

Hi! It's been a while. We just wanted to update you on where Peterborough Poverty Truth Commission is now that we're over halfway through our second year. (Already? I know.)

If you've been keeping up with our blog, you'll have seen that we had our first full commission this February (have a read here if you haven't yet), it went better than we could ever have hoped, and we facilitated three more full commission gatherings throughout the first half of the year.

These had a simple goal: bring our community empowerers and our civic commissioners together regularly to build connections and develop our conversation around what we'd like to see change in Peterborough to help people who are experiencing the struggle against poverty.

Our first full commission gathering was wonderful, but with the amount of enthusiastic people wanting to take part, it was also a bit cramped. Michelle, the vicar of St John the Baptist Church in Cathedral Square, was nice enough to support the project not just by being part of the civic commission but by letting us use St John's for meetings. It's a beautiful church and gives us much more space to dream.

We have had to strike a balance as the year has gone on. The group want change to happen yesterday, so we need to have detailed discussions around policy, but relationships are the foundation of the Poverty Truth process, so we still had to make sure to hold the space that will allow connections to form and for people to really see each other.

I think we've done a good job. We've arranged our full commission meetings similarly to how we facilitated the one at the beginning of the year. The first half often focuses on a check in, a chance to share, and an exercise or game, all intended to help people get to know and understand each other, and the second half will involve more focused work around the issues that have emerged from our work over the last year and a half.

The stage after that is the stage we're in now; working groups. There is a deep enough understanding within our commission that the work of looking at and then trying to see if we can change specifics has begun: A working group is made up of a handful of people each from our community and civic groups who are passionate about driving change regarding a particular issue.

We have three working groups:

- A health group, or HIPPO, as they've called themselves.
- A housing group.
- A group looking at education/digital exclusion/form filling. We sometimes call this group the Bridge group.

That our commission ended up focused on these broad areas wasn't surprising, and I think you'd agree these are issues affecting everybody. We are looking at how people who have a lived experience of poverty can struggle with these issues, and what we can do about them.

Each of our working groups have met a couple of times and are making good progress. Conversations and understanding are developing, and we are narrowing down from those big problems to smaller, fixable things, that we can do something about locally.

There is some exciting work going on!

I don't want to jinx it by telling you about any of it too early, but please believe me when I tell you change is happening.

Until next time.

James