

# Case study 149

## What Works in Tackling Poverty

### EPiC - Evidence Participation Change Project

#### What are case studies?

Case studies share what people and organisations have learned from delivering or developing a project or programme. They can help you to see what has worked on the ground and can give you ideas about how to tackle problems. They can also signpost you to people and organisations you may want to talk to.

#### EPiC - Evidence Participation Change

Tel: 0141 353 0440

[www.povertyalliance.org](http://www.povertyalliance.org)

#### Key Contacts:

Policy and Parliamentary Officer

Sarah Welford

#### E-mail:

[sarah.welford@povertyalliance.org](mailto:sarah.welford@povertyalliance.org)

Community Research Officer

Fiona McHardy

#### E-mail:

[fiona.mchardy@povertyalliance.org](mailto:fiona.mchardy@povertyalliance.org)

#### In a nutshell

EPiC is a four year participatory project lead by the Poverty Alliance and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Its overall aim is to support people with experience of poverty, grassroots community and voluntary organisations to influence the development of anti-poverty policy within Scotland. The three key elements to the project are:

- **Training** for grassroots groups to help them better understand how change can be made
- **Community / Participatory Research** to enable communities to generate their own evidence
- The development of new spaces for discussion and debate in the form of **Participatory Forums** - bringing together policy makers and people with experience of poverty, community and voluntary groups to influence the development of policy.

## The issues

Involving people with experience of poverty has always been at the heart of the approach the Poverty Alliance, the anti-poverty network in Scotland, has taken to their work. They believe that the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is central to finding the solutions to the problems that affect their lives. Since establishment almost 20 years ago, the Alliance has developed and supported a wide range of projects that have taken a variety of approaches to support engagement in policy development. An important lesson has been learnt from this work which has helped focus priorities – *there needs to be a process to support participation*. Too many projects around participation are under resourced, short term, and not linked to mainstream processes.

Since Scotland achieved its own Parliament in 1999 there has been a number of anti-poverty strategies developed. Whilst these have often involved large scale consultations in their development, including with people experiencing poverty, it was felt that they have not maintained *consistent* engagement with people and organisations at the grassroots.

## The EPiC approach

The Evidence, Participation, Change (EPiC) project was initiated by the Poverty Alliance in 2009 as a process to support participation. The aim is to demonstrate the value of consistent engagement and dialogue in the development of policy and its monitoring and evaluation. The project aims to support community based organisations and individuals within them who have experience of the issues to get involved in local and national policy making through:

## Training

Information and training is provided over a two day course to support community groups and the individuals to understand how best to get their voice heard in the right places and the best way to do it.

From an organisation's perspective the EPiC training:

- Creates the opportunity to hear directly from communities about how poverty affects them in their area
- Enables people to use and view this knowledge as a basis for taking action at different levels in order to instigate change
- Explores public attitudes to poverty and why this is key to gathering support for anti poverty policy.

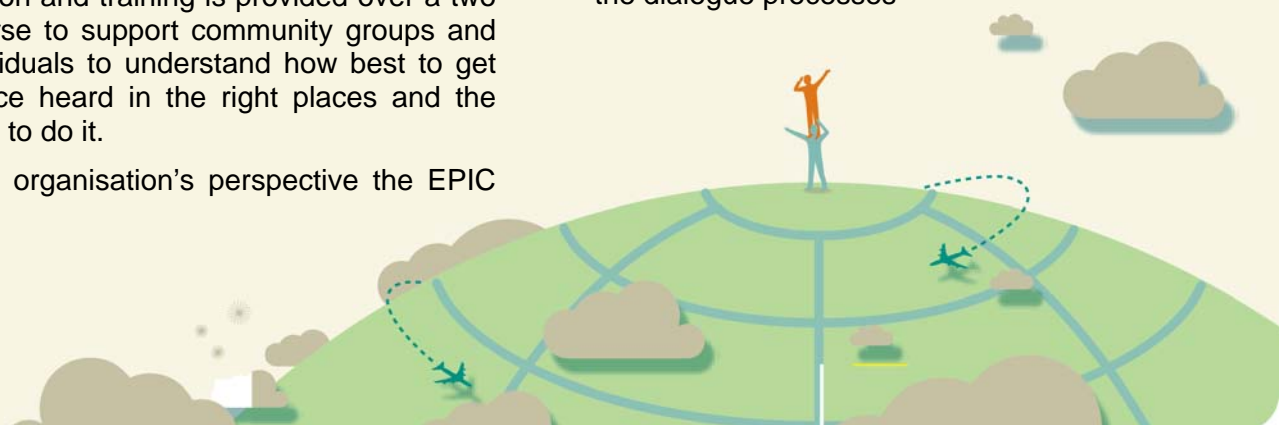
What participants can expect:

- To understand how decisions are made, who makes them and how people can get involved
- To learn what the Scottish Government is doing to tackle poverty and how people can be heard on issues that they think are important
- Understanding of what is being done on issues people think are important
- Information and opportunities to meet with decision makers in the Scottish Government to make their voice heard
- Opportunities to meet with other organisations and people affected by / working on similar issues to make their voice stronger
- Support to carry out actions after the training.

## Community / Participatory Research

There is a historical trend of research being conducted 'on' communities, with them as the subject matter of the research process. Community / participatory research seeks to bring about a new type of process, one that empowers individuals and groups to take control and ownership of the research process. EPiC's approach looks to:

- Provide an evidence base of issues being experienced by communities to be fed into the dialogue processes



- Carry out full participatory research which is identified by, carried out by and presented by those who have experience / knowledge of the issues
- Provide a full training programme and continuous ongoing support for participants.

### Participatory Forums

The overall objective of the participatory forums is to create a space for ongoing dialogue amongst those who are directly involved in policy making, those working to influence it and those affected by the policy outcomes. It aims to create a space where people can gather as equals and work towards improved anti poverty policy making. It also allows monitoring of 'Achieving our Potential', the Scottish Government's anti poverty framework, highlighting where progress is being made and where weaknesses remain.

### Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty

The Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty provides an important opportunity for all of those engaged in the fight against poverty in Scotland, from inside and out of Government, to come together to debate where progress has been made and how to address the challenges of the future. Participants are from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences from across Scotland. Crucially the Assembly is a forum where those with experience of poverty can have a direct debate with those responsible for developing policy.

### Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum

The Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum is made up of around 40 members; one third is drawn from senior, national and local government civil servants, one third from the voluntary sector and one third is people with direct experience of poverty. The forum meets every six months to review the progress made on 'Achieving our Potential'. It is membership based which means that the same people meet on a regular basis, thus creating continuity and accountability. Working groups are formed to take forward key issues that are collectively agreed by members. There have been three short life working groups so far focusing on:

- Health inequalities
- Stigma of people living in poverty
- Child poverty.

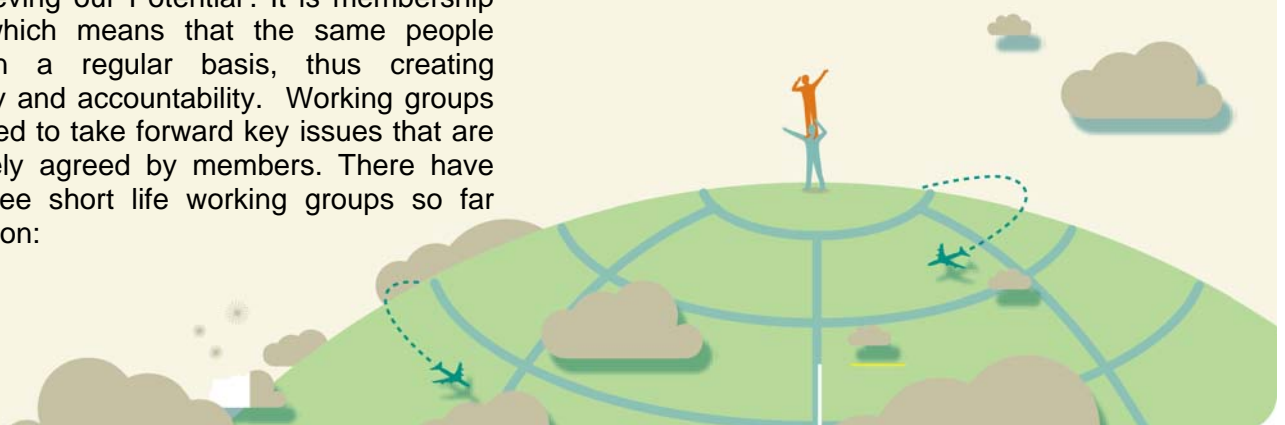
### Health inequalities working group what worked well?

1. The reasons for participation were clear, resulting in realistic expectations for all participants
2. Preparation meetings were held with other community members. Those involved in the working group were not simply reflecting on their own experience but could draw on that of others in their community
3. The senior level civil servant who led on this working group had a very good understanding of participation ensuring the right conditions were in place
4. Time was dedicated to understanding the roles and responsibilities of policy makers meaning that people involved were clearer on how policy making happens and what the possibilities and the limitations are
5. There was upfront commitment from the policy makers to feed back to the group after hearing their experiences. This addressed the *consultation fatigue* that is so often an unintended outcome of such processes
6. Respectful and real dialogue was created between the participants which enabled a two way exchange, rather than a one sided extraction of information.

### Evidence of success

#### Training

- 20 organisations / 50 participants engaged with the EPiC training 2009/10
- 18 organisations / 72 participants engaged with the EPiC training 2010/11.



*"I think in the future I will be going to the Government, and saying how I feel and getting my views across."*

*"I would love to take this training to community groups in my area - think it's all relevant and important to encourage people to think about it."*

*"The video footage was good for acknowledging other people's perspectives on poverty and campaigning and made me think - if they can do that, so could I."*

*"Glad I participated, learnt a great deal about policy implementation, how to follow through what you want to petition about."*

### **Community / Participatory Research**

Two EPiC research briefings were launched at the 2011 Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty. This research has allowed for vulnerable people's voices to be heard through control and ownership of the process:

- 'Lost Sheep, looking for somewhere to go?' a participatory study into young people in the transition from school to employment, education or training. Provides a snapshot of the views of young people in two community regeneration areas in Stirling. Supported by Stirling Council's Youth Services
- Young researchers engaging with the project totalled 150 hours of volunteering each and awarded Dynamic Youth and Millennium Volunteer Awards.

*"I have learned a lot about what poverty is and how it affects people, a year ago I didn't think I would have cared about this but now I am really thinking about it"*

*"I have become much more confident due to the things we have done. We have done things like interview both people our age and older people. I also got the chance to go into parliament and talk to The MSP's about our work. This time last year I wouldn't have done any of that. This project has boosted my confidence so much I love it"*

*"I feel as though I have learned to push myself and stop saying I can't do, I then go away and prove myself wrong"*

- 'Out of Jail but still not free' a community research approach to researching the experiences of temporary accommodation on leaving prison. Focused on the experiences of 10 ex-offenders, all part of the Wise Group's Routes out of Prison (RooP) partnership
- The EPiC project was awarded the Wise Group 2010 valued partner award for innovative research.

### **The Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty**

- 199 people attended the first Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty in 2010
- 239 people attended day one of the 2011 Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty and 205 people on day two.

*"Well organised and good to see a diverse range of speakers from different backgrounds..."*

*"Chance to make my voice and options heard"*

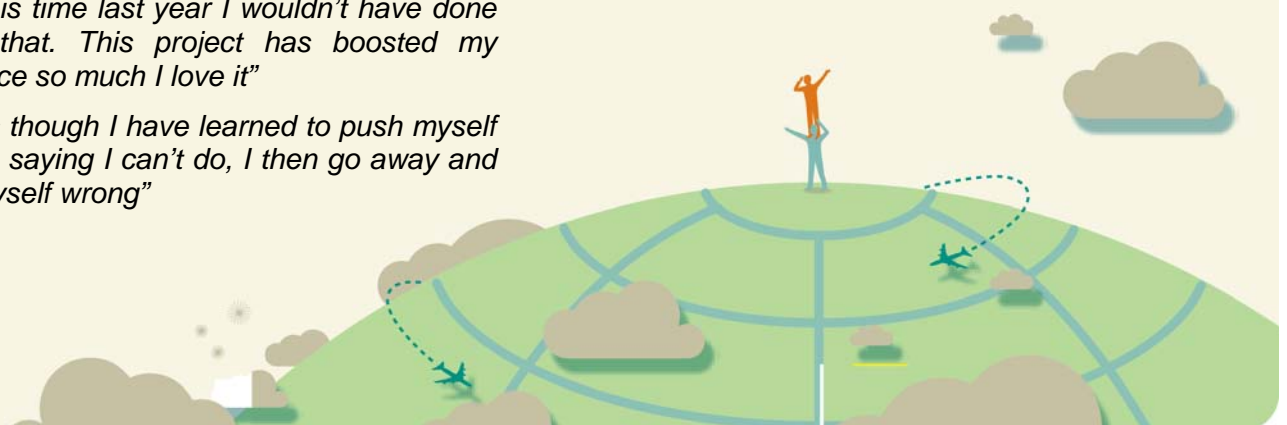
*"Speakers were great and workshops inspiring"*

*"It was well balanced and had people with real life experiences giving presentations..."*

*"Really enjoyed the whole day, learned a great deal about research, engagement, policy making, left inspired and hopeful..."*

### **Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum**

- There are currently 49 members of the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum
- The first working group on health inequalities directly influenced the content of the review for the health inequality policy in Scotland.





*“The sub groups are particularly useful. Getting the opportunity to participate in these and look at how to tackle the issues together rather than separately. There isn’t a specific forum for poverty and poverty issues so it is useful to have a regular one like this. It’s good to have a forum that doesn’t only focus on what the problems are but also what we can do about it”*

*“So far the Stakeholder Forum has influenced the anti poverty aspect of my work quite a lot. Particularly with regards to the emphasis on financial inclusion and the need for universal public services which was reinforced by the discussions at the Forum. The discussions held made the need for it that much more real.”*

### Challenges

The current economic climate in which the EPiC project operates has proved challenging. Change in Government at a UK level has also led to a significant shift in the policy direction. This context has had a significant affect on the delivery of the anti-poverty strategy in Scotland. This can be disheartening for those attempting to influence policy, as it may appear than their efforts are wasted and key calls are being ignored. It also adds further complexity to the process of building a network of organisations and individuals who have experience of the issues of poverty and who are willing *and* ready to get involved:

- People do not like being labeled as ‘poor’
- Individuals are often at different stages of engagement and participation due to issues with confidence and/or trust
- Community and voluntary organisations under pressure in terms of allocating resource and evidencing outcomes tend to prioritise their focus on micro interventions making it difficult to engage them in macro level activity
- There is mistrust and cynicism about politics and what change can be made
- Influencing policy is intangible and results do not come about quickly – this is frustrating for participants

- Dedicating more intensive community engagement, supporting action on key issues and ensuring the participation of very vulnerable groups, ie those in need of language or mobility support, is challenging due to limited resources
- Organisations and politicians are in need of capacity building in order to effectively engage in *meaningful* dialogue at a grassroots level.

### Lessons Learnt

1. Clarity from the outset as to what can and cannot be achieved - this is essential to maintaining trust
2. Promotion of the value of networking with other individuals, groups, organisations and of being part of a movement
3. The development of a jargon buster to help develop *meaningful* dialogue
4. Flexibility – being open to tailoring learning to fit with individual or group needs rather than having a set approach
5. A more creative approach to evidencing change – keeping participants up to date of where and how their views and experiences are being used – no matter how small scale or in what context - it’s about constantly letting people know their voices matter.

### One great thing

People who have never had the confidence or opportunity to voice their experience and views are participating in research, discussions and in events like the Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty or meeting with policy makers as part of the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum. This has been significant breakthrough in developing a consistent approach to engagement and dialogue.



## Why would this approach work elsewhere in Scotland?

EPiC is a model that could be re-created or built on to develop *consistent* engagement with people and organisations at the grassroots. This is essential to the *real* participation of people with the experience of the issues in the development of policy and its monitoring and evaluation.

## What next?

EPiC has a further 2 years to run. The Poverty Alliance will use this time to try and gain the commitment of the Scottish Government that this type of engagement in policy development should be supported and continued.



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### Scottish Centre for Regeneration

This document is published by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration, which is part of the Scottish Government. We support our public, private and voluntary sector delivery partners to become more effective at:

- regenerating communities and tackling poverty
- developing more successful town centres and local high streets
- creating and managing mixed and sustainable communities
- making housing more energy efficient
- managing housing more efficiently and effectively

We do this through:

- coordinating learning networks which bring people together to identify the challenges they face and to support them to tackle these through events, networking and capacity building programmes
- identifying and sharing innovation and practice through publishing documents detailing examples of projects and programmes and highlighting lessons learned
- developing partnerships with key players in the housing and regeneration sector to ensure that our activities meet their needs and support their work

Scottish Centre for Regeneration, Scottish Government, Highlander House, 58 Waterloo Street, Glasgow, G2 7DA  
Tel: 0141 271 3736 Email: [contactscr@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:contactscr@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.partnersinregeneration.com](http://www.partnersinregeneration.com)

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