

HUMANIFESTO

Poverty dehumanises.

It's not just the constant struggle to buy enough food to feed the kids, or having to walk everywhere because you can't afford the bus fare. Paying more for your electricity and gas because you don't have the credit history for direct debit is tough. But it's more than that.

When you're experiencing poverty, what really grinds you down is the way other people perceive you. The media often portray low-income families in unsympathetic, and sometimes insulting terms. Feckless. Scroungers. Skivers. And this leads the public to think that the hard-up have only themselves to blame, and they treat them with disdain. Attempts to get help with money, benefits, housing and other basic essentials can sometimes be frustrating, complicated and bureaucratic. This reinforces the impression that anyone who is experiencing poverty is a problem.

Even people who aren't on a low income can be affected by the dehumanising effects of poverty in our city. People who deliver services to the low-paid often have to use systems that get in the way of treating their customers as real people with real lives and real stories. No one wants to make life harder for folk. Blaming 'the suits' does not make things better.

And any society is weaker when some of its members are excluded. Poverty dehumanises us all.

We are the Leeds Poverty Truth Commission, and we believe that everyone can play a part in creating a fairer, more human society by changing these attitudes. Our Commissioners come from many different backgrounds. Crucially, many of us have experienced, or are experiencing poverty. By sharing our stories and listening to each other, we have come up with some simple ways of changing our society for the better.

THREE WAYS TO REHUMANISE LEEDS

1

We know that, in our wonderful city of Leeds, there are many initiatives aimed at reducing the effects of poverty. These include some businesses doing things a bit differently to help alleviate poverty, voluntary and public-sector initiatives, and the simple acts of caring neighbours. These are welcome, but to strengthen any initiative, those planning them should include people who are experiencing poverty in the leadership of those programmes.

2

Anyone writing or speaking about poverty should take care to use language that portrays those experiencing poverty in respectful, human terms. They should listen to those on the sharp end of this issue, and learn from their stories.

3

Poverty creates isolation. Those experiencing poverty often feel isolated from the rest of their community, and this can lead to physical and mental distress. By reaching out to other people who might be feeling isolated and alone, the people of Leeds can help to build stronger, more resilient communities.

It is a scandal that a wealthy city like Leeds has so many inhabitants who experience poverty. But we can all play a part in reducing its dehumanising effects. We invite all residents and workers in Leeds to join us in creating a fairer, stronger and happier society.