



CHURCH ACTION
ON POVERTY

TAKING CARE OF WHAT WE VALUE

Overcoming poverty in Scotland



Kathy Galloway

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Introduction

Churches in Scotland engage with the issue of poverty in Scotland, and with people living in poverty in Scotland, at many levels. Nationally, individual denominations, ecumenical agencies and a range of organisations concerned with different aspects of poverty develop policy for their own work and publish carefully-researched reports and briefing papers relating to public and government policy. The reports of, for example, the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee, the Catholic Bishops' Conference, Action of Churches Together in Scotland, have over many years provided an informed comment on and critique of public policy that has supplemented those of the other faiths and civic and voluntary sector bodies who help to shape the context for policy-making.

Churches and their agencies are also major service-providers in Scotland, offering a wide range of residential and non-residential support, advisory and advocacy services to people who experience poverty, including senior citizens, people with disability and special needs, families and individuals in crisis, people experiencing homelessness or housing problems, and, most recently, refugees and asylum seekers.

But most importantly, local churches in their congregations and parishes live alongside, come into daily contact with and number among their membership people who are themselves living in poverty. There are local churches in every community in Scotland, including the poorest ones, and this voluntary relationship, which is not defined in terms of client/provider relationship, allows access to the agency and views of people in an important way. The role played by local churches in overcoming social exclusion, encouraging community renewal and most recently in supporting asylum seekers has been recognised in research by the University of Glasgow.

This location 'on the ground' is the driver behind much of the work churches in Scotland are engaged in. A major report published in 2005 by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), entitled 'Prosperity with a Purpose', while relating to poverty issues across the whole of the UK, has a number of chapters which are particularly relevant to Scotland. (1) A chapter on Scotland by David Sinclair of the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland (its committee concerned with Scottish public policy) is a useful and wide-ranging outline and discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Scottish economy, of the real progress that has been made and of the considerable challenges still facing all those who seek to overcome poverty in Scotland. (2)

The problems of poverty in Scotland are well-known and exhaustively documented, and many of them share the same causes and challenges as poverty elsewhere in the UK. Church Action on Poverty is a national charity committed to tackling poverty in the UK. Its particular emphasis is on working in partnership with people who experience poverty themselves to find solutions to poverty, locally, nationally and globally. It believes that people with direct experience of poverty are the real 'poverty experts.' It is from CAP's many years of work with people in poor communities, including in Scotland, that Niall Cooper identifies five key issues for action (3):

On minimum income standards

The establishment of transparent Minimum Income Standards to inform benefit policies.

Income is an essential measure of poverty. An objectively-determined set of minimum income standards allows benefit levels (and tax band thresholds) to be debated and decided in the light of the levels of income necessary to meet reasonable basic needs.

On poverty and low pay

Government and employers should recognise that at its current level, the National Minimum Wage is not sufficient to lift many households out of poverty.

Our society should be working towards paying the overwhelming majority of employees a socially responsible Living Wage.

On debt and financial exclusion

A two-pronged programme to reduce the burden of low income consumer debt through (1) the introduction of a reasonable ceiling on interest rates and charges and (2) facilitation of the expansion of Credit Unions and other forms of community development finance institutions.

On ending pensioner poverty

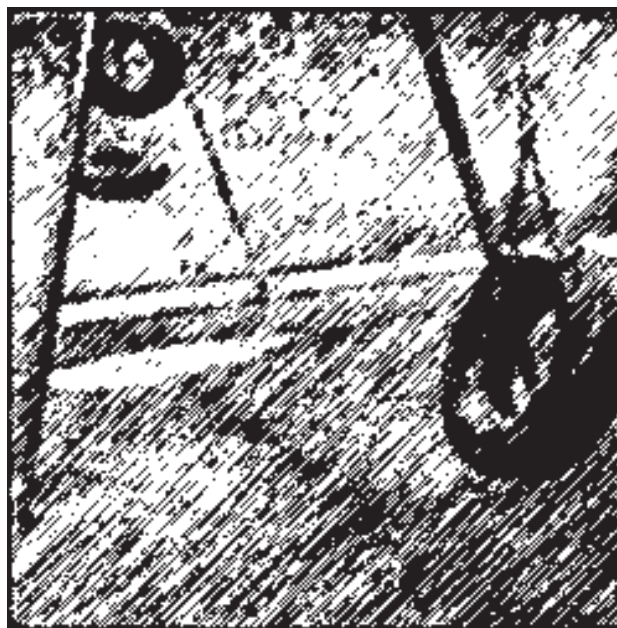
The most urgent need is to improve the benefits paid to pensioners currently aged over 75. Longer term strategies are also needed to enhance basic pensions in real terms and to permit pensioners to share in rising real incomes through having their payments linked to earnings rather than prices.

On taxation and the common good

After years of under-indexation and patchwork reforms the burden of personal taxation now falls unduly heavily on the low paid. Revised tax and national insurance scales can share these tax obligations more fairly with those more able to contribute from their increased wealth and income. Direct taxation continues to need to be supported by a broad range of other taxes.

In addition, Church Action on Poverty's work with community groups across Scotland found a recognition of real advances but also gaps still evident(4):

- Housing and homelessness are still a major issue in many parts of Scotland.



- The complexities and inadequacies of the benefits system still make the system a nightmare to navigate, and one in which people feel considerably disempowered.
- Government policy notwithstanding, getting people into work does not necessarily lift them out of poverty
- Indebtedness is both a major consequence and a major cause of poverty.
- Funding for local initiatives in ways that enable rather than disable is problematic.

But underlying the economic and political challenges which face communities, politicians, the voluntary sector and ordinary citizens across Scotland, and while recognizing the genuine good faith and commitment with which so many of these engage in attempting to address the problems of poverty, there is a deeper issue which is not being sufficiently addressed. It might be described as a cultural/spiritual issue, since it relates to social attitudes to poverty and by extension, to people living in poverty.

The battle of invisibility

One of the most consistent experiences of people living in poverty is of the unremittingly negative attitudes they encounter simply as a result of being poor. A group of people in Glasgow identified five key indicators of poverty. Three were quantitative – inadequate income, work/welfare, health; the other two were qualitative – expectations and standards – and fed off each other. Negative attitudes towards people living in poverty have a strong tendency to create lowered expectations both by them and in regard to them. These experiences were borne out by groups across Scotland in the same Poverty Indicators work across Scotland. (6) For one group in Drumchapel, the worst things about being poor were identified as:

- Not having people to talk to
- Being abusive/being abused
- Being stressed-out
- Bad debts
- Addictions-drugs, alcohol
- It's like a whirlwind!
- Robbing Peter to pay Paul
- 'Provvies', catalogues



- Paying extra for credit
- Terrible housing (dampness, dry rot, no repairs, 'they're coming down in 2 years, so no repairs')
- City Council think Drumchapel people are the scum of the earth and don't deserve anything better
- Embarrassed by the state of your house!
- Apathy- people lower their expectations
- Health affected
- Bad neighbours
- Feeling unsafe

There are some groups of people living in poverty who experience these negative attitudes to a degree that amounts to outright hostility and vilification.

“What is poverty? Poverty is a battle of invisibility, a lack of resources, exclusion, powerlessness... it is being blamed for society's problems.” (5)

Poverty is: (6)

Double Standards

- People are judged by appearances, clothes, accents, addresses/postcodes, occupation, regardless of actual facts, so:
- One person gets a loan, another doesn't
- Made to feel inadequate in certain shops – 'not a typical M&S customer'
- Stigma – where delivery vans, taxis, etc, won't go
- It puts you off asking!
- Troublemakers are not dealt with, so a whole area is stigmatised
- Different standards for Govan and Bearsden
- Double standards on signing the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act
- Double standards on Child Support Agency
- Double standards on whether you are a working tenant or a benefits tenant, council or private
- Double standards on single parents – 'feckless', 'can't be trusted'
- Made to feel like a child-not treated as an adult
- Supported = childlike
- 'It's not fair' – mitigating circumstances not taken into account
- Middle-class complaints more likely to be taken seriously than those of poor people

Disrespectful Services

- Expectations have changed over the last century (upstairs/downstairs) but attitudes have not necessarily changed
- Assumptions about being undeserving, so ok to treat people disrespectfully
- Police, housing department, social work, doctors
- To them we're 'social problems'

Information held on you

- Medical notes, chemists
- Postcodes
- Private companies
- Police
- Electoral register
- Finance companies

All hold information which can be used in damaging and prejudicial ways

- No access to it
- No control over it
- Dependent on other people's assessment of you, often with little knowledge
- Confidences are abused
- Privacy and sense of self violated

Being young, poor and male



Writing in the *British Medical Journal* recently, a Glasgow GP painted a sharp, sympathetic and very sad picture of what it's like to be young, poor and male in Glasgow, Britain's poorest city. Near the beginning of the article, he writes, 'If you're male and of the underclass in inner-city Britain, then watch out, because your life may well be poor, violent and short.' He goes on to describe an all-too recognisable scenario, ending in early and violent death, and ends 'you had two risk factors that, when present together are a fatal combination: 'maleness' and 'poverty'. You're lucky if your death gets two lines in a local newspaper. You never had a single advocate other than those paid for through legal aid.' (7)

This scenario is one that should figure largely on the public policy agenda in Scotland, and elsewhere in Britain too, and even more on the

churches' agenda, yet is unlikely to do so; because the focus on young men living in poverty is much more likely to be on their anti-social behaviour, and even on their clothing, most notably recently in the banning of young people wearing 'hoodies' from a shopping mall; because it's often easier and more 'feel-good' to focus on the problems of far-away places; because there are no votes in the unrespectable face of poverty. These are not the poor who attract sympathy, not the 'hard-working families' of whom we heard so much from the government recently. The implication is obvious. As in the Victorian era, these are the 'undeserving poor.' And yet poverty it is- of income, of skills, of aspiration, of security.

Conversations with young men in some of Glasgow's poorest areas and in a Young Offenders Institution revealed all of these:

Income Poverty

So what kind of food do you buy?

Stuff that doesn't take too long too make

Microwave stuff

Why do you buy microwave stuff?

Because it's easier!

I buy it cause it cheaper

So what does all your money go on?

Bills. Bills, bills, bills. Insurance and loan charges, interest on credit

How do you think you'll get your money in the future?

Off my mum (laughter)

And is that how you always plan to get money?

Probably

And what do you think you'll need money for, say, in 10 years time?

Food

And in 10 years time, will you still be getting your money from your mum?

No, my dad

What one thing would you like to do that you can't afford to?

Buy a house

What kind of house?

Any!

Ye can go oot oan the toon but ye canny bring a burd back tae yer flat 'cause ye havenae decorated or goat a Hi-fi

Yer flat's goat tae be cushty though...

Aye, he's goat a point...

... Ah mean, ye cannae hae parties.

See if ye stiyed where we stiy, and ye said

tae a burd, "come back tae ma flat" an she sais "nae problem, like, where dae ye live?", "Sandylands" she widnae even look at ye again!

Do you think you'll ever get one?

Probably

And your mum and dad are going to pay for that as well?

Probably

So, where do you think you'll be getting your money from in the future?

A job

Skills Poverty

And do you feel you have enough money to buy all the things you want?

No, that's why I was at the job centre today, getting an application form for, eh, what's it called, labelling, no, eh, labouring. I got three application forms for cleaning, but who wants to do that?

So where do you think you'll get your money from in the future?

A job

What kind of job?

Working in the Barras (Glasgow market)... no, I wanted to be a nurse.

I'm going to join the police

I want to work in a nursery as a nursery nurse

(Jokes are made by others about child protection issues)

How do you plan to get money in the future?

By working

Any type of work in particular?

Don't know

Where do you think you'll get your money from in the future, and what do you think you'll spend it on?

*Where'd ah recon ah'll get the money frae?
Probably sellin drugs, eh? Dunno man, try an
get maseel a job*

*I'll probably get ma money from the social
(there is laughter, and someone says "it's
about time someone came oot wey that!")
and I know what I'll spend ma money on,
getting a motorbike, that's ma first priority,
canny think of anything else*

*Ah'm gonnae gat a labouring joab wi' ma
uncle, get some money up an that, get a
motor. Maybe go back tae college, dae
somethin anyway.*

*I tried ta stick in at school, oh aye man, get
an education, what did they gie me mate,
fuck all, ken what ah mean?...*

Poverty of Aspiration

So what about in the future? Where do you think you'll get your money and what do you think you'll need money for?

*Well hopefully I'll get a job, I'll need money
for baby stuff, my girlfriend's pregnant.
Hopefully I'll get a job at "Quid's in"*

What hopes have you got about the future?

*What hopes? I hope I'll settle down and get
married. I've already got one wean, so this'll
be two. I've never seen the first one, I was
only 15 and I got my girlfriend pregnant.*

And have you got any hopes for the future?

I don't know...

What kind of things would you like to do in the future, apart from work?

I don't know...

Is there anything about the future that scares you?

Dying

What's the number one thing that you really want to do but you can't afford to?

Get away from here

Why do you not like here?

Because you can't do anything

And where would you like to go instead?

*As far away as I can; somewhere in America,
somewhere sunny*

Do you think you will ever be able to do something like that?

Aye

And do you think you'll have to work for a long time to get that?

*I'll just sell everything; I'll sell my mum and
dad's house*

Is there anything else you really want to do?

Play for Celtic

And that's something you would need more money for?

Aye, I'd just by my way in

And do you think that something you'll be able to achieve?

No

Is there anything you think you might be able to manage if you get a bit more cash?

*Don't know... I can't think, I've not got a
brain*

What can you do because you don't have enough money?

Don't know, go somewhere

Is there any where in particular you'd like to go?

Travel the world, anywhere

So what would you like to do that you can afford to?

Own my own island

(Other young people start teasing him and he clamps up and won't respond to further questions)

What would you like to do if you had some more money?

Go to the Caribbean

And do you think you'll ever get there?

Hope so

Travel

Anywhere in particular?

I don't know

Do you think you'll ever get to do a bit of traveling?

Don't know

What hopes have you got about the future?

Got a joab waitin for me when ah get oot, eh? But if no' ah'll be goin' back oan the dole, eh, it's aright

Get a job when ah'm oot ther, start a family, get a job an that, like ma work, keep ma heid doon, get a place, hae a few kids, ken? Get a job... might go tae college, dae that, or just get a job... get a motor too.

(Everyone starts talking at once about cars, buying a car, going to drag races, cars in magazines they've read)

Where would you not like to be in 10 years time? What kind of jobs would you really not want to do?

A cleaner

I wouldn't like to sell my arse

Sitting on my arse in the house doing nothing

Sitting in the house with my mum and dad

A boring job

Poverty of Security

What fears have you got about the future?

Poverty's going to get a lot worse

And taxes are going to go up

So is there anything that scares you about the future?

Having weans and getting married scares me

What is it that scares you about that?

Having arguments with women, cause all they do is grab plates, vases, irons and throw them at you. I was actually sitting doing nothing and all I saw was this big plate come flying; it was my Maw that fired it for no reason. I was like that, I pure crapped it.

At 14 ah ended up on the streets, ma Ma disowned me an that, lived wi ma pal, ma Da's goat skin cancer an he just drinks the money, doesny take responsibility for anything, ah just take responsibility for masel... Social Work was nae use...

You mentioned the government, what do you think the government should spend their money, our money on?

See instead of renovating everybody's house, I think they should build a refuge centre or something for people that's on the streets, because you see a lot of young people out on the streets, their parents have kicked them out and there's a lot of people on a Friday and Saturday night going out that will walk by and beat them up. They should get somewhere safe to stay.

I've got hopes and fears, just hope I get my life back on fuckin track again, that's about it. Fears... bein on the street again

The gap these young people see between the consumer culture all around them, which is represented as the 'good life', and their ability to access it in any realistic way is huge. Their command of the practical life skills needed to approach independent adult living is limited. But their actual awareness of the gap, and of

the difficulties they face in bridging it, is acute and painful. Sometimes this is expressed in black humour:

Where do you think you'll get your money in the future?

Robbing banks!

If you were able to tell the government to spend more money on something, what would it be?

The pigeons (laughter) they should pay me to go out with a rifle

Things you can't do without money...

Ye canny be a gangster

Sometimes it's expressed in fantasy

Winning the lottery! The full 20 million!

So what would you do with that 20 million?

I'd actually go and get some surgery done! And then go and buy a Mitsubishi, and then go and buy a woman I like!

So are cars an important thing to you all?

(Unanimously) Oh aye!

That'll really improve the quality o' ma life, getting a car, like, ah'll get an old BM or somat, do it up, that's what ah want tae dae

Nice set a wheels, awe aye... gie me an Escort an' in 6 months ah'll hae full body kit, re-spray, the hale lot. Gie me a 1.3 Escort, do it up, sell it for at least 2 grand

Listen tae it! Gie em a Subaru, Ah'll fuckin annihilate your Escort! Fuck's sake man!

Ah'll gie ye a Renault 5 turbo, wipe any car...

No danger man!

... wipe any car out a reach!

Often it finds escape in substance abuse.

So what does all your money go on?

Probably alcohol... And food

Mine goes on sweeties! (Laughter) food,

sweeties, cannabis, drink most of the time

What do I spend money on? Drugs and booze... Hash and booze, and if it's Mother's Day or something I'll get a fucking bunch of flowers or something.

Enjoy yersel wi hash

Smarties, ye need money for them don't ye?!

What did ah spend it on? Drugs eh, and enjoyment, tryin tae enjoy masel, getting a couple of pints an that, tryin tae get wae the lassies an take them out

Used tae spend it oan drink an drugs

used ta dae cunts over for drugs, spend a hunner quid

Started aff workin, spent all ma money on cannabis, then ah stopped goin tae work an that an goat sacked, ended up beggin

Used tae work for ma money an all, then ah started takin vallies, daein stupid things, spent all ma money oan claes, goat interested in claes, drugs

On the street ma money went on smack... an crack, an vallies

Best buzz ye can get is wae crack, gets yer heart racin; smack yer just sit oan yer arse.

They're always talkin about drugs, they think they're helping ye but they're no, ye'd rather just forget about them, talking about drugs and alcohol just makes you want them more, ye miss it, but when you're up in ... (another prison hall), yer working an that, yer daein things so ye forget about it and by the time ye get out yer probably no bothered about it.

That's whit ah'm sayin, Ah ahm'ny gonny lie tae yees, ah'm gonnae go oot an go fir a tenner bag, eh? Doesn'y mean ah'm gonnae git a habit again in the first day or two, ah'll just get oot the jail an enjoy masel

But if you've been clean for a few months then your system won't be able to cope with what it used to.

Ah know what yer sayin, but ah'm daein three and a half years, so ah'm gonnae go oot

*an get jist a wee tenner bag o' blow, man,
get mase! a wee bit o' enjoyment.*

**The number of guys who have said that
and then gone out and got something
heavy and OD'd...**

*That's what ah mean, ah'm sayin that an all,
so ah need tae change mase!, but there's no
point in me sayin ah'm gonnae change mase!,
just sayin it doesnae work, that's the God's
honest truth. Ah don't want tae go back tae
the way ah wis in the past, ah've seen what
it does tae me.*

Underneath the bravado, the anti-social
behaviour and the self-damage, these are
highly vulnerable young people. Furthermore,
they have little or no confidence that anybody
cares about them, or will offer them support,
apart from their families. For many of them, the
main, or sole, support-system are their
families, especially their mothers.

How do you think you'll get your money in the
future?

Off my mum (laughter)

And is that how you always plan to get
money?

Probably

Family

Aye, family, aye

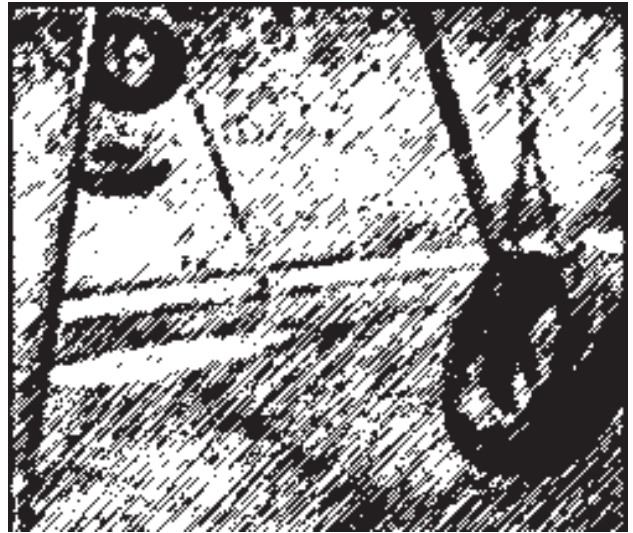
*Yer family's the maist important thing,
that's the top o' yer list*

*Family, number 1, everybody agree wae
that?*

*Aw come on! So if you're oot oan the toon,
whit'll ye say tae yer family if that's mair
important than them?*

*It depends, ah'll bet ye maist o' the people in
this room stay wi' their maw, they rely oan
their mum, right? If ye didnae huv yer
family ye'd be stuck*

Since their mothers are such a fundamental
source of support and feeling valued, it is
perhaps not surprising that a primary concern
of many of these young people is that they
should have enough money to buy Christmas,



birthday and Mother's Day presents for their
mothers.

And for the young offenders, the ability to
maintain contact with their families is the most
important thing.

*Aye, ma son, Ah'll get tae see ma son, cause
ah've no seen him since ah got here, miss
him... but there's nae point when ah'm in the
jail, if he dosn'y see me in the jail he might
just think "daddy's workin" an that... but ah
miss him, no what ah mean?*

**So what's the most important thing to
get?**

(Unanimously) phone credit

And can anyone phone you?

**The only person that can phone you is yer
lawyer!**

And social work

*Say you're on the basic, ye'll get £2.80 a
week that'll get ye half an ounce and a
packet of skins, nae phone credit an yer Da's
just died, ye have tae sit an wait for a
letter comin in.*

Nevertheless, in spite of the constraints and
the bleak horizons, these are still young people
who have the ability to see beyond their own
situation to the needs of others, and to identify
how things might improve.

**What do you think the government should
spend their money on?**



Houses for the homeless and that, cause they're letting asylum seekers in and we've got people sleeping on the streets. And help the junkies; get them off their addiction.

Apart from that, probably youth clubs, cause about here there's not much to do apart from the one we come to on a Wednesday, and that's it. Probably better courses for people to do in school and college to get them better jobs.

Useful stuff

See instead of renovating everybody's house, I think they should build a refuge centre or something for people that's on the streets, because you see a lot of young people out on the streets, their parents have kicked them out and there's a lot of people on a Friday and Saturday night going out that will walk by and beat them up. They should get somewhere safe to stay.

See instead of building all they fancy houses over the water, they should build a community centre for the weans and that, give kids things to do. I blame the government, that Tony Blair and thingmy, Jack McConnell. I think politicians are all the same, they're only in it to line they're own pockets.

It's alright for them, walikg around in a 2 grand suit, but look at the people down there, some of them canny even afford a set

of clothes.

People hanging about the street, fuck's sake, that could be solved. The kids get better fucking things in Blackhill, instead of a wee shitey club, some swings (laughter) they keep talking about building a community centre.

The NHS, it could be a lot better

A swimming pool

Better giros

Aye, but if they gie bigger giros naeb'dys gonnae wannae work

Youth centres, getting people's flats done up. Ah've been places that are pure ramshackle, ken what ah mean?

Getting' folks joabs

There's joabs around, but the joabs are aw shite

if you had loads of money, what would you do with it?

put 2 million in the bank and live off the interest and anything else I made... homeless shelters and charities

When asked, 'who is poor?', none of these young people identified themselves, but rather;

- *African children*
- *Tramps*
- *People living on the street*
- *Beggars*
- *The people on the telly that's no got any water*
- *Tsunami, and other countries that have nothing to eat and drink, I count myself lucky, you know what I mean*
- *Homeless people; alcoholics, alcoholics bring it on themselves, junkies as well.*

Though by British standards these young people are living in poverty, their definitions of poverty are much more basic, and relate very much to issues of survival, possibly reflecting their own struggles and the stigma attached to being poor in Britain today.

You know we want to work!

Another vulnerable group with whom churches in Scotland engage at the grassroots are refugees and asylum seekers. Like the young people, they also suffer from

Income poverty

How have you been surviving since you got here? (Male Kosovan, 22 years old)

Asylum seekers allowance and help from local charity centre/church.

As soon as we were brought to Glasgow, they put us in a house and gave us £29 a week.

But when they interviewed me, they said there was no danger in Kosovo any more. No war. They said I could go back there. But I said I don't have a family there any more. I don't have a house, I don't have a future. It's a bit too soon to go back. So we come here, and they give us £29. It's not very much. And we're not allowed to work. They just gave us £29.

The solicitor says that we should have permission to work after being in Glasgow for 6 months, maybe part time - I don't know for how many hours, - maybe 15 or 20 hours per week for cigarettes and things like that. I don't know how the law works here.

How long have you been here?

4 years

When did you stop receiving your £29 a week?

2 years ago

My sister and brother have been supporting me (they are also asylum seekers with a 3 year old child, but who do receive their £29.

The interviewee lives in a 2 bedroom house with them)

We have made some friends here, especially through the church. They have helped us with clothes and things. When we came here, we had only one table in the house. With £29 you cannot buy good things. Now the money has been stopped.

How have you been surviving since you got here?(Female, North African)

Asylum seekers allowance and help from local church centre. Benefit stopped four months ago.

How long have you been here? Has your application been accepted yet?

4-5 years, still not accepted. May be deported soon. Very uncertain.

How have you been surviving since you got here?(Female, Iranian)

Every week I need to report to the Home Office in Glasgow. There I have my fingerprints taken. I have an id card which I need to show. I don't get any money, but I get £40 a week for my daughter. I used to get money, but that stopped around 18 months ago because our case was refused. We now survive with help from the church. They gave us the church flat to live in.

How are you surviving here? (Female, Pakistan)

We came here because a large gangster gang were after my Dad-also because of my Dad's politics. They made threats on his life. They attacked our land, our home, they broke my Dad's leg. When he arrived here, he was injured, hardly able to walk. Then the gang made threats against me. In a Muslim culture, when threats are made about a

woman, they stone the woman to death if it is claimed that she has brought disloyalty to the family. They made these kind of threats.

We had to leave my brothers at home. They are somewhere in another city. We don't know if we will ever see them again. Muslim culture is to look after the woman, but boys are supposed to be able to look after themselves. I miss my brothers.

My case was refused because they said there is a different government in place, and because we could move to a different city. But they don't know our culture. They will find us. Also, when the case was refused, no one asked me anything. The judge just decided. In any case, I was scared.

The lawyer didn't tell us when the case was going to court. My parents' money of £60 a week continues, but mine stopped two months ago. There will possibly be an appeal. The lawyer didn't say.

My parent's case is still on-going - they are still receiving money. Mine has been refused.

Do you have any other support?

No. I think it is funny. I am told to report every week to the home office. I need to have my fingerprints taken, I need to show my id card. But they don't give me the bus fare to get in from my home to the city centre. How am I supposed to get there?

Poverty of security

Asylum seekers are also vulnerable to an extreme degree from Poverty of security. Indeed, it is why they are in this country in the first place.

What happened that made you need to leave?

Because of the war. My mum died. My dad and my little brother. I left because things were going on in my country, in Kosovo. Someone asked me if I wanted to leave Kosovo and he gave me money to get out.

We are Kosovan, and speak Albanian. We are not Serbian, but our land is. Our land was taken and our home was taken.

What actually happened to you?

I was being persecuted for being a part of student movement that disagreed with government.

Did the government make you leave ?

Some people were killed and I felt my life was under threat. (she was scared in case the home office got hold of our interview details, she said they would use it as evidence against her application.)

What is it like for you here?

I cry too much. Sometimes I can't tidy up. All the time, I count what day I have to go to sign. I take two buses.

Before I was very, very fat. Now I lost weight through stress. I have chest problem. I am concerned about the cold weather in Scotland.

Why did you have to leave Iran?

You know, we are converts to Christianity. No one knows how difficult it is for Christians in a Moslem country. I met my husband here. He is also Iranian and seeking asylum. He goes to college. We are married now and have an 18-month old daughter.

6 months ago, at around 6.45am, 6 immigration police arrived at the house and searched it. They took my passport, my birth certificate, my baby's birth certificate, my marriage certificate, my qualification certificates. They took all the certificates. They said I would get these things back, but I have not.

Have you asked about them when you go to report at the home office?

No. I am too scared. After they searched the house, about 3 months ago, when me and my husband were reporting at the home office, they took my husband away and he was taken to London to a detention centre.

He wasn't even allowed to say goodbye to me. They just took him. He was away for 10 days. I was allowed to phone him every day. But the Church, they helped. They managed to get money together and paid bail for my husband to be released. When the bail was received, he was allowed back home - they said because of me and the baby.

What about your lawyer?

He says we need to wait.

After the immigration police arrived at the house, I got really scared. And I am depressed. What is the point of trying to look nice, or buy nice clothes? For what? So I slit my wrists. I ended up in hospital. They said it was because of me that my husband was allowed bail.

What is it like for you here?

Here we live in an area where there is verbal abuse, where we are treated really badly by the locals, where there are many problems, including drugs, alcohol, where it is not safe to go out at night, where there are problems sleeping, where there is a lot of noise. The people don't like us, they talk about us, the way they look at us, it is horrible. At home, my Dad would never treat his workers this way.

One problem I have is that I am not free to marry because I cannot reveal my true identity to anyone I meet - so I never tell my friends where I live, or anything about my family. I cannot have friends back to the house, or meet them anywhere. I need to be in by around 4pm because of the problems in the area.

I cannot have any free conversations with anyone - always on the surface, always false. If I tell them I am illegal, I will lose my friends.

I will have no respect until this is over. I am stuck.

On the outside I have a smiling face, but I told my Mum what is happening on the inside. I am so depressed. One day, I slit my wrists. I did not go to hospital. My Mum managed to

bandage my wrists. Look, they are a bit better now.

But unlike the young people, these are people who have skills they are eager to use and aspirations they are anxious to realise.

What kind of work are you able to do?

I'm not allowed to work despite having a degree in International Law. I'm studying towards standard grades in science subjects. I would work in any job if I was allowed.

What kind of work can you do or would you like to do?

I would take any job. I don't know how to work computers but I'd take any job.

What kind of work are you able to do?

You know - we want to work. My husband has a degree in Maths, and is now at college studying Dental technology. But he would love to teach Maths. I have a qualification in Architecture. I want to study it more and work. We want to work. We hate benefits. I just want a normal life.

How would you like to live, if you could?

In my culture, I am supposed to marry within my cast. Many of my friends are now married at my age. It is not so important for the girl to work. In my culture, the girls are at home and the boys work. I have told my Mum, "no, girls can work too," but she finds this idea hard.

What about education?

I am currently doing an access course, specifically for people like us, to show everyone that we are not stupid. We do all sorts of things: business, marketing, design.

My friend says that because my money has been stopped I will now be asked to pay college fees. I don't know.

I want to help this country

Taking care of what we value



The huge task of overcoming poverty in Scotland will not be helped by the division of people into ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. Vulnerable young people know that they don’t command much public sympathy.

For whatever reason, the education route is not working for too many of them, and the heavy industry jobs they would have filled a generation ago are gone, swept away in the Lowland Clearances of the 1980s, which reduced Glasgow’s population from over a million to the 650,000 it is today. Yet the images of success and acceptance all around are those of a consumer society, access to which most of us take for granted. Even if we try to make ethical choices about how we spend our money, they are still choices. And nobody will ban us from entering shopping centres on the basis of what we wear!

It is not easy to work with young people on the margins, harder perhaps than it was thirty or forty years ago. Progress is measured in tiny

steps, building trust is tentative, setbacks are many. But if we are not to write off such young people, it’s still important to recognise and invest in their potential and wellbeing, and above all, to value them.

Like other UK cities, Glasgow now has large numbers of destitute asylum-seekers, and others living on appallingly low incomes, yet desperate to work. Scotland has a declining population and a skills shortage, yet inflexible UK legislation means that the Scottish Executive, which wants to attract immigrants to Scotland, is unable to employ the ones it has. A young Sudanese asylum-seeker in Scotland, prohibited from working, receives the standard £29 a week. He is existing on £10 a week, and sending the rest back to support his desperate family in the war-torn, devastated country of Sudan! This is all too often the reality of immigration in Scotland—the poorest here supporting the poorest there.

Church Action on Poverty has at its heart the belief that all children of God should have people who speak out against this kind of poverty, that there should be advocates, and even more, that ways should be found which allow them to speak in their own voices, and to have their voices heard. Much of the CAP linkwork in Scotland over the last five years has been about enabling people living in poverty to speak for themselves, whether they be children and families, people with disability, young men, and, more recently, asylum-seekers and refugees. There are good public policy reasons for this; solutions which are identified and owned by people themselves are more likely to be effective than those which are imposed. But there are also moral, ethical and spiritual reasons for letting people be heard. The theologian Kosuke Koyama writes:

What is love if it remains invisible and intangible? Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. The devastating poverty in which millions of children live is visible. Racism is visible. Machine guns are visible. Slums are visible. The gap between rich and poor is glaringly visible. Our response to these realities must be visible. Grace cannot function in a world of invisibility. Yet in our world, the rulers try to make invisible the alien, the orphan, the hungry and thirsty, the sick and imprisoned. This is violence. Their bodies must remain visible. There is a connection between invisibility and violence. People, because of the image of God they embody, must remain seen. Faith, hope and love are not vital except in what is seen. Religion seems to raise up the invisible and despise what is visible. But it is the 'see, hear, touch' gospel that can nurture the hope which is free from deception.

Far more violence is done **to** people living in poverty than is done **by** people living in poverty. In this country, as elsewhere, their neighbourhoods are more at risk of environmental degradation by planners and developers, their livelihoods are more vulnerable, their health is more at risk, they

and their children are more likely to suffer physical violence, and they are the targeted by unremitting psychological and emotional abuse by media and sometimes by politicians.

For churches, which have the potential to be, and very often are, a source of value and respect for poor communities and individuals, this act of making visible those who are overlooked is one which Jesus initiated. It is a crucially important act, and sometimes requires standing out against a society which stigmatizes poverty in order that the violence which is daily perpetrated against poor people may be concealed and covered-up. If Christians believe that the value of persons is not set by the market, but is intrinsic, God-given, to everyone, then the vocation is to take care not only of what is precious to us but of what is of ultimate and lasting value.

Notes

1. 'Prosperity with a Purpose', CTBI 2005
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. 'A Scotland Where Everyone Matters', CAP 2002
5. CAP Annual Report
6. 'A Scotland Where Everyone Matters', CAP 2002
7. British Medical Journal, Dr Des Spence, 1/2005
8. From a WCC Address, 1998



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