

## Cross Party Group on Poverty

### Inquiry into poverty and stigma

#### Call for written evidence

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Corra Foundation welcomes the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Poverty's Inquiry into poverty related stigma. This inquiry is an important step towards understanding the impacts of stigma for people experiencing poverty. In [Corra's recent response to the Scottish Government's Ending the need for food banks draft national plan](#), we highlighted the importance of lived expertise being heard and understood to create real change, and with that paying close attention to the ways stigma impacts people's lives.

This response draws on evidence and insights from across Corra's work alongside communities and grant funded organisations. It highlights the impacts of stigma on people's day to day lives as well as drawing on the ways organisations and communities are working hard to address and overcome stigma.

#### **What are the key impacts of poverty related stigma on the people your organisation works with?**

From Corra's work alongside communities and the third sector, we know that poverty is far more than economic and material deprivation. Like poverty, stigma is complex and has many different dimensions. It can be perpetuated through language, cultures, policies, institutions and systems. Stigma runs alongside systemic poverty and can further exacerbate the inequality and isolation people experience. The impacts of stigma can manifest in different ways:

#### **Stigma can prevent people accessing available support**

In Castlehill, one of the [communities Corra works alongside](#), a local food initiative found that people were concerned about being seen queuing outside a food bank. As a result, they did not access it for fear others in the community would find out they were struggling financially. In response to this, the local food bank decided to offer a meal delivery service which has enabled them to extend their reach to more families as well as signpost people to other local services. Similar examples have been highlighted across the communities Corra works alongside which have prompted shifts in the way services are delivered to be more discreet whilst also responding to the needs of families. For instance, Community Co-ordinators have noticed that some people will not use the services, such as food banks or community larders, that are local to them for fear of being recognised with some travelling to use services in the next town. This gives an indication of the ways embarrassment can create barriers preventing some people from physically attending a local service.

#### **The route to support can be challenging**

Insights from across Corra suggest the route to accessing the right support can be challenging. Long forms and referrals processes can be stigmatising by creating hurdles for people to overcome as they attempt to access support. Community Co-ordinators have observed the ways navigating different systems, for instance understanding what financial support is available, can create additional stress for people, particularly when the language used feels inaccessible.

Thirty-eight charities are currently funded through Corra's Henry Duncan Grants to support individuals and families to cope with the impacts of poverty. Many of these projects offer financial advice, advocacy and signposting for families dealing with debt. Organisations report that often families feel a great deal of shame talking about their debt. This can make them reluctant to seek out support and result in them being isolated or feel underserving of help. Evidence from Henry Duncan Grant funded charities highlights the important role of advocacy services to support people to navigate through the different options available and make them aware of their human rights.

#### **Bridge Community Project – Henry Duncan Grants**

The Bridge Community Project is funded through Henry Duncan Grants to deliver a money advice service. Many of the people supported through the project also struggle with their mental health and some people have found accessing support online a challenge. The Bridge Community Project has gone beyond their traditional money advice service, offering a listening service as well as referrals to school uniform banks.

*“Linda is 22 years old with a little boy aged 18 months. She was paying off her debts when she was working but now her monthly income does not allow for this as well as looking after herself and her son. Linda came into some difficulty with her buggy when it broke. This is her only means of getting out and about and shopping as she does not own a car. We were able to source a buggy from a local charity and get this to her, so she could still get to the shops. After a few conversations with Linda, we realised that she is quite isolated and expressed an interest in suggestions for entertaining her son and keeping him engaged. We have been in touch with the local charity again and will be able to get some toys for Linda's son and some outdoor equipment as well because Linda would like to spend time in the garden with him.”*

#### **Collydean Community Centre – Henry Duncan Grants**

*The Family Support Worker has contacted many families in the local community, helping to teach families to cook nutritious meals, and assisting with welfare payments and foodbank referrals in times of crisis. The Centre has also been connecting families with other agencies that have gone on to assist with benefit applications, budgeting, and debt management, to help relieve long-term poverty. One family ended up in fuel debt because of a loss of income due to being furloughed and were struggling to put food on the table. Collydean Community Centre were able to support with the initial need and provide food, but also to put them in touch with other agencies that have helped to reduce the fuel debt. They also helped the*

*family to apply for benefits that they are entitled to, which will also increase their income long-term.*

### **Stigma can impact people's sense of choice and control over the decisions that affect their life**

Learning from a number of Corra's programmes demonstrated poverty amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. In the proactive round of [The Equity Programme](#) many applications included requests for food vouchers and distribution of food parcels. The grants also supported many families to access culturally appropriate food, as insights suggest this can be a real challenge. Our learning suggests that families find it difficult to ask for something different, extra or something more appropriate when given food parcels. Further insights explained that people sometimes worry they should be grateful for what they receive, even though they may be unable to eat it if it does not suit their dietary requirements.

Community fridges, larders and pantries are working to address this by offering people the chance to choose the items of food that they want. Reflections from Community Co-ordinators highlight that these models work best when people are not limited in the number of items they can select. There has also been a recent shift to offer cash or supermarket vouchers to alleviate the stigma associated with poverty and offer a more dignified, human rights-based response.

Distribution of vouchers and cash has been supported across several of the programmes that Corra runs, including [#ShiftThePower Comic Relief Scotland fund](#) and The Scottish Government's [Winter Support Small Grants Fund](#). Through the Scottish Government's Winter Support Small Grants Fund a total of £707,801 was distributed to 174 organisations. Each of these organisations used the funding to distribute money directly to families in need.

*"Many of the applications were for families struggling with heating, food and clothing for their children."* Gartcairn Football Academy, Scottish Government Winter Support Small Grants Fund

### **Mental health impacts of stigma**

It is also important to acknowledge the mental health impacts of stigma. Social isolation, loneliness and mental health problems were challenges in many communities prior to the pandemic. Insights from Community Co-ordinators have regularly highlighted that this has been exacerbated further throughout the pandemic. They also increasingly report people worrying about money.

Third sector organisations and community groups often play an instrumental role in offering safe spaces for people to talk about their mental health and the other challenges they may face. In 2021 eighty-three organisations received funding to deliver community based mental health support through the [Henry Duncan Grants](#).

**Pollokshields Development Agency, Henry Duncan Grants**

*“I was suffering from poor mental health during lockdown. The cooking and sewing classes gave me something to look forward to. Through the classes I made so many new friends and I can now pass my time talking to them”*

*“I don't have much money and feel lonely, but PDA had provided me with a tablet and Wi-Fi, and I am now able to speak to loved ones on WhatsApp and attend the zoom sessions which I enjoy and love so much. I really look forward to them and have met some lovely people.”*

## **How does poverty related stigma impact on communities that are more likely to be affected by poverty?**

### **People affected by alcohol and drugs**

Evidence also suggests that people affected by alcohol and drugs can experience shame, secrecy and a lack of trust in services. For over 20 years Corra, in partnership with the Scottish Government, has delivered the Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI). PDI supports third sector work to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families affected by drugs and alcohol. Evidence illustrates the ways the stigma associated with alcohol and drug use can have a negative impact on families. Organisations continue to report on the way this stigma can isolate families from their community, this was evident in Corra’s 2020 research [Connections Are key](#) which explored the role of relationship-based practice for families affected by alcohol and drugs.

### **Practitioner, Connections Are Key, 2020**

*“The other big one is stigma. Yeah, the stigma that comes along. For the young person, their parents’ lifestyle. People will often say to them, ‘aw your mum’s a junkie’. So young people distance themselves from certain situations. Going into a club or something, and I think sometimes the clubs themselves have a lack of understanding of like, what might be going on with people. It’s partly society which is the barrier itself.”*

### **Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs, Routes Project, PDI funded**

*The project saw common obstacles in the young people around low self-esteem, low future expectations and feelings of being stuck with a reputation they were powerless to change. However, meeting in the group they finally had an opportunity to escape from the role they’ve been given, being able to show a vulnerable side and not worry that anyone would be shocked or judge them or their family. Introductions to inspiring settings and role models have also helped the young people start to shape aspirations for themselves.*

Corra is currently administering several [Scottish Government’s National Drug Mission Funds](#). The funding aims to support a range of changes, including working to improve the wellbeing of people who use drugs and their families, including working to tackle the stigma and public perceptions associated with drug use.

**Do particular groups of people living on low incomes (for example women, disabled people, Black and minority ethnic people, young people) experience stigma in different ways? If yes, please give examples.**

Groups that have no recourse to public funds such as refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to multiple deprivation. This means that many people within these communities can be reliant on local food banks and initiatives to get by. In Corra's response to the draft national plan to end the need for food banks, we called on the Scottish Government to go further in ensuring refugees and asylum seekers human rights are protected at every point in the system.

Corra, in partnership with Comic Relief, delivers the #ShiftThePower Scotland programme. One strand of the funding aims to support projects working alongside people experiencing mental health challenges to share their stories, live free from discrimination, stigma and build positive relationships. The example below illustrates the ways some groups are providing opportunities for people to come together and speak out about the challenges they face.

**Maryhill Integration Network (MIN), #ShiftThePower Scotland**

*MIN Voices enables participants to collaborate and challenge stereotypical views of asylum seekers, affecting real change in their lives and their communities. MIN Voices provides the opportunity to explore and present alternative narratives to those in the mainstream media, raising the profile of participants, and allowing their voices to be heard.*

It is crucial that the experiences of people experiencing poverty are heard. It is still too common for communities to be under-estimated, and we need to make a fundamental shift towards people impacted by poverty being the ones who shape the responses.

Corra's recent [Equity Programme insight briefing](#) draws on learning from community led grant making as part of the Equity Programme. The programme worked alongside a range of different groups made up of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities that were adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The aim of this work is to build trust, relationships and shift power so each group could take the lead within the decision-making process.

Corra is committed to community led grant making and currently delivers several programmes where people shape how funding is spent. This includes facilitating decision makers panels that brings a range of lived and learned expertise to design programmes and make, or in some cases contribute to, funding decisions. As part of our delivery of [The Promise Partnership](#), Corra supports an advisory group and decision maker's panel. These groups shape the processes and make decisions to ensure that the funding [keeps The Promise](#) and helps deliver change for children, young people and families. Centring lived expertise supports a deeper understanding of people and their experiences which can be a powerful tool for challenging systems and barriers such as poverty related stigma.

**11) What is the key change that can be taken that would help tackle poverty related stigma?**

**Understand the power of language to both help and hinder anti-poverty campaigns**

Language can be a powerful tool to both emphasise and eradicate stigma. Over recent years, in the communities Corra works alongside groups have adapted the language used to promote inclusive spaces, free from stigma. For example, in Langlees the group renamed the food bank to 'natter and bite to eat' to engage more people with the service. In other communities, food banks have become community pantries and in Blackland's the community group prefers to describe clothes as 'pre-loved' rather than second hand.

As a funder Corra is committed to continue to learn and evolve its language to be inclusive and accessible. This includes reviewing the language used in grant application forms and processes. As part of this commitment Corra has joined over 100 Grantmakers in signing [IVAR's Flexible Funders](#) pledge. This involves enabling flexibility, transparency and trust between funder and charity. These commitments contribute to how Corra engages and support charities working on the ground to overcome issues such as poverty related stigma.

Corra also welcomes the work of other organisations highlighting the important role of language in work to eradicate poverty. This includes [Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Framing Toolkit](#) which aims to change the story about poverty using recommendations from the Framework institutes research on public attitudes to poverty. As well as the work of the Poverty Alliance leading on campaigns such as [Challenge Poverty Week](#) which is an opportunity to raise awareness of poverty in Scotland along with the important work of communities and groups.

### **A commitment to human rights and understanding lived expertise in service delivery and policy making**

Poverty is an intersectional issue and requires a multifaceted response. We know that stigma can impact different people in different ways. Poverty related stigma creates barriers to people fully accessing their human rights and, in many ways, stigma prevents the eradication of poverty.

Corra welcomes the progressive human rights trajectory in Scotland, in particular the plans to fully incorporate the UNCRC (United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child) and plans for a landmark Human Rights Bill. A commitment to human rights offers an alternative response to poverty and inequality, one that is centred on people being heard, understood, and enabled to be active agents of change in their own life. This is important as much of the evidence tells us that people experiencing poverty related stigma feel stripped of their voice.

*"A human rights-based approach requires that people have voice, and that they are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives. It supports people to grow in confidence and become empowered through the idea of claiming rights to which they are entitled, rather than being passive recipients."* [Voice, Power Change blog Corra Foundation](#)

Human rights-based approaches are important for both policy making and service design as they put people at the heart. Reflections from Community Co-ordinators suggest that if people's experiences of poverty are misunderstood, and the day-to-day challenges they face overlooked, there is a risk stigma could be amplified and the extent people engage with

services reflects how well they feel seen and heard. Central to Corra's ten-year strategy is amplifying people's voices and shifting power to communities. This includes participatory approaches within grant programmes, for example through lived experience panels and models of community-controlled funding. As well as working alongside communities to support the ideas for change that matter to local people.

## About Corra Foundation

Corra exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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