



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION TOOLKIT



1. Introduction

Too many people in communities across Scotland are locked into poverty. It doesn't need to be this way. By working together we can find, and then implement, better solutions to the problems Scotland faces. Central to finding those better solutions must be the individuals, communities and organisations that directly confront poverty day in and day out.

This toolkit has been developed to help find those solutions. It is at the heart of a process that will bring together a body of evidence from people experiencing poverty, from people living and working in communities affected by poverty, to influence local and national policies and plans for tackling poverty.

It was produced by the Poverty Alliance through engaging with people with direct experience of poverty, as well as voluntary and community sector organisations, policy makers and academics involved in anti-poverty work. We believe that the voices of those with direct experience of poverty need to be at the centre of all policy-making decisions, for the following reasons:

- It helps ensure that people with direct experience of poverty are able to influence what the government does
- It helps promote a holistic approach to understanding and tackling poverty
- It is a right that the voices of people with experience of poverty are heard

2. What is Get Heard Scotland?

Get Heard Scotland (GHS) is a process that will be coordinated by the Poverty Alliance over the next three years. It is designed to make sure that members of communities affected by poverty are able to get their voices heard on the policies and decisions that most impact their lives and the lives of people in their communities.

Very simply, it aims to find out what is working, what is not and what people would like to see changed in order to solve poverty. Most importantly, it aims to have an actual impact on policy, and on the lives of people living in communities affected by poverty across Scotland.

Although the main purpose of GHS is to influence the policies that impact on poverty, it is also intended to help support local organisations and help create a demand for change. Individuals taking part in GHS will have a better understanding of those policies and practices that should help their communities. Groups and organisations will have their own evidence to use in their own work. All of us will be able to work together to demand change on the things that matter most.

Why should you get involved?

It is a fundamental right for people who are affected by poverty to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives, and becoming involved in GHS means that you will be supported in getting your voice – and the voice of your community or organisation – heard on the decisions and issues that matter most.

You – or the people you work with – have the knowledge of the realities of poverty, and you have the ideas on how poverty can be solved. We can provide the support to amplify your voice, make sure it is heard, and that it creates the kind of change that you want to see.

3. The Get Heard Scotland Process

GHS is intended to provide independent feedback into policy-making processes, centred on the commitments made in the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan (CPDP).

The emphasis of GHS is on encouraging groups and networks across Scotland to undertake workshops, discussions, engagements and gatherings to explore issues relating to poverty and social injustice in Scotland. These discussions will contribute to the development of a community-led body of evidence about what works and what needs to change to solve poverty in Scotland.

To support these workshops and discussions, the Poverty Alliance has developed this Get Heard Toolkit. The toolkit is to be used by groups and organisations to gather views on poverty and what needs to change.

Following community-based discussions, summaries are fed back to the Poverty Alliance, and are then compiled into summary reports which are fed directly into relevant policy-making processes, such as local child poverty action plans, Scottish Government consultations, and Scottish Parliament committee inquiries.

4. Using the Toolkit

What is the GHS Toolkit?

The GHS Toolkit is a guide to getting involved, not an instruction manual!

It provides enough information to help your group look at government policy on poverty and to discuss what they would like to see change in the future. It includes:

- Background information on child poverty and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan (in a separate briefing)
- Workshop format to explore a range of issues
- Notes on running discussion sessions
- Recording and Feedback forms (separate document)

The toolkit is designed to be used to support GHS discussion sessions, and can be used as much or as little as you wish. GHS discussion sessions can be used to explore the key issues in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, or to examine local issues around poverty e.g. transport, housing, childcare or low income. Supplementary questions to guide discussions are included in the Facilitator's Notes.

The purpose of the workshops is to ask participants about their lives and communities and to bring out their experiences of poverty. Key questions, to provide a common thread with other workshops, should always include:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- How should things be done differently?

While it is helpful for participants to describe the challenges and problems that they face, it's important that they also focus on thinking about some of the solutions to these problems and challenges. In this way, GHS will make a bigger impact on decision-makers.

Where should GHS discussions take place?

Discussions, workshops and gatherings can take place anywhere! It will be important, though, to choose somewhere where everyone can take part.

Take into consideration things like:

- Accessibility: Can people with mobility issues access the venue?
- Supervision for children: Is there somewhere where children can play, to allow parents and carers to participate?
- Hearing impairments: Can provision be made for people who have difficulties hearing, like PA systems?

There is no right size for a GHS discussion, but if it's too large not everyone will be able to contribute. Usually groups of up to 10 work best, but more or less people can work too. Remember if it's a bigger group you may need someone to help take notes or record what was said.

You can set up a special meeting for a discussion as part of Get Heard Scotland, but we would encourage you to build on what may already be happening. Is there a support group that you work with that could take part? Perhaps a parent and toddler group, a local group working on food issues or a group dealing with housing issues.

How should discussions be organised and facilitated?

People like to participate in different ways; what works for one person – a round the table discussion, for example, may be really difficult for another. It is important that a process has variety and flexibility to ensure that people can engage with it as best they can. Many issues are important here:

- Literacy
- Languages
- Confidence
- Social and cultural issues, relating to gender, age and status
- Identity

It is not enough to get 'a good mix' of people at an event – if some people feel unable to voice their opinions, then they are not participating. So an event needs to be run in a way that allows different people to have their say.

- Use participative tools, work in small groups, use a mix of tools – some more visual than others
- Keep activities short, varied and manageable
- Manage the process – you could organise groups along interests or identity; if you think women would find it easier to discuss issues within an all-woman group, then arrange that
- Check that within that group all those present are actively participating

Is there any other information to help guide the conversation?

Yes. The Poverty Alliance have produced a range of briefings on different issues related to poverty in Scotland that are intended to inform the conversations and discussions that you have.

These briefings are included as part of the Toolkit and available to download at https://www.povertyalliance.org/get_heard_scotland/toolkit_briefings

Format

Each discussion will be different – dependent upon the number of participants, who is attending, and the focus of the discussion – so we encourage you to be flexible in the way you manage the conversation. If helpful, a suggested format for the discussion could contain the following six sections:

1. Introduction
2. Ice-breaker
3. Exploring the issues and relevant policies
4. Asking key questions
5. Summarising and drawing together
6. Evaluation and conclusions

There are many areas of policy that can help to reduce poverty, including health, employment, economic regeneration, transport, social security, or housing. You may want to use case studies or stories to stimulate discussion about the impact of policy and to assist people to reflect upon their own experience in answering the key discussion questions.

Using the key questions

The GHS questions are deliberately open – they are questions that most people will have a view on, and they are questions that really need to be answered if we are to make a difference. Although the questions are open and simple, you may need to follow them up to make sure you get to the root cause of any problem, or to better understand what is working.

One technique is to use the ‘five whys’. This is a facilitation technique that involves simply asking ‘why’ after a problem is stated. By repeating the question five times, it’s more likely that you will get to the root of a problem (or of something that works).

Answering the ‘what needs to change’ question can sometimes be difficult – we often spend more time on what isn’t working than how we fix it. If answers to this question are slow, then try doing some more brainstorming. This can be an effective technique to help get ideas flowing. A good brainstorming session can help generate lots of ideas in a short space of time. You can then ask the group to start thinking about the most important ones, and to explain their choices.

Remember throughout all the discussion to keep recording what people are saying – the whole point of this exercise is to help people Get Heard!

After the discussion

When you have completed the discussion type up the results of the discussion using the feedback form. Give us as much detail as is possible, we don’t want to lose any ideas or issues at this stage. You can also send us photos of any flipcharts, drawings etc. that the group produces as part of their discussion. Where ever possible include direct quotes from people

Send the completed forms to us (remember to keep copies for yourself!)

The information will be used in a variety of ways:

- We will publish individual reports of discussions on our website
- The evidence gathered will be used in a variety of consultation responses...
- We will include the evidence in an annual GHS report

All feedback will be acknowledged and we will keep you up to date with how your evidence is being used by GHS