

# STIGMA PLEDGE NO. 1: POVERTY IS NOT INEVITABLE



Poverty is a problem of political choices, it is neither natural nor acceptable. We all have a role to play in addressing poverty: **We will set out our contribution to tackling poverty in Scotland.**

The first of the Stick Your Labels Campaign Stigma pledges is aimed at challenging the idea that poverty is inevitable by getting organisations to state clearly what they will do to help address poverty.

One of the biggest challenges that we face in addressing poverty in Scotland, is the widespread belief that the existence of poverty is simply inevitable. It is seen as simply a part of modern life, and that there is relatively little that can be done to change this fact. Around 35 per cent of people in Britain currently believe that poverty is inevitable, with another 13 per cent believing that it is simply down to luck.<sup>1</sup> In order to challenge the existence of poverty, it is important that we show people that this is a myth, and poverty need not exist in a country as rich as Scotland.

With almost half of people thinking that the existence of poverty is inevitable or down to luck<sup>1</sup>, it is possible to get disheartened about the possibility of change, but this is not the end of the story. People often hold contradictory views on poverty, and the recently published 'Public attitudes to poverty, inequality and welfare in Scotland and Britain' shows this is still the case.

## Tackling poverty

While people may say they believe poverty will always exist, 98 per cent of people believe tackling child poverty is important, and three quarters of people felt it was the job of the Scottish Government to do something about it.<sup>2</sup>

In Scotland, there are currently 940,000 people living in poverty (after housing costs), including 210,000 children. Of these children, 56 per cent live in a household where someone is in employment.<sup>3</sup> While poverty is about more than money, for these families at least the cause is clear – low incomes. By clearly identifying the cause, we can start to find the solution to poverty. For many of those in work the problems are about low wages and underemployment.

## Change is possible

Child poverty figures demonstrate that change is possible. In the decade to 2010/11, the child poverty rate in Scotland fell from 31% to 21% after housing costs (AHC).<sup>4</sup> Scotland went from having a higher child poverty rate than England and Wales, to having a much lower rate. There are many reasons for this, including big policy changes such as the introduction of Tax Credits and the National Minimum Wage. It was also about actions taken at a more local level, for example to support more lone parents into employment. Unfortunately, it is likely that these trends will be reversed over the next 5 years, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicting as many as 100,000 more children in Scotland living in poverty by 2020.

Both the decline in child poverty in Scotland in decade up to 2010/11, and the recent IFS predictions show that policy decisions impact poverty levels. The existence of poverty is a political choice, not an inevitability, and it is only by acknowledging this that we can expect to see real change happen.

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2015) 'Public attitudes to poverty, inequality and welfare in Scotland and Britain' <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00473561.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2015) 'Public attitudes to poverty, inequality and welfare in Scotland and Britain' <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00473561.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2015) Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland: 2013/14, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00480301.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013) 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland in Scotland 2013' <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-exclusion-scotland-summary.pdf>



## YOUR contribution to tackling poverty

To change the negative attitudes towards those living in poverty and challenge the pessimism that poverty is inevitable it is essential to show where change is being made. One of the things we all can do is to be clear about the actions we are taking to address poverty. Below we highlight some of the things that your organisation could do to show that they are serious about tackling poverty.

By signing up to the Stick Your Labels pledges, you are agreeing to set out what your organisation is planning to do help address poverty. What different organisations are able to do will vary depending on their main purpose, the sector they operate in, their size and a range of other factors. No matter whether in the public sector, the voluntary and community sector or the private sector, all organisations can help address poverty.

So for a company from the private sector it may be about signing up to pay the Living Wage, or to sign up to the Fair Tax Mark [www.fairtaxmark.net](http://www.fairtaxmark.net), or giving employees time off for volunteering, or supporting local anti-poverty charities. For public sector organisations like Local Authorities it means going beyond their statutory duties by producing a specific anti-poverty strategy. Renfrewshire Council produce a clear strategy, as have many others, which they will now implement.



It doesn't matter whether the action is big or small, the important thing is that the public know that your organisation is committed to tackling poverty. **Organisations across Scotland are in a position to shape the way we think about poverty.** If more of us believed that we really can tackle poverty, then some of the negative and misguided attitudes to those living in poverty.



Renfrewshire Tackling Poverty Commission report launch

When you sign up to Stick Your Labels, we will help you develop your anti-poverty plan and will publicise your aims. By working together we can help tackle the stigma of poverty and make a real difference to the lives of people across Scotland.

To get involved contact us at:

**0141 353 0440**

**[admin@povertyalliance.org](mailto:admin@povertyalliance.org)**

