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Health Issues
in the Community

Writing About Health Issues

Poverty and Inequality

"Social change
begins in the stories
of the people"

Paulo Freire



Foreword from Lesley Riddoch

Suddenly, from all the grimness of lockdown and the staleness of news comes this wee gem of a collection - words from folk who live at the sharp end of life in Scotland. By turn deft, knowing, outraged, upbeat and sorrowful, the folk contributing to this project are never less than honest and constructive. I was really moved by their determination to know more, change more and insist on being heard by the authorities. This is education at its most dynamic, cooperative and productive. I'm sure Paolo Freire would approve.

The first time I saw anyone else reading his dynamic but unsnappily titled paperback - *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - was in north-west Scotland in 1992. I was watching a crofter - the late Allan Macrae - herding sheep into a fank with his trusty sheepdogs in the pouring rain, rolling a fag with one hand and reading a dog-eared copy of Paolo Freire's book in the other. Freire contended that folk had to consciously unlearn the skillsets required to live as 'second class citizens' - and that helped him set the Assynt Crofters on course to reverse the tide of Scottish history and become the first crofters to buy their land from an absentee Laird. I've no doubt that when such a transformational moment presents itself, the folk involved in this HIIC course will use the insights and comradeship they've gained to start moving mountains - while taking care of one another.

Congratulations.

Lesley Riddoch is an award-winning broadcaster, journalist, author, cyclist, land reform campaigner & lover of all things Nordic.

What is Health Issues in the Community?

Health Issues in the Community (HIIC) is a course that helps people understand what affects their health and the health of their communities. HIIC supports people to develop the skills and knowledge to address health issues using community development approaches.

Through the course participants gain a broad understanding of the social model of health, health inequalities, power and participation and community development approaches in health – and how they can use these to make positive change happen in their communities. When we reflect on the stories of participants and tutors, HIIC is a journey that participants and tutor go on together; it explores health inequalities, holding community development and popular education values and principles at its heart. HIIC is a toolbox that gives structure to the community development process. It gives it shape, direction and a clear purpose.

HIIC was originally written by Jane Jones and was first produced in 1997. It is still going strong today being delivered by tutors across Scotland. We are delighted to welcome Jane Jones back to HIIC and thank her for editing this excellent collection of student writings.

As well as the original author and driving force behind HIIC; Jane is the author of *Private Troubles and Public Issues: A Community Development Approach to Health* and the founder of [Pilton Community Health Project](#).

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Introduction

This is the fourth collection of writing from students undertaking the Health Issues in the Community Course (HIIC). The topic that these students identified as a key health issue in 2019/20 is that of poverty and inequality and its impact on their communities.

The detailed stories, descriptions, and facts reveal the corrosive effect that these issues are having on a day to day basis in modern Scotland and were written before the 2020 Covid pandemic started. Public Health specialists have drawn attention to the serious effect that there will be on health if the inequalities exacerbated by the global health crisis are not addressed. Given the additional economic impact of an uncertain post covid and Brexit future, putting this collection together is deeply disturbing but very timely. It should act as a wake- up call, as has the covid pandemic, in challenging a seemingly resigned acceptance of poverty, despite recognition at governmental level.

The HIIC course draws on both the philosophy and approach of 'transformative' popular education espoused by Paulo Freire, and community development. These elements can be seen clearly in the way that students have not just identified issues and drawn facts together but have interrogated the issues themselves through collective, critical enquiry. This is evident in the rich array of evidence that has been produced. Often drawing from the thread of their own experience, they have enriched and extended this by undertaking local surveys and conversations, and picking up complex social and practical details that a distant bureaucracy often misses. By listening and naming the damaging emotional and social effects such as 'stigma', on their communities, the multi-dimensional picture that they present is much more nuanced and interwoven than is often available.

The course encourages participants to widen and deepen awareness of health issues by communicating their findings into their communities using presentations, discussions or other creative methods. It also encourages people to take action by engaging with their elected representatives and others to push for change. This collection shows some impressive instances of change happening - sometimes in small ways by individuals beginning to find their voice and becoming involved as active citizens. In other ways they are beginning to create more public debate and discussion about previously unspoken areas. And lastly, they have achieved real changes to the way local services are provided and created dialogues with politicians and national organisations.

Amidst the grim picture that is so minutely described, the writings are also witness to the power of community, of kindness, of the sense of 'the commonweal' that is still alive in many communities that have been devastated by post-industrial changes. The actions described in this volume bear testament to this but also demonstrate how this social fabric which supports social solidarity and inclusion is being gradually eroded through globalisation, stigma and divisive policies. There is an increasing awareness that communities cannot solve this issue alone. Political action is required by government to ensure Scotland is no longer defined by poverty and inequality in the 21st century.

The 17 students represented here come from Dunfermline, Inverkeithing and the West Fife villages, Dundee east, East Kilbride, and from a school student group in Castlemilk, Glasgow.

In the text, the symbol ♦ is used to denote different extracts from each student. They have been organised into sections, each concentrating on a particular theme and with a short introduction. Key phrases have been highlighted.

Jane Jones, March 2021

The culture of silence

Unacceptable levels of poverty in 21st Century Scotland are recognised at national level by government and health agencies. Newspaper articles, television documentaries, and films have reported and highlighted this and yet its harsh reality still appears to be invisible to many.

In this selection of writing we observe students beginning to explore poverty in their own communities and engage with the way it is hidden from the public gaze. In their exploration the issue becomes more open to question and challenge and measured against the community development values of social justice and equality.



Parkgate HIIC group (Fife) highlighting community health issues through role play.

◆ Being able to study an issue that affects so many people has opened my eyes. I never expected the course to have such an impact on me. I have become aware of the greater need for food banks and how, although it is a relief for some that we have food banks and a sign of how strong humanity can be, it is still not acceptable. As a nation, no one should be left hungry or destitute. **Illness, family breakdown or loss of a job can happen to anyone.**

◆ I am a pupil in Secondary school in Castlemilk doing a variety of higher subjects, one of them being community youth work and community skills class which the HIIC course is part of. I find it interesting as **I thought I knew my community but in class I have learned a lot more.**

◆ When we arrived at the food bank we were warmly welcomed and invited into the main reception where service users come in and are offered tea, coffee and biscuits. He showed us round the warehouse where they stored the donations, I was totally astounded at how big the place was and not to mention how much was stored in there, everything from baby milk and nappies to toothbrushes and bars of soap. **It truly did shock me just how huge this issue really was.**

Illness, family breakdown or loss of a job can happen to anyone.



◆ My journey through HIIC began in January 2017 when I walked through the doors of Douglas Community Centre in the east end of Dundee a place where I had lived for most of my life. I was unsure what to expect of this as being a busy wife and mother **I had no idea what went on in my local community.**

◆ **Poverty and inequality were the issues in my society that shocked me the most** as the rates I looked at were particularly high. I think if you look closely you can see this on daily basis.

Poverty and inequality were the issues in my society that shocked me the most...



◆ I have gained more knowledge with regards to how much poverty can have a detrimental effect on not only an individual but as a whole on communities. I was unaware of services depleting and many people suffering from all the cuts that have been made by the government's cutbacks, **I just never realised that different parts of the city were actually a lot worse than I ever had thought.**

◆ Although there are other food bank providers in Fife, we chose to research the 'Trussell Trust' as they had a presence in each of our communities and are experts in the field. On the Trussell Trust website it stated that there are 5 centres across West Fife, covering an area of 125sq miles with over 200 volunteers assisting at the Dunfermline food bank and in the year 2017-2018 a staggering 2,435 three-day EMERGENCY food supplies were given to people in crisis in the west of Fife.

◆ The community health profiles highlight that there are deeper issues that aren't as visible such as low-income families. On the statistics that I have found I discovered that in 2013, 40% of children in Castlemilk live in poverty. By now I am pretty sure that the number will have risen, as it is more visible that people in the area live in relative poverty.

◆ I found out a lot more about the community I travel around daily and was oblivious to some of the issues it faced. Throughout this essay I'm looking at some aspects of the social model of health, the topic will mostly be focusing on is poverty, I was particularly interested in this topic as **I never realised how much of a problem poverty was in my community.**

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◆ We looked into the community profiles of Croftfoot and Castlemilk and the results were shocking. If you are a female living in Castlemilk, your life expectancy is 76 years old but if you live in Croftfoot, on average you can expect to live until 80. I currently stay on Croftfoot and my best friend stays in Castlemilk. We do everything together, we attend the same school, go to dance clubs together but due to living a few streets away from one another, statistically our lives will be different. This is heart breaking and not acceptable. In Castlemilk 5,015 people are in income deprivation but in Croftfoot there are only 940, so why is there such a huge difference in two areas that are right next to each other? Overall I feel poverty is a major issue in my community and I believe it could be managed with the help and understanding of those in power as **I don't think they are aware of how bad poverty is in Castlemilk and how many people are actually suffering from it daily.**

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◆ As can be seen, poverty is a huge problem in most areas of the city of Glasgow, and affects most aspects of people's lives. Poverty can have a huge impact on the vulnerability of people. From watching a movie "I Daniel Blake" which is based on a true story, I was able to easily see that this can also influence people's lifestyles. The main character was forced into prostitution to make ends meet. So I also think **aspects like consent should be encouraged to be spoken about more in schools and work places** as it seems to be a topic which is put aside and not spoken about.

◆ The healthy life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived parts of the UK is 19 years. The reasons for this are complex and money is just one part of the picture - the index of multiple deprivation also includes other determinants such as housing, employment and education. Yet, in many conversations I have about inequalities in health, 'deprivation' or 'disadvantage' are quickly translated into 'poverty'. While we mustn't lose sight of the other factors involved, **the importance of having enough money cannot be ignored.**

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Fact Finding

Students not only find relevant statistics but, interrogate the issues using local surveys, interviews, meetings, and visits to groups and organisations, as can be seen here.

Through this ongoing dialogue between themselves and the wider community, the detailed way in which these issues are impacting locally, and the causes of them, are brought to light through small informal, open discussions, increasing public awareness of these serious social issues



HIIC group from East Kilbride analysing community responses as part of their group project.

◆ Initially the issues we identified within the HIIC group were those we had personal experience of, but these acted as triggers for wider discussion of the bigger issues at the root of our individual, family and community concerns. What we learned about our community came first from other community members and then we researched various sources to find out if the statistics supported their views. The methods we used included face to face surveys, desk based research and small group discussions as well as questioning various groups invited to the group.

◆ After gathering all the information from our food bank interviews, speaking to various agency workers and volunteers along with general online research I think it's fair to say that the introduction of Universal Credit in Fife caused a significant increase in food bank use. Through volunteering and issuing food bank vouchers I have noted that one of the primary reasons for this is issues with benefits such as Universal Credit. Although there are many other reasons and contributing factors such as to why people get into difficulties such as relationship breakdown bereavement, mental health issues, and unemployment, **Universal Credit and zero hours contracts have definitely played their part.**

◆ I live in Inverkeithing; it is reasonably-sized Burgh, with retail, hairdressers, pubs and a few other industries. I have tried to find actual unemployment figures just for my area but have been unable to access that information. Although I have been able to find Fife/Scotland /Great Britain. This lack of information keeps us from being able to challenge inequalities. Unless people know about a problem, they don't understand it is an issue. They might just see it as one of a kind of thing and not realise the extent of it. With no figures to back it up, it can be easily ignored and no one will be held accountable. I know a few families that have suffered from generational poverty and so, as well as from my research, I have seen first-hand how the lives of these people are and how they struggle to survive.

◆ Poverty has a huge impact in the Castlemilk community, affecting things like people individual lifestyle, education, unemployment and health care services. I learned these through looking at each factor of the social model of health individually and **exploring them in more depth.**



◆ In Scotland, Universal Credit (UC) has been rolled out within the Dunfermline area. All new Job Seekers receive this. There is a projected 'transfer over' for other claimants of the benefit, although this was postponed in January as there was a recognition that there was a failure in implementing this [1]. The waiting time for receiving this credit is about 6 weeks and this can lead to claimants falling behind in rent and also not having enough money to meet the basic needs of heat and food. Although a loan is available to cover claimants for the time gap, which is provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) it is reclaimed once Universal Credit is up and running; the rate decided by the DWP. This could lead to food poverty because of reduced household income. There is no other help available, not even income support, whilst waiting for this benefit. It has been documented in the local press about claimants being left with no heat or food in their cupboards and in some cases dying whilst waiting to be processed. "The sister of a man who died whilst waiting for a Universal Credit payment says her brother spent his last days hungry and in fear of losing his home." (ITV, 2017).

Use of Food Banks

◆ I have chosen to look at food banks and why there has been an increase in their use within Fife and West Fife villages in recent years. I chose this topic as it makes me angry that in 2019 in the UK, so many people do not have enough money to feed themselves and their families. Many regularly have to make the grim choice between feeding themselves and keeping their home warm. How can this be in 2019? What is more, it would appear that it has almost become acceptable to have food banks in our society, how did we get here? Go into most major supermarkets nowadays and you'll probably find a collection point for the local food bank, in fact it has almost become a permanent feature! Growing up in the '80s I can remember my Aunt sending baby clothes her children had grown out of to relatives in Poland. At that time things were tough in Poland, I particularly remember the food queues. This was the 1980s, a country behind the iron curtain had food queues and yet here we are in the UK in 2019 with food banks.



[1] McMenemy, 2019

◆ As a group, we decided to narrow down our research area to a locality in Fife: Dunfermline and the West Fife Villages. My part of the research looks at the area of Abbeyview, which is within Dunfermline town. Abbeyview has an approximate population of 9,600 residents. Over the last few years, this area has been redeveloped with help from the, 'European Funding'. This enabled Fife Council to remove substandard housing stock and replace it with new-build provided by Fife Housing Group. The local authority committed to bringing the remaining housing stock up to the same standards as the 'new-build'. This along with the Council having a presence in the area (Abbeyview Local Office) went a long way to improving the area. Before the start of the process, 70% of the housing was Council/Housing Association with 30% in private hands. However, after the renovations, owner-occupied housing rose to 60% and only 40% remained in Council/Housing Association control. **We wondered if this could be a factor in the increase in the use of food banks by the 'working poor.'** The JRF stated "the number of workers in poverty hit 4 million last year, meaning 1 in 8 in the economy are now classified as the working poor" as quoted in the Guardian Newspaper (Parkington, 2018).

Unequal service and food provision

◆ Unemployment is also an issue as many young people struggle to get a job because they don't have the qualifications and more likely to gain an unskilled job with lower wages as more competition for these. They might not have the money to go out and buy appropriate clothes for an interview or their uniform. There is also a lack of available jobs in Castlemilk therefore they may have to travel which is another cost both for interviews, or the job, if successful. The local shopping centre is also closing down with only two shops open in the centre. One being the pharmacy and the other being a small Greggs bakers, so opportunities in the area are limited and causes extra strain on job seekers. There is no supermarket in Castlemilk, we have a MacDonal'd's so many people will buy a burger for £1 rather than buying healthier foods simply because it is a cheaper option and **this food is cheaper than the bus fare to the nearest supermarket in Toryglen.**

...this food is cheaper than the bus fare to the nearest supermarket in Toryglen.



◆ In Castlemilk there are very few shops selling fresh fruit and vegetables. This is because the shops **selling these products i.e. The Co-op and fruit and vegetable shop were shut down as people couldn't afford them**, whereas in Kings Park this isn't so much an issue.

◆ We discovered more about wealth and inequality and the waiting times to see a psychiatrist/ psychologist on the NHS. On average this is 18 – 24 months whereas if you can afford to pay for private health insurance you can be seen within 24hrs. I ask **why is someone's life worth less, just because they happen to be born in the wrong post code area**. Why does such wealth belong to the minority of the people? Why is everyone not given the same life chances?

...why is someone's life worth less, just because they happen to be born in the wrong post code area.



Issues facing women

◆ It is mostly noticeable within high school environment but it can be seen around the area as well. A small number of girls dropping out of local high schools as a result of getting pregnant as they are not wanting to be judged by others when they go into school with a baby bump especially when they attend a catholic school. 15% of the girls in my year have left school due to pregnancy. I have done some research on different areas on the south side of Glasgow through NHS GGC [2] statistics. I compared the areas with higher poverty rates for example Govanhill, which has the highest rate of young pregnancies in NHS GGC at 153 in 1,000 15.3% with a nearby area Strathbungo which at 8.5% highlighted that areas with less poverty have lower teenage pregnancy rates.

Employment is another area of inequality for woman. Doing a gender inequality quiz I found out that a lot of woman each year get sacked due to being pregnant. This is actually an illegal action and it links in with sexism which is part of discrimination.



[2] NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board

◆ **Another big issue which comes with poverty is "Period Poverty".** This is seen as a large issue for women in deprived areas. Sanitary products are not cheap to buy and do come with quite a heavy cost for some people who are scraping just to get by. This affects people in many ways, for example women or girls not wanting to attend work or education purely because they cannot afford the product for themselves, this then leads to money not being made which can then lead to further issues, from being off a few days every month can also lead to unemployment. This issue was targeted in schools and some work places by the council providing free sanitary products to help encourage the girls and women to still attend and take the products provided.

Child poverty

◆ **Young people may get involved in theft due to a lack of food, money and a variety of everyday necessities.**

Crime has an effect on young people more than most. For example they could have a lot of pressure on them to "fit in" so if it becomes normal for gangs of youths to run around the streets drinking, buying or selling drugs and carrying knives then the mentality among young people will be "if my pals are doing it why shouldn't I?"

I believe drug related crime has a serious effect on my community's health as drug dealers can hold a terrifying grip on a community gaining power and control by using scare tactics to keep people in a state of terror, prevent them from reporting their activities, loaning people drugs to keep them in debt and to threatening anyone that tries to remove this kind of activity from their community. This is not healthy for a community to live in a constant state of fear because it can lead to people being paranoid and cause members of the community to experience anxiety. The crime rate for Castlemilk in 2017 was 133 compared to the national average of 30.5 which is four times the average in a small area. These statistics are from the neighbourhood health profiles that we studied during the course. In my opinion this would come as no shock to anyone living in Castlemilk but **isn't the way a community should be.**

**...but isn't the way
a community
should be.**



◆ When gathering information on my community, the steps taken were: finding out what people in the community were struggling with; planning where I would find up-to-date information on how many children were living in poverty; how many people were applying for school meals and clothing grants; and if people were not applying for these, why was that? What barriers did people face or did they just not know they were eligible to apply. The school clothing grant payment is still not enough to buy what a child needs for school. As part of my research I looked at the cheapest shop to buy a uniform from and after going through what a child needs for school and how much the grant payment was at the time, this just was not enough. This can be detrimental to a child's education by not having what they need. However, the clothing grant payment has now gone up to £110.00 in Glasgow and £100.00 in South Lanarkshire and you don't have to fill in any forms for this now, a payment is directly sent out to parents. There has been a rise in children arriving in school hungry in the morning.



◆ Dundee's drug problem has grown massively over the past decade. The east side of the city Whitfield, Fintry, Douglas and so forth are the most deprived areas in Dundee. But what makes Dundee stand out more on the scale? And why do we have one of the highest drug problem. My beliefs is there has been cuts made everywhere across the board, £22 million had to be saved this financial year 2019-2020 in Dundee. Services have been overflowing with patients due to staff shortages, reduced working hours and more importantly transferring people onto Universal Credit. Since this benefit has been rolled out across Scotland in October 2017, food banks have seen a huge increase on users both unemployed and employed **which is having a detrimental effect on their mental health.**

**...which is having
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mental health.**



Obstacles and Barriers

The obstacles benefit claimants have to deal with are described here. The Scottish Government abandoned the words 'welfare' and 'benefit' in establishing the new Scottish Social Security service in 2016.

However the benefits such as Universal Credit that are still run by the UK government and the problems of accessibility are critiqued in this section.



Parkgate HIIC group (Fife) performing a play on the effects of universal credit on families.

◆ From our research it was very evident that many people did not apply for these benefits even when they were entitled to. This was due to a variety of reasons: not knowing how to go about it; not having the necessary IT skills; feeling embarrassed for their children and themselves; and no time to prioritise this due to other pressures. **And so the figures are not a true reflection of the extent of the problem.**

◆ Experiencing crisis with poverty is a heavy burden to cope with. For example, not everyone has money for mobile phone calls or public telephones. For the unemployed there is another challenging situation and I feel more can be done to help those disadvantaged people into employment. Bus passes and clothing grants would be a positive place to begin. Coming off benefits to go on to a different allowance brings more trauma and upset.

Applying for Universal Credit is fraught with worry. The waiting time to have your new benefit entitlement worked out is far too long. Whole families are left without any money for weeks at a time plunging them into even worse despair and poverty. They need food, electricity and other household necessities.

Some are forced further into debt and hardship which is demoralising and humiliating. One good thing is free school meals for Primary 1-3, at least kids of this age can have at least one good nutritious meal a day. On the other hand, councils need to stop targeting the poorest of people. Putting breakfast club prices up from 25p to £2 is scandalous, yet they expect parents working for the minimum wage, who depend on these clubs, to struggle even more.

◆ Poverty has an effect on many things, one being the amount of opportunities people get. This is an issue as many young people miss out on things such as school trips, proms, community fun days and many more due to the fact they don't have enough money. The issue can reach a point where young people can't go to school because they can only afford one pair of trousers and when they get dirty or ruined and they don't have another pair, they have to miss days of school which leaves them with gaps in their knowledge and less chance of success in their final exams. Young people also miss the opportunity to apply for university because they don't have the money to pay for the application fee and so having less chance of a well paid or skilled job in the future.

◆ As part of our group presentation, we handed out questionnaires and also to a few groups in my local community. We went to other venues in the community to get a wider range of views. I received 45 filled in forms. Three quarters of the respondents thought there should be a Minister for Poverty or some kind of governmental body with real experience of poverty to help alleviate the problem. The overall conclusions were that the current benefit system was predominately difficult for people. People find it over complicated and it takes too long to receive the benefits, which cause them distress. It was also clear that people found it confusing as to what they were actually entitled to and, it seemed, that the benefits were stopped too easily and in my view wrongly in some cases such as - a man who missed his appointment due to being with his partner in hospital who had just had a stillborn child - a man who had carried out 60 job searches but missed one that matched his profile.

◆ I also know a lone parent who was working part time while in receipt of UC, she was paid her earnings approximately every four weeks. Her pay day varies depending on weekends and holidays.

As a result, she sometimes got paid twice during her UC assessment period and then receives no earnings in the following assessment period. When she receives 'double pay' in an assessment period, her UC stops because her earnings were too high (she was also only entitled to one 'work allowance') and she has to reclaim it. It has put her off working as she felt she was getting more confused with what she was to be paying out to council for her rent and her mental health suffered so she ended up being off sick and then feeling she was letting her work colleagues down, so she gave up work and tells other people it not worth going out to work, her daughter and son in law are now both thinking is it worth it to go out and work?

◆ I have come to the conclusion that one of the main barriers to change is the government itself. It has implemented many cuts to the benefit system over a long period, since the conservatives came into power in May 2010. The difficult economic conditions created by the government's austerity measures have mainly affected the most vulnerable in society, those claiming benefits, and the sick and disabled. The working poor are also affected.



The growing use of zero hours contracts in our society further adds to the strain on families and individuals. They often don't qualify for passport benefits such as Income Support, Pension Credit, and ESA. And therefore are not entitled to additional help with healthcare costs etc., this having a knock on effect with the family budget. Their income, **as a result of these zero hours contracts can vary quite dramatically from month to month, making it extremely difficult to make ends meet.**

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◆ Where we live there are community groups, various clubs and classes, job shops, Educational, Health and Well being groups, playgroups, drop in centres and money advice agencies.

Local churches and centres also have lunch clubs which are heavily subsidised by donations and charities. If people can afford a small donation, they can pay what they can, if not the meals are free. There are also separate men's/ women's groups, disabled/ carers groups and many more, too many to mention. This is all fine and well, but the barriers for using these facilities are too great for a lot of local residents.

Unemployment and resultant lack of money is one example. If people do not have money for bus fares, etc then this makes most places inaccessible. Therefore, job interviews are missed because most employers want an updated CV and certificates of previous experience. A lot of people need to go to centres like Douglas and Rainbow House where there are computers and staff on hand to help with downloading and printing information that's required. Also the sad fact is that these services are not fully utilised. Going for an interview also requires applicants to look tidy and presentable for some in our area this is not possible because, feeding families and paying bills is a priority, not new clothing.



◆ When looking at barriers it was clear that when people are experiencing financial poverty, they are less likely to be able to access any information online unless they were to go to a library. Inherent in this fact is another barrier - not everyone knows how to use a computer. One weakness we all noticed was that the food bank we visited was **not near a bus stop or railway station.** This means that for some people they would have to walk, get a lift maybe, or use two to three buses, depending on how rural the area they live in, or even get a costly taxi. In these circumstances where you cannot afford food, even bus fares can be too much, which often results in not being able to make the journey in the first place.

◆ We found that; 1 in 8 children in high income countries face food insecurity rising to 1 in 5 in the United Kingdom. We then looked at the distribution of free school meals in our local area of East Kilbride, we found out that there are 1,879 children who received free school meals and 2,353 children received school clothing grants. However, we believe that this number is much higher as by talking to our local community **we know that not everyone who is entitled to these benefits are applying,**

this could be down to not having any IT skills or just not knowing they are entitled to help. Unfortunately it may also be down to stigma and embarrassment as people feel ashamed having to claim benefits.

...we know that not everyone who is entitled to these benefits are applying...



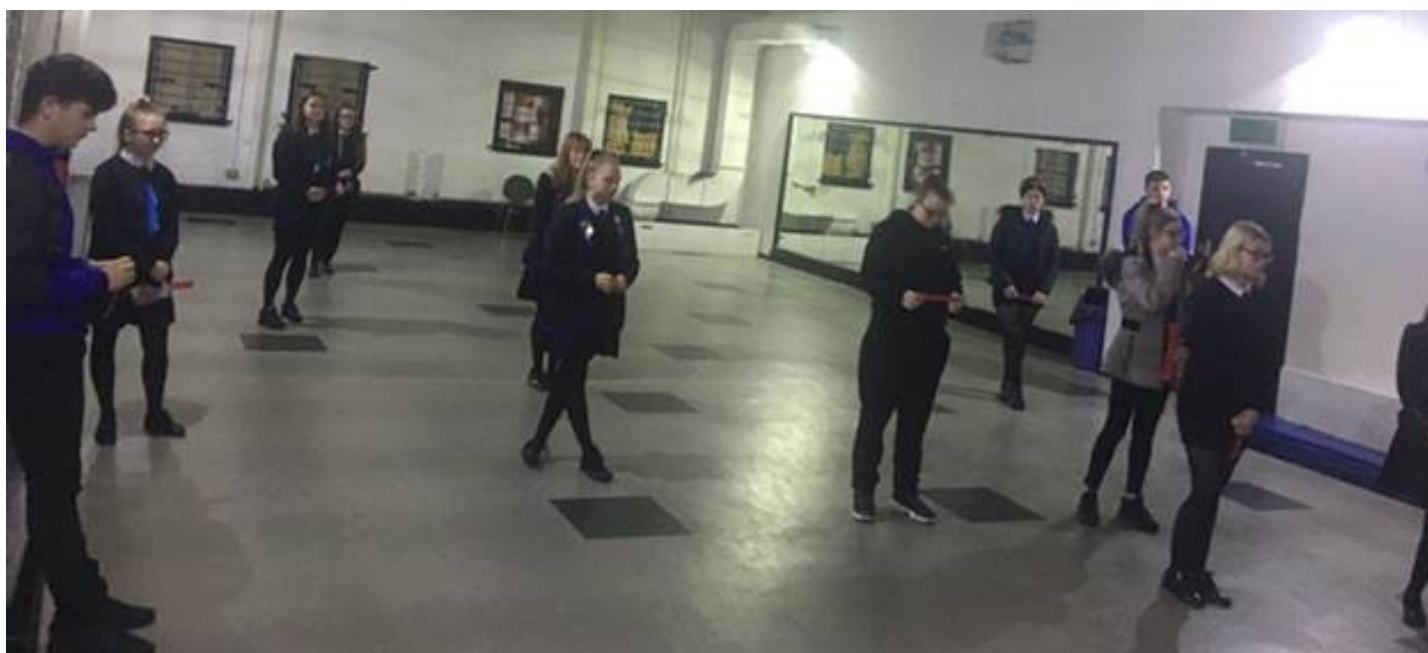
Rationing of provision

◆ There is also a food pantry located in a few of the local community centres. It stores dried and canned foods which people have donated, and people can swap to access other goods. When speaking to members of staff, they said this was where they also store emergency food parcels for people in extreme need. When asked why there was no knowledge of this food pantry locally, for example, no advertisement or information on social media, I was told that if too many people found out about it, they probably would not be able to keep up with the demand.

Stigma and Shame

The labelling of people who become unemployed or unable to earn enough as 'shirkers' has been a toxic myth used by sections of the media and politicians over the last decade, to legitimate the austerity agenda. One of the effects which causes fundamental harm to people of all ages was picked up by all students in their critical inquiry - that of stigma, loss of dignity and shame.

Research has shown that the stigma of poverty doesn't just cause distress to the individuals on the receiving end, it can lead to social isolation as people try to avoid situations where they might be labelled. Social psychologists suggest that shame is among the most pernicious of the social emotions, creating a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency that cannot readily be assuaged since the cause is often not of the person's making.



Youth HIIC group from Glasgow taking part in a well known exercise in HIIC: Barriers and Choices.

◆ You know that you are living in a deprived area when you have smashed bus stops all down your street, parks and woodlands covered in glass and rubbish. It's hard to live a healthy lifestyle when your local shop only consists of bookies, pubs and takeaway shops. **Young people can often be ashamed of where they come from** when meeting peers from different areas that are considered to be "posh" or "well off" and some areas are known as run down because of the stereotypes that they have. I am in a class with people from different areas and I am considered to speak "slang" which shows off my area. Universities are not easy to get into especially when you are faced with additional barriers in a poverty area or even lifestyle. Young people can have too much stress in their lives making it harder for them to concentrate in classes leading to them to not getting the results that they are capable of.

◆ So there are several community structures in place in the area which try to combat the lack of good food amongst the unemployed and the poor. 'Fare Share' is an organisation that takes food which is over-supplied by supermarkets and gives it to communities to hand out to local people in need (sometimes for a small donation).

This is done in a relaxed atmosphere so that people can discreetly access food supplies in a way that does not compound or give added stress to them. There are also community cafes in Oakley in the Community Centre where you pay what you can afford. Blairhall has a community cafe which has been up and running since the start of this year. It has now secured funding as a steady influx of people are using it. This is indirectly dealing with another health issue, that of isolation. Here, people are getting together and socialising, using, what was before, an empty space. In Valleyfield itself there is the 'Canary Cafe' canteen, which enables everyone to have access to low cost meals by paying what you can afford. However, we found from our research, that even with these outlets, people sometimes do not have food to feed their families or themselves and have to resort to food banks. Through our questionnaire, we found that people can be embarrassed to have to admit they are in need of emergency food.



◆ Not only did we discuss the practicalities of running a food bank, we also looked at how clients feel about having to use them, how they are affected emotionally. Too many feel a sense of shame and embarrassment, others feel anger and many are grateful. So why are so many people forced to use them? You would think unemployment would be the main reason for food bank use but sadly many clients are in employment, the 'working poor'. **Zero hours contracts and a scarcity of full-time employment all add to the struggle of trying to make ends meet.**

Other obstacles may be people's embarrassment or shame in having to admit to using food banks (we identified this from the questionnaires we issued to people who had used food banks). People may also feel disempowered, that they feel they are unable to make changes, that they are less worthy and less important than everybody else and should therefore accept the status quo.

◆ I can speak personally about this. After becoming unemployed through ill health, and being in receipt of benefits, I learned that I had to put my pride to one side and ask for help. My experience of walking into the food bank in Dunfermline, if I am being honest was daunting to say the least, as I have never experienced or considered myself to be in poverty.

◆ The first method of research was to look up online to find out where our nearest 'food bank' was and to see what information was available to us. We interviewed a food voucher 'referrer' in order to understand how the system works and to whom these vouchers were available. He explained that when a person is financially struggling, they can be issued with a food bank voucher in order to feed themselves and their family for three days. He said there has been a huge increase in the number of vouchers being issued but he is also aware that there are still people going without because they are too embarrassed, too proud, unsure if they are entitled or have no transport or access to get to and from the food bank. He went on to explain about the misuse of the food bank, saying that the reason the food vouchers are issued are in red is so they cannot be photocopied and this is to prevent fraud.



◆ We wanted to know if there was a limit to how many times a person can claim a food parcel and if so within what timescale. Also, we wondered if there were any circumstances where this would be exceeded? Usually, people can get 3 vouchers within 6 months any more than this the Trust will investigate.

◆ When reading through the returned questionnaires, it was clear that it was mainly agency structures that were being used to refer service users to food banks. Health visitors and GPs were mentioned. I also discovered that the Department of Work and Pensions bans Jobcentre staff from referring people to food banks [3]. They have to signpost people to charities who formally refer them instead. Often people who have plucked up the courage to ask for help will not approach charities **because of the additional stress and embarrassment to ask a second time**. I was speaking to a lady who has been in this situation and said she felt thoroughly ashamed to ask a second time.

The strain of school holidays

◆ As a parent with three children, I know how difficult it can be during school holidays, whether it be by paying for activities, buying new clothing, the extra cost of the household bills that can be that bit more expensive, shopping is also more expensive over the school holidays and trying to do all of this on very little money is tough and stressful. Parents are struggling with all of the above and this can make the school holidays less fun and more stressful.

◆ 'Holiday hunger' was a subject that came up as an important issue. To get a true feeling and understanding of how and why change was needed we knew from our HIIC course that the power of participation was important and so we talked to our community. We went to already established groups for single parents, carers, peer support and other similar groups and asked if they would sure which in turn caused families to struggle. This was because parents providing additional experiences for children found that they were proving too much to be able to afford them.

For example the added cost of gas, electric, bus fares for outings, clothing if not in school uniform, activities, childcare if parents had to work or go to appointments etc., but mostly the additional cost of food.



[3] The Independent 8/2/18

The local community provided some quotes which we used in our presentation:

- *I juggle my benefit every week and it strains the purse strings when they are off school.*
- *Being a parent of 3 children, I struggle during the holiday periods especially during the summer as I can't afford to do a lot of the activities.*
- *Sometimes as a parent I dread the summer holidays when these are the times we should cherish the extra times with our children.*

◆ Some families in certain circumstances cannot find the cost of having a young person attending school. Attending school requires, for most schools in my area, to wear a particular uniform. This is costly and can be a strain on the financial income to a family. Recently a new rule makes wearing a blazer to wear in school a requirement and costs roughly £45. **This, along with a full uniform, shoes and a bag can be too much for many families.** Also there are school trips which are used to take young people out of the school environment either for fun or for learning.

However they are often pricey and should be free. There is also the costs of lunch. If a young person receives free school meals, they should get a lunch for the trip, provided from the school. This often leads to young people feeling embarrassed about not having the same as their peers, leading to isolation and self-esteem issues within school. All of the above are extra stresses on family life and have a huge impact on parent /child relationships. Having to say "no" can bring parental guilt and make them feel unfit, also for the child being told "no" can hurt their feelings, **make them feel unloved and left out from their other peers.**

**...make them
feel unloved
and left out
from their other
peers.**



◆ Hearing from older children in my community and from parents who have heard children say cruel things when they were kids too, we know that hurtful words can have an effect on their self-worth and mental health. Here are some more quotes that people in the community have used and heard about things that can be said are included below, Quotes from parents listening to children:

- *"ma maws got too much month at the end of her money"*
- *"you canny go cause you're poor"*
- *I'm no going to yours you've just got council telly"*
- *"hocus pocus your brok:us"*
- *"yer maws got a gold card with Oxfam"*

◆ Young people facing poverty often suffer from mental health issues. This could be stress, anxiety or even depression. A young person could feel the financial stress in not wanting to tell their parent or guardian that they require something such as new trainers for school. This in turn, could lead to many young people not attending school and this can decrease their chances to get a better job as they do not have enough qualifications or sometimes not any.

They might have to work early on in life in order to provide money to support the home. This can encourage young people to leave school earlier than maybe they would have if it wasn't for the poverty that they are facing. **Young people are also seen to be feeling isolated when living in poverty.**

Young people are also seen to be feeling isolated when living in poverty.



◆ The broader approach to community issues covered in HIIC Part 2 was fascinating and inspirational as we widened our perspective and recognised the global ongoing and historical struggle for equity. Looking at 'private v public' issues was particularly enjoyable as it inspired us to discuss how preventable many issues were if there was the will at the public level to address the underlying causes. **We felt this message would be welcomed by community members who tended to take on the blame for everything negatively impacting their health, mentally and physically.**

Social Cohesion

In the past when the majority of a town or village were employed in similar industries, the level of wages were similar and trade unions provided more collective strength. When times were hard, most people were in the same boat, shame and guilt about your situation was less of an issue, and mostly difficulties were shared. This social fabric and the solidarity it supported were a tremendous resource for many working class communities. Today's globalised economy, zero hours contracts and un-unionised workers have created conditions which reduce solidarity and social cohesion. We can see here more isolated individuals and families who have to bear the brunt of economic insecurity alone, leading some to hopelessness and despair.

No-one chooses to become dependent on drugs. Poverty and inequality alongside the cruel effect of stigma, creates difficult conditions in which people live, and problematic drug use is commonly a sign of these complex social circumstances and hopelessness. Described as "deaths of despair", this tells us something about the nature of drug use in Scotland. [4]



East Kilbride HIIC group planting trees in their local community.

[4] Public Health Scotland July 2019

Privacy and dignity

◆ As part of our overall research, I wanted to ask members of my community whether the benefit system has helped them or made things worse in their lives. Not all those who responded are on benefits. Looking at the twenty respondents and through other research, I realised that one of the key issues in my area is the lack of privacy. This issue has been around for a long time. 60% of the people questioned believed that lack of privacy in dealing with their situation was the main issue they faced. I discovered that, although there are appropriate services within the community, it is the lack of discretion from community members that prevents people from asking for help. It is not that there are no services available, more that some of the public are reluctant to use them due to feeling that their personal business will be shared throughout the wider community. Often, workers and volunteers, just do not realise that sharing the personal information within the community is not right, or that they are not fully aware of doing so. This is both an issue and a barrier, because it stops people receiving the appropriate help at the right time.

I attended a meeting to discuss ways of tackling the issue of lack of privacy in the community and how we as a community can provide a better solution. The group of workers present stated that they were not aware of or had even considered any problems and basically changed the conversation to another unrelated subject. The issues and barriers that came to light reflected an insular culture in the community. The work I have been doing has helped to change my views on the way communities work. Although I am part of the community, I feel as if I am standing on the outside looking in and I see things now that I would not have noticed before.

◆ Towards the end of 2018, after speaking to members of the public, sending and receiving questionnaires, throughout the three local villages **the issue of lack of privacy was seen as a barrier to receiving proper help in all of them.** The other issue raised was that it was difficult to gain the correct financial information or to know where to get help in the first place.



Impact on mental health and drug use

◆ The cumulative effect of these different forms of poverty sometimes creates the most damaging outcome of generational poverty - and the constant presence of hopelessness. **Hopelessness is the key factor** in creating the cycle from one generation to the next. Without hope and the belief that life can be better, the motivation and energy needed to break the cycle are very low.

◆ Doing all this research has opened up my eyes and opinions. We decided to look at what was most relevant in our City of Dundee in relation to health and inequalities. “Problematic” drug use is the highest in areas of deprivation, where people are not getting opportunities in education employment. According to Elinor Dickie of Public Health Scotland **“drug use is 17 times higher in Scotland’s poorest area compared to the wealthiest”** [5].

“drug use is 17 times higher in Scotland’s poorest area compared to the wealthiest”



◆ I feel that if the same statistics (on average one a week) where a person is committing suicide was happening in Morningside in Edinburgh or any “affluent” area, the authorities would quickly look for the reasons why so many young people felt suicide was their only option and they would quickly find the money to try to find the answer. **Why is someone’s life less important just because they are born in a certain area?**

Why is someone’s life less important just because they are born in a certain area?



◆ After doing some research and many discussions within our group, we realised that mental health and suicide was the path that we would take to concentrate on. Scotland has one of the highest suicide rates and has the highest drug rate in the whole of Europe. **In Dundee alone the drug rate has increased drastically since 2016 and has now reached a crisis point** in trying to tackle this problem. In 2016 there were 38 people who had died of drug related deaths.

[5] Public Health Scotland July 2019

2018 the death toll reached 78 whether it be illicit or illicitly obtained. There were 53 overdoses in Dundee alone in 2018.

On average there are at least 2 people on the Tay Road bridge each week, these individuals are then taken to either Ninewells hospital or Carseview to be assessed and most of the time they are discharged without any follow ups.

Although the drug rate is high in Dundee I do strongly believe that with mental health services stretched to the limit people are turning to self medicate to try and forget the pain that they are facing through their personal lives. GP's are handing Opioids out to patients for chronic pain sufferers, and although they may need this they are not monitoring their patients on these drugs which then can turn into an addiction. Heroin, valium and other drugs are easily accessible on the streets. Gang members and drug dealers are now seeking out young people to sell their drugs and are offering money for this. They are preying on the vulnerable and exploiting them.

The Dundee drug commission have just released their findings on the drug rate in Dundee and are calling for urgent changes, more more understanding for people with drug addictions and also how to better improve mental health services across the city.

This city has a public health crisis in relation to drug deaths just now and things drastically need to change. We as a city need to come together to try and help the people of Dundee. In the last decade there has been over 400 deaths in relation to drug deaths in the city, one every week from 2018- present.

Accessing services

◆ There are 17 mental health services in Dundee alone and the lack of knowledge about these services, within communities is shocking. Each GP surgery now offers an SOS (sources of support) link worker located in the surgery and yet some patients aren't being informed about this. I can't tell you how many people I have told about this service and they have no clue or idea that this is even available. This is also true of patients needing medical appointments, (Doctors, Nurses, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, any specialist) apart from the fact there are so many cancellations, there are severe staff, funding and resource shortages. Several people have had to endure months on waiting lists to be seen by a professional. Quite often it is in excess of 6 months.



I find in this day and age this is totally unacceptable. This has a detrimental effect on other family members as well. These long waiting lists and / or inability to attend can lead to depression, anxiety and isolation to name a few causes.

◆ Reading the Alma Ata Declaration [6] was hard-hitting. The big ideas for all persons regarding health, the importance of our NHS, and then reading the news that the Tories are slowly privatising it off is soul destroying. All health boards across the globe want the same thing for everyone when regarding health, housing, social to end poverty etc. This was in 1978 yet 41 years later things are at all-time low. Services being cut, homelessness on the rise, with obesity being the second biggest killer. However, food costs are high and benefit cuts can result in poor choice of food. If anything things have deteriorated massively. Doing the social justice exercise and reading the different views expressed was quite difficult knowing things have depleted over the years. For example, In 2009 – fewer children needed to worry where their next meal is coming from. Forward to 2018 and more children and families worry where their next meal is coming from, including working families.

Again the government stated in 2009 that the Welfare state was so generous, it was beneficial to claim “dole”. Fast forward to 2018 and the introduction of a new benefit system, Universal Credit, more working/ non-working in dire straits, choosing between heating and food. With longer waiting times on payments and more debt, poverty and homelessness, this change and uncertainty has caused huge stress and confusion.

To read two different views regarding the same thing “benefits”, it’s hard hitting to know that the upper and middle class look on people on these benefits as ‘scroungers’, wasting tax payer’s money etc. If only they opened their eyes and have a hard look in their cold hearts how poverty plagues society now. Many people are facing hardship more than ever now and this includes the working class also. It must be great to be born into money and not have to worry about where your next meal will come from or where you’ll sleep tonight but this is the questions many have to ask themselves on a daily basis.



[6] The WHO Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978 emerged as a major milestone of the 20th century in the field of public health.

Community Action

The popular education and community development approach of the course encourages people to act as well as critically engage with these serious issues affecting community life - to widen the dialogue with others. Through interviewing local people, creating community presentations, meeting with politicians and others, some groups have made impressive changes to local services and broken the 'culture of silence' about issues in their communities.

Many have begun to organise immediate practical help as well as working to develop a wider critique of the issue in question, at community, local or national government level..



The Douglas HIIC group (Dundee) performing their play "She Died Waiting" at the CHEX conference 2019.

◆ Firstly, if there is an issue affecting many people in a community, it is important to look around for any like minded people. Are there others feeling the same as you, is there an appetite for change? Are others feeling the same as you but as individuals feel powerless? One individual voice may not have an impact but a collective voice will carry more clout!.If you don't do something about it, who will?

◆ We felt quite strongly that we would rather become an action group and submit a participation request to the council to pass on what we have found out from our community to try and influence their decision making on holiday hunger as we know this issue is already being discussed and funding allocated. We have now discovered through the Scottish Community Development Centre that we are entitled to have our views heard according to the rules and regulations governing participation requests as long as we are clear in what ways we can contribute ideas to improve the identified outcomes.

Holiday Hunger Programme

◆ The community led project I wanted to help make a difference with was the holiday hunger programme. The aim of the programme is to provide all children with a meal during the summer holidays.

As a parent with three children I know how difficult it can be during school holidays. Our project was 'let's make a difference, stop child poverty' and '**let's feed our weans**' as holiday hunger was a subject that came up as an important issue. To progress with this we thought about different ways of thinking about health, poverty and inequality while also focusing on participation and power and bringing these topics into our group project.

We looked at established projects in our area and found a few already running like summer programmes set up and run by community learning and home school partnership, food banks set up and run by Loaves and Fishes, East Kilbride community food banks running in various community halls such as Westwood community hall, and found out about holiday and breakfast clubs. We contacted them to get more information on how they work and what the criteria was for families to access them and we asked them what more can be done within their areas. We contacted our local authority also to find out about recent pilot projects in schools and what the plans were to develop them.



◆ I learned by going to see our local MSP at parliament and asking questions which were of importance to our holiday hunger project. It was a good way to get help or advice from our government and to invite them to our second presentation. This was a great experience and was very helpful for our project.

It was also discussed that if children have kids cards then some kind of payment could be put onto their card and it could be swiped at, so that kids weren't feeling embarrassed about getting a free meal, as there can be some stigma attached to not having money to eat out or having free school meals. On doing our presentation a second time around we invited our local MSP Linda Fabiani and local Councillor Collette Stevenson to show them what we were looking at to help all school children in our community and to ask their advice on how to push the project forward. This was somewhat helpful for us and the holiday hunger programme, and their feedback was really good.

◆ On the follow up from our presentation to local people and members of our council, we started work on progressing our thoughts and ideas gained from the feedback we received and worked on turning them into an action plan. We looked at community centres and schools and getting other organisations on board and looked into help from education

and council departments. We also had a few food outlets at our presentation in the hope that they could offer help to provide free and discounted food to children. This was successful as McDonald's were keen to work with us. We also had meetings with health care to discuss nutrition ideas and to make meals healthy, we heard from them about the importance of a healthy balanced diet and they were not keen on having McDonald's involved, however we also know that for some children the chance of a free meal from McDonald's during the school holidays may be their only meal that day and so we argued that it might be important for the calories for those children for that time period and once we had worked with families we could direct them to health for information on healthy balanced diets.

Widening the debate about food banks

◆ How as a community can we effect change? We can do this initially by talking to people in our local communities about how they feel about food banks having to be used in 2019. By identifying and involving the people and organisations who have an interest in food banks, we can determine if they too think that this is unacceptable in 2019 and how we might go about eradicating the need. We do need to identify any barriers that will stop local participation in the discussion.

From our questionnaire, it is obvious that people may be too embarrassed to ask for help. To help overcome this, for example, we could arrange meetings at a time when as many people as possible can attend and/or provide childcare; as it was identified in our research that 36% of parcels went to families with children.

Forming an action group to meet up with like-minded individuals to tackle the issue and invite representatives from the DWP and the Council to our meetings, to let them know what the issues are will also help. Involving professional bodies will also help take ideas forward as they will have more resources. Pressure can be applied to our local councillors by raising the issue of the 'working poor' at community councils.

On social media such as Facebook, Instagram and similar sites, we can highlight the problems that families and individuals are facing in the local community. We can make use of group members' talents and interests to produce art work and offer a 'listening ear' for example. The people who are most affected by the existence or otherwise of food banks, are the people we need to engage. We need to be asking them what they want, not impose our own ideas. We need to begin!

◆ One solution that I feel would be fitting, especially in my community would be placing a supermarket in the local area. This would have to be a shop that was accessible and affordable. **It would also be a plus if they hired people from the area which would then tackle poverty and unemployment for many adults** as they would then be earning a wage. If it would hire young people over 16 this could help with many more issues, such as mental health and poverty.

◆ Building a budget supermarket in Castlemilk with affordable food could help stop unhealthy eating and allow people to get the nutrition they need. This would hopefully eliminate the need for so many food banks in Castlemilk as they don't solve the problem, they are a charitable approach.

◆ The people that I spoke to in the community questioned whether or not their opinion would matter if they were to try and get involved in community business. They were used to the same faces. As we found out, there is a certain amount already being done in our community around food banks and poverty. Most of it, though, is being done by people who are not in need themselves, which means it is not been led by people who are experiencing this directly.

Through the course, we realised that it is important to take a community development approach to really resolve these issues longer term - community-led solutions rather than community-based.

◆ A further way to address the problem is to inform the local councillor and local community council that **we want dialogue to challenge the acceptance of food banks and poverty in our community.** One of the issues is complacency and we want to raise awareness of that. We should never assume that things will stay as they are, though they will if not challenged. If there is no way of resolving the matter, then it can be taken to a higher stage by lobbying our local MP or MSP. We have found out through our research that the roll out of 'universal credit' has been delayed and it could be 2023 before it is fully rolled out. This will necessarily have an impact on whether or not food banks remain a part of the lives in our community.

...we want dialogue to challenge the acceptance of food banks and poverty in our community.



◆ After spending some months studying this course it has become very clear that community development is a process where members of the community come together, discuss issues and take collective action to generate solutions to problems that arise or bring concern to us in our community. Through this process, we have to actively engage people of our community. Giving people a voice to have their say will empower individuals and groups of people to make changes.

We can as a community resolve this issue by applying pressure locally about the increase in working poor needing to use food banks. Also apply pressure to get the waiting time for universal credit reduced. We can contact all politicians locally, councillors, MSP and MP and invite them to community council meetings in order to voice our issues. We can send out questionnaires and information in our community to get feedback and keep everyone involved. We can highlight our concerns in social media using Facebook, Instagram and twitter. We can also volunteer at food banks, food clubs or community hubs. We can support our community by getting involved.

Accessible information and privacy

◆ This culture of silence in the community means that the issues are not being addressed and as such people are suffering. Working with community workers, myself and volunteers looked at the issues and barriers within my village. We then had conversations with the local community, which were organised through community workers to discuss what we proposed to offer in terms of assistance and to find out what the local community wanted from us. These conversations took place on a one-to-one basis and in group sessions. We felt that the proposal of a Community Hub in Valleyfield Community Centre may be an issue for the people of Oakley as it was not in their own village, but this was not the case. The community felt that having the Hub would give them access to the services they needed and the privacy they wanted.

Myself and other volunteers launched, "West Fife Villages Community Hub", on the 19th March 2019. With the success of the Hub, there has been an interest in expanding our Community Hub to a branch into Oakley, offering the same service as we provide in Valleyfield. The name would not change only the volunteers, and I, with the help of workers and volunteers, would encourage some training sessions and talks regarding basic human rights.

The right to privacy protects you against intrusion into your personal life - including unnecessary, heavy-handed state surveillance. Your right to privacy can only be interfered with when it is, "necessary to do so in a democratic society".[7] This might include reasons like protecting national security or public safety, preventing crime or protecting the rights of other people. However, any interference with your right to privacy must be 'proportionate' - no more than is absolutely necessary to achieve one of these aims. The right to a private life is based on the principles of human dignity and is linked to many other rights such as equal treatment and free expression. A society that does not respect personal privacy is one where dignity, autonomy and trust are dangerously undermined. In the Hub, we offer advice and support to Oakley, along with providing services for free as we are anti-poverty and non profit. **Beating poverty is only possible when people work together.**

**Beating poverty is
only possible
when people work
together.**



[7] Article 8 of Human Rights Act

Yet, this task is far from easy when you are looking at trying to change attitudes and behaviours established over generations. People live in very different circumstances within a community and many want to keep their affairs private. However, we can begin to make changes by bringing people together in the community where they live. The work I have been doing has helped to change my views on the way communities work.

Addressing Period Poverty

◆ During the HIIC course I have also been working on a group project which is about woman's health, and period poverty in particular. While doing the research I found out that one of the high schools in my community were participating in a period poverty scheme called "Hey Girls". In my school I wasn't aware of any schemes for period poverty going on but, during the group project I carried out a conversation with my head teacher and I asked, then encouraged the school through the head teacher, to put the pads out in the bathrooms instead of hiding them in the teacher's bases. Then the following day I went into school and noticed the pads in the school toilets. This has made me feel empowered and made me realise that I can make a greater change in my community.

Widening awareness through drama

◆ Our HIIC group **wrote a short play about self-harm and suicide called "She Died Waiting"**. Sophie is a 17-year-old girl who struggled to cope with the death of her grand-father. She lived at home with her mother who was working two jobs to pay the bills and keep them both, plus she was in the middle of school exams. Sadly, Sophie took her own life because help was not available at a time, she most needed it.

This was a powerful message to let people know that services need urgently updated. There is a comprehensive list of places to go in Dundee (our local council) but they need to be distributed to every community centre/hub, doctors' surgeries, libraries and other social outlets. People in need should know exactly where to go for information and assistance appertaining to them. We also feel that there is a need for doctors (receptionists) health professionals to be re-trained. Since writing our play we have been asked to perform it (firstly at Douglas Community Centre) with family and friends.



Then we had MSP Shona Robinson at another meeting, Abertay University, Dundee University, A.D.H.D. group, Glasgow WEvolution group. CHEX (Community Health Exchange) Glasgow, Aberdeen and the SPG (strategic planning group).

On reflection of the impact our short drama had on our family, friends and the wider community we each felt we had gained a lot of confidence. We began to realise that people were listening as we were being invited to perform at more venues. The audiences were always different, we were reaching more and more people who were willing to listen. We felt empowered and confident we could help to make change that we decided to look to our local areas. Every performance prompted a spontaneous discussion as everyone could relate to the story. It was an enlightening as well as a heart-breaking discovery, for although when we wrote the script it was not based on any person, it was based on parts of our life experiences it **suddenly became everyone's story, a story everyone could relate to.**

...it suddenly became everyone's story, a story everyone could relate to.



The research, and the determination of us as individuals and also as a group has been having quite a big input into the mental health provisions in our local area. We have managed to break down barriers and stigma around this once never talked about condition by delivering our play that we wrote and performed. Opening up discussions, telling our stories and hearing other stories. As we near the end to HIIC part 2 I am leaving a stronger more confident person with lifelong friends. We will still continue our work out with this group but one thing for sure is we're stronger as a team and will keep fighting until drastic change happens. Coming into this one of our goals was to try and get a 24hr support system unit opened, used for when someone is in a crisis and a safe space for them. Dundee is now in the middle of setting up such a service and it will open in the near future, I personally can't wait for more changes like this to happen.

Wider action on inclusion and solidarity

◆ These performances led to serious discussions about what can be done to help vulnerable people and where they should go. It has encouraged more men to become involved because most of them see mental health as a taboo or a weakness (not a "real mans" illness). We need to get rid of this stigma men are just as prone to mental health issues as woman.

◆ Firstly as a group **we helped to set up and volunteer at a fortnightly Healthy Minds Drop In** at a local venue, Rainbow House. We are welcoming and make people feel comfortable. Refreshments are provided free of charge as are all services. We try to have a different main activity each time we meet

As part of the Healthy Minds drop in – East End, we are looking to continue to develop our communication with local people, and services. Getting people more involved in services for and with them. In responding to their expressed needs, we hope to continue to bring local government, local volunteer agencies and local centres together. We will have focus groups quarterly as part of the Healthy Minds Drop in, continue to develop relevant publicity and to listen to the needs of local people and be part of the solution.

At a CHEX conference in Glasgow we were introduced to a gentleman named Dylan. He is an ambassador for the displaced Syrian refugees who arrived recently in our country. After talks and email exchanges we managed to apply and were granted a sum of money. This was to allow us to **invite and interact with local Syrian families, to welcome them and help them integrate into our local community as it is now their local community.** So far, it's in the early stages and hasn't happened yet, but we hope to encourage participation in Rainbow House.

Obviously if this doesn't happen, we will refund the monies given so another group can benefit. Hopefully the Syrian families can come along and see what is on offer. Together we can educate each other on both our cultures. We had suggested different food taster sessions with both groups cooking their own dishes and sharing tips and recipes. We hope to have the capacity to supply an interpreter to help overcome language barriers. We will keep a line of communication open in the hope we can still get together and assist with their resettlement.

Active Involvement

◆ I am getting more involved in my community by attending regular public meetings and sharing these meetings on my social media asking others to get involved. I have also found that by sharing knowledge and experience can encourage individuals to get involved. I am now in the process of becoming a volunteer for Fife council, I am involved in West Fife villages community hub alongside other local volunteers. I will move forward by completing training sessions with Dunfermline food bank.



◆ I am passionate about helping others as I am on the board for Castlemilk Youth Complex, helping make changes in my community and creating a voice for those who don't always have power. I encourage others to get involved in making a difference in their community and starting the process of community development.

◆ I have realized that supporting community organizations and social action approaches has significant potential to achieve better changes. Through HIIC I have gained more confidence, I will take the presentation and group work skills I have learned and use them to help me to move forward.

◆ The impact of doing this group work project is for me to educate even more people in my community, by holding more presentation groups within the youth complex and invite people from my community as well as people from other parts of Glasgow and the higher authority for example business owners and local MSPs. People that are able to encourage and help me carry out greater changes and spread awareness of period poverty schemes which are free such as 'Always'. Lastly through HIIC and seeing the changes that I can make I am looking to join a local women against

capitalism group to tackle poverty and inequalities for women in my own community and the rest of Glasgow.

◆ We have had many invites onto other panels to voice our opinions in regards to mental health in our communities. We are being listened too, valued members of the public. I've learnt so many things with doing this course, from finding out how many services there are available to people needing/using mental health provisions, how deprivation is very high due to all the cuts within local councils, due to austerity policies. I've been on further learning courses, completed peer to peer training around mental health, and made links with volunteer Dundee.

◆ The learning opportunities that have arisen from doing the play through HIIC have been phenomenal. I have sat on the mental health regeneration programme and also have been taking part in the mental health archives at Dundee University looking at how things were 100 years ago, and at the end of this we get to record our story to put into the archives so people will be able to look back and see what it was like in 2019.



◆ From our first presentation there were community members who expressed an interest in what we were doing and so they then attended an introductory short HIIC course with our group members, who have completed their HIIC facilitators training to deliver the course.

It is our hope that **this can be the start of increased participation, political awareness and action group petitioning of our local authority, amongst others, to have our community's views influence decision making which impacts on all our lives and health.**

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From our work so far we feel that we are able to engage with local people with a real understanding of the genuine concerns which exist to stop people sharing their views on the issues affecting them **and have a real appreciation of the feelings of blame and inadequacy that people take on from the way the media reports all the issues of our society.**

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More information about the Health Issues in the
Community course please visit www.hiic.org.uk

