secure jobs...then money can go towards school trips*

Despite claims that unemployment is at an all-time low, we feel that a lack of secure jobs with fixed hours and wages, and a lack of flexibility so that we can work around family commitments, are pushing parents and particularly single parents into difficult situations. Without the stability of a secure job, children and young people's education is affected. We're missing out on things like school trips, extra-curricular activities and other parts of school life which are not always compulsory but which we want to have the same opportunities as other children to take part in.

**How it's affecting us:** It's not right that poverty should ever restrict the educational and social experiences of our children and young people, but this is our everyday reality. In our society it is unjust that the opportunity to succeed at school is being limited by family finances. Children and young people from low-income families don't expect preferential treatment but we do expect recognition of the practical and hidden challenges of living on a low-income, and support in dealing with the stress caused when we are unable to access the same things as our peers. Our youth are being robbed of their education and their childhood—and this is something we won't accept!

*They are disadvantaged and robbed every day, and this upsets my daughter and me*

*Stop the expelling of children, that needs to stop because nowadays schools are so bothered about marks, and want to get rid of them so their school looks good. But all you're doing is pushing the problem onto someone else*

Whilst not all students who are excluded from the education system are from low income families, poorer students are amongst the most likely to be in this group. The education system should focus on the causes of the behaviour which leads to pupil exclusion amongst those from low-income families, rather than treating the effects by excluding children and young people. Feeling alienated at school can encourage our youth to

seek the sense of affiliation that is available in gangs – which will only make the problem worse.

#### **What we want to do about it**

- We want to see **investment** in the futures of all young people—academic or not.
- We want **careers advice** for all young people so that they have hope for life beyond school.
- We want **support** for our children to develop self esteem and self respect, so that they know how valuable they are to society.
- We want **inclusive practice** from teachers and other professionals—children should not be singled out because of their background, and resources should be used to support them.
- Schools have a role to play, but we need **system-wide reforms** to housing, benefits and work, so that parents can provide for their children.

## Georgia's story

Georgia (15) has not had a permanent home since she was 9 years old. She has just finished her GCSEs and is ambitious for her future.

*"I had to move six times when I was in year 10 starting my GCSEs. Living in temporary accommodation and sharing with strangers has had a big effect on my health and education. It's stressful, I can't settle, I get anxious. There is nowhere to study and I have to keep moving my books as there is not enough space. I only have my bunk bed for everything. We are also impacted by other people smoking – they're not supposed to, but they do.*

*From a young age I've become adapted to not even having a basic level of security, because in temporary accommodation it changes day by day, depending on who the residents are. Every day I had a fear that we may have to move today and it might only be an hour's notice. It's affected my ability to have friends because I'm keeping secrets from them.*

*I'm determined but what if I wasn't? I could easily get lost to gangs and crime. People forget about you – you're expected to function and survive. I've had to walk down dangerous streets to study instead of being able to go home after school.*

*It's also limited my ability to be independent, like cooking for myself. There's a lack of meals sometimes – they call it Bed and Breakfast, but there's no breakfast. And that's after being kept awake all night and sleeping with the light on. I have to go out to see my friends as they can't come round to me.*

*Periods of our childhood are held in storage boxes, which mum cannot afford to pay for and we don't have room for."*

# WORK, BENEFITS AND THE COST OF LIVING

*Just let me settle my children, how do you expect me to work?  
Give me the chance, let me catch myself from the difficult  
circumstances that got us into this situation*

**What is happening:** The benefits system—and particularly Universal Credit— isn't working for single parents when they need it most. The breakdown of a relationship and the worries of managing family life alone can make entering or returning to employment extremely difficult for single parents, and there's not much support available. No-one chooses to end up in such a difficult situation but the job market and benefits system don't seem to take this into account or offer adequate support when things go wrong.

*Something has to give somewhere  
because if you're going to work and  
you STILL can't get by, then there's  
something drastically wrong*

The face of poverty in London is changing. Before, most people in poverty in inner-city London were unemployed; now working families living in outer London are struggling

too. It isn't right that anyone is forced to use food banks, and in particular we do not understand how it can be that working families are unable to afford the basics. Zero-hour contracts can make it difficult to make ends meet because we're not sure what our pay packets will look like from one week to the next. The rising cost of living adds to the challenge of providing for our families, and London weighting isn't keeping up with rising costs.

*Universal Credit has been a major,  
major, major thing towards  
poverty... thank god for anti-  
poverty charities*

Reforms to the benefits system and particularly Universal Credit mean that millions of families are being swept into extreme poverty in the UK. The five-week wait for Universal Credit from the submission of a claim means that families are left with little or no funds to get by in the meantime, especially if they don't

have savings. Miscalculations following changes in circumstances can push us into financial difficulty when repayments are demanded for a mistake that wasn't our fault. This can have a drastic impact on our whole family when we're already carefully managing tight budgets.

*Some people say 'well my mum had two jobs'... well I had two jobs  
before, you know, when I had a home, but just give me a home...  
give my children a home, I need that*

**Why it is happening:** There can be lots of reasons why someone might lose their job or find themselves unemployed. A lack of decent, affordable housing can be a huge barrier to securing employment. Without a safe and permanent place to call home, how can parents be expected to start to build their lives for themselves and their families?

In our society everyone should be able to live a healthy life fuelled by a nutritious diet. When you're living on a low income this is not always so straightforward. It is simply not right that the health of families should be compromised by their financial situations.

*Like being in a B&B and hostels, the fridge isn't that big, you have to throw away food, you can't cook*

**How it's affecting us:** Our panel discussed how difficult it can be for single parents trying to balance work and family life in London. There's a lot of stigma attached to single parents who are not working. It's not right that

parents should be judged for the decisions they make about how best to support their family, but the media and politicians always reinforce the idea that mothers who don't work are bad for their children and bad for society. No-one seems to realise the amount of work it takes to raise your children and keep them safe, especially as they get older, and when your neighbourhood isn't safe.

The worries of a single parent in London do not end once they secure a job. Our panel commented that single parents are stigmatised for not working but when they do, their

*It's like in other words, they're totally disregarded; it's like 'get yourself back to work, you are lazy'.... Do you think of the load of a single mum? What they've got to carry and what they've got to contend with?*

home life can suffer, especially in London where gangs are rife and protecting children from this can prove very difficult. When parents try to move their families away from potentially harmful influences, they face further challenges from housing authorities who, fearful of the perceived 'trouble' this may bring, make this process very difficult thereby further adding to the worries of a single parent and placing them in an impossible situation.

*If you're working and you're not getting home until 6 or 7 o'clock you can only do the best you can do with the tools that you have. You can tell your kids all day long, 'don't do that, that's wrong, you shouldn't be going there, please do your homework'... but if your boys are going to go out and play with the boys they shouldn't be playing with and you're not physically there to stop them...*

#### **What we want to do about it**

- We want to be **listened to** by politicians and other decision makers, so they can understand our complex lives and realities, not just caricatures of us.
- We want **a fit-for-purpose social security system** which recognises the pressures parents are under trying to balance work and caring for children.
  - We want **balanced and fair representation** of people like us in policy and the media.
- We want **access to affordable and healthy food**—health should be at the top of the agenda.
- We want **patience and support** for families going through difficulties like separation and domestic violence—we need time to adjust before working.
  - We want **training and education** for our children which prepares them for work.
- We want **reliable, regular and affordable transport** so we can realistically take up job opportunities.

## Amanda's story

Amanda, 45, lives in Hackney with three of her four children (one child has grown up and left home). They used to live in a two-bedroom housing association flat, but recently moved to a four-bedroom housing association home. Her rent and council tax are both very high because of the property's central location.

Before her fourth child was born, Amanda used to train bus drivers for a living. She earned a decent salary, but had to drive to south London every day for work, which meant commuting for 15 hours a week. When she got pregnant with her fourth child, she realised that she could not afford to go back to her old job after maternity leave, because her wages would not cover the cost of childcare. Adding to that the money she would have to spend on petrol to get to work, the 15 hours travel time and not being able to drop off or pick up her children from school or nursery, she decided that she was better off leaving her job and taking a local, part-time job in retail.

She now works 20 hours per week in a supermarket from 5am until 9am, five days a week. She has to wake up at 3.30am every day to walk to work, often in the cold and dark during the winter months. Her wages are much lower than in her previous job and only just cover her rent, council tax and a benefit overpayment which she is paying back. She pays for everything else with the money she receives from Child Benefit and Tax Credits. It can be a struggle, but her job means that she doesn't have to pay for childcare (her older children help out), and she can still pick her children up from school – something that she is very happy to do. She knows she won't stay in her current job for forever, but it suits her for the time being.

Amanda resents the stigma attached to single parents who choose to stay at home to look after their children.

*"The reality is... especially if you're a single parent, when you have children they say you should start work within the first five years, but believe it or not the years your children need you most are the first five years, and then from 11-16 because when a lot of kids are going off the rails it is at secondary school, that's when it's gonna happen... Yet that's the time when the government says 'You cannot be at home with your children, you MUST go to work'. So whilst you're at work doing whatever job you are doing and your child is possibly walking the streets or doing things they shouldn't be doing and hanging out with kids, you have no control over it so what can you physically do? Tell the government, well my son is going off the rails?... he's not doing his homework? he's playing with the kids he shouldn't be with? I really need to be at home with my kid right now? They do not care. The attitude is 'Really? Well then you will get no benefits and this is what's going to happen to you'. You get no choice."*

## WHERE WE LIVE

*People are paying to live there, and those conditions aren't fit for the rats*

**What's happening:** Home should be a place where you feel safe – but our houses and neighbourhoods don't feel that way. The houses we live in are often overcrowded, dirty, damp, and infested with rats and cockroaches. We know families who are living in one room, and we're moved so often that we don't have any sense of community. We are losing our social networks and we can't keep up with friends, family and work because public transport links aren't good enough.

**Why it's happening:** House prices and rents are rising, and even people in work are struggling – this means there's more pressure on social housing. Many people in our panel have

experience of insecure work and zero-hours contracts, which makes it difficult to know whether we can pay the rent from one month to the next. We've spoken to people who've been housed for months in what's meant to be temporary accommodation – and sometimes we get the feeling that the process of finding suitable accommodation for our families is being deliberately delayed until our children turn 18, at which point we will no longer be even officially a priority. When we report problems with our accommodation, like damp, pests, and community issues, we don't get any help.

*People don't choose to be in this situation*

*If your partner's abusive or gambles, you can lose your home*

The ways that benefit payments are changing under Universal Credit are a huge problem for the security of our housing. All of the money going to one person in the family is a big problem, particularly since the rent now has to be paid by us to the landlord rather than going directly to them. Furthermore, if we're trying to get out of difficult or abusive relationships, there's no room in the system for us to take the time we need to look after our children and ourselves – we're expected to get straight into work, and we have to wait weeks before we get any benefits.

We're often left feeling that the people who are meant to be helping us – like people who work in local authorities – aren't doing anything. We know that there have been cuts to their budgets, and we are ultimately the people suffering because of those cuts. There isn't enough social housing, so we're passed on to private landlords and poor housing conditions that we can't complain about because we're scared of losing our home. People don't see this as being homeless – but although we're not sleeping on the streets we don't have a safe, secure and permanent place to live.

**How it's affecting us:** Pushing poor people out of the centre of London doesn't only lead to crime – it also means that we can't access our work, the public transport we need, and our family and friends who could support us if we lived closer together. Our local area doesn't feel like a community any more.

*Having to walk for so long at 4 o'clock in the morning... you work hard and you pay all your taxes and then you can't get a bus to work on a morning*

*My friend's son got attacked by local youths ... they wouldn't move him, refused to move him, and then he turned to the local gang for friendships*

There doesn't seem to be any understanding of the complexity in our lives – we might be given a place in a hostel where they are also housing people coming out of prison, which makes us scared for our children; or in an area which is dangerous for our young people because they have been targeted by local gangs. Some people in our group were given a home that was not adapted to the needs of a disabled child in the family – so they had to carry their sibling up the stairs every day. We heard from lots of people who have been housed in places without cooking facilities, which means that we can't eat or feed our families healthily or cheaply.

#### **What we want to do about it**

- We want to be **respected**: people working in the council and in other systems should listen to us, and not make excuses or delays in dealing with our problems.
- We want to be **heard** by politicians and decision makers, so that when they make policies about us and talk about us, they understand the realities of our lives.
- We want **urgent attention to the need for more and better social housing**—we need clean, dry homes equipped with the resources we need for a healthy life.
- We want **better regulation of private landlords** so that they can't provide inadequate housing and intimidate us so that we can't complain.
- We want **safe neighbourhoods with good transport links** so we can travel to work and to meet with family and friends—separating us from our support networks will make more problems in the long run.
- We want **responsive and compassionate systems** which take the complexities of life into consideration. When life is difficult we need time to get things back on track.

## Jemima's story

Jemima lives with her two daughters, Georgia (15) and Serena (11).

The family's experience of poverty stems from their becoming homeless after fleeing domestic violence. Until recently, they were living in temporary accommodation in B&Bs and hostels for six years, including five B&Bs and a two-year period in a hostel.

Jemima says:

*"If we had been able to find the money for a rental deposit, we could have been in our own home by now".*

Poverty and homelessness have had a major impact on family life, causing the girls to miss out on regular childhood activities such as having friends over for sleepovers.

*"I want to cook healthy food for the girls. When we were in temporary accommodation, my children used to cry because they didn't want another take-away. We had stomach aches from having them, as we had no use of the kitchen, which was only open between 9 and 11 o'clock if someone was around. Otherwise it was kept locked. We'd have a small fridge in our room but we had to throw food away as there wasn't enough space... and pests would gravitate to the warm of the fridge motor, which would be near our beds, alarmingly.*

*Every time I wanted to prepare food, I had to move stuff from our room to the kitchen and back as we had to keep all our stuff in our room. It's given me repetitive strain injuries.*

*One of the worst things was living so close to strangers, hearing other people's children screaming in the next room and being kept up all night by noise and doors opening."*

Jemima and her daughters are now in privately rented accommodation which is unaffordable and only has a short lease.

*"We still haven't had time to heal from the ongoing trauma and our future isn't secure, in terms of being able to rent somewhere that's affordable."*



## Final thoughts

*I'm just a member of the public, but actually it's so important that normal people talk about these issues because we're not given the air time usually*

During our panel meetings we have spoken about various aspects of our lives that are impacted when living on a low income. We are used to people talking about these challenges—but the people talking don't usually understand our lives. It is rare that we are asked to share our views on what it is really like and to offer up our ideas for real solutions.

It was impossible to include in this report everything we have discussed during our meetings but we have tried to present issues that have affected us all, albeit in different ways. We have considered what the causes and consequences of these issues are, many of which are centred around the impacts of austerity, stigmatisation and a general lack of understanding about the realities of living on a low income in policy and practice. As you will have read, we have come up with some recommendations for change which we hope people will take on board and listen to. After all, we are the experts!

We don't want this to end here. We are excited to continue and develop these conversations around challenges we face living on a low income. We are hopeful that we will be able to convert this into real change on issues that are affecting us. We intend to send this report to all those who will listen: government, councils, MPs and the media too!

We have a lot to say about our lives and how we can work together to solve the problems created by poverty—but we can't push for change alone. If you are interested in helping us to push back we would love to hear from you.

**You can contact the A Different Take London Panel via Alice Woudhuysen at the Child Poverty Action Group: email [awoudhuysen@cpag.org.uk](mailto:awoudhuysen@cpag.org.uk)**

**If you would like to discuss any of the contents of this report, please contact Gill Main at the University of Leeds: email [g.main@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:g.main@leeds.ac.uk)**

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