

Potential NOT Poverty

A Peer Network for Young People to Campaign

Overview

Potential NOT Poverty is a two-year project building a youth Network led by young people with lived experience of poverty, alongside those committed to social justice, to hold decision-makers to account for the priorities set out in the Our Children, Our Future child poverty strategy.

Year 1 focuses on establishing and strengthening the Network across the South East. Year 2 will expand the Network nationally.

Context

Child poverty is still surrounded by stigma and shame. Many young people do not feel able to speak openly about money worries, leaving few mechanisms for young people to organise and hold decision-makers to account.

Honest conversations about poverty rarely happen in just a few sessions. Building trust takes time and care, through regular contact over a longer period. Short-term funding can mean the work ends just as trust is starting to form, undermining relationships and reducing young people's willingness to get involved.

Young people are also often asked to 'share their views' but not supported to organise. One-off participation can sit outside decision-making cycles, which means young people are heard but do not see change.

Potential NOT Poverty seeks to respond to these gaps by building a long-term youth Network. Young people will set priorities, agree on clear campaign asks, and apply ongoing scrutiny so child poverty commitments translate into tangible outcomes.

Key facts

- 4.5 million children live in poverty or 10 children in a class of 30.
- 2 million children live in 'deep material poverty' where families are unable to afford key essentials.
- In England, 18% of children live in food insecure households.
- In England, over 172,000 children are living in temporary accommodation.
- 3,340 families living in Bed and Breakfasts
- The cost of child poverty to the UK economy each year is £39.5 billion.

Quote

'Being part of this project opened my eyes. I really feel like people understand me and that I'm making a difference. Work like this is so important to speak up about poverty and make a difference'

Young woman, aged 15

Aims and objectives

Aim 1: Network Building

Objectives:

- Recruit young people across the South East i.e those who have already taken part in our previous child poverty work, and wanting to challenge social inequality and injustice.
- Onboarding and capacity building activities to support the Network through clear group agreements, safeguarding, participation support, and a trauma-informed approach.
- Use the Lundy Model of Participation to create safe spaces that build trust, peer connection, and long-term involvement.

Aim 2: Setting Priorities

Objectives:

- Support young people to choose campaign priorities and focus them into a small number of clear aims.
- Co-produce clear, practical campaign 'asks', and map who has the power to deliver them i.e. local, regional and national audiences.
- Deliver youth-led campaigning that combines local action with regional influence, including meetings with decision-makers, public communications, and partnership and coalition work.

Potential NOT Poverty

Young People's Network

Aim 4: Outcome measures

For young people:

- Increased confidence and capability to organise, campaign, and influence decisions
- Reduced stigma and isolation through collective action
- Practical experience of advocacy, negotiation, and civic participation

For decision-makers and systems:

- Stronger scrutiny and accountability linked to lived experience and sustained engagement
- Clearer priorities and 'asks' from young people that support practical change
- Increased expectations to translate commitments into action

For communities and wider change

- Reduced stigma through visible collective organising rather than individualised stories
- Stronger local alliances between young people, community partners and services
- A replicable model for youth-led accountability that can expand nationally

Aims 3: Accountability and reporting

Objectives:

- Identify the key commitments, who is responsible for delivering them, and where decisions are made locally and regionally.
- Set up clear routes for scrutiny, with regular points where decision-makers are expected to report back.
- Track progress through a youth-led progress tracker, and escalate where action stalls.
- Use evaluation to capture learning, strengthen delivery, and report back to funders through progress reports.

Our key achievements to date

- Commissioned by Save the Children UK to gather young people's lived experience of poverty to inform their End Child Poverty campaign (October 2023)
- Young people's insights help shape four national policy reports on child poverty (June 2024)
- Young people meet with the Minister for Education and the Child Poverty Taskforce (October 2024)
- Young people present their recommendations at 10 Downing Street (October 2024)
- Commissioned by 4in10 to examine young people's lived experience of poverty in South East London with XLPs Young Leaders (September 2025)
- Funding secured to develop a national Network of Youth Leaders to explore ways to hold decision-makers to account for child poverty priorities (January 2026).
- Speaking Truth to Power event with young people Deputy Lord Mayor for London. (February 2026)

For more information

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Quote

It's hard, and to be honest, I find it embarrassing talking about not having money and mental health stuff, but like here, it's been different. Because I know people are in the same situation as me

Young woman, aged 16