

Growing up in poverty

The voices of babies, children and young people from Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Director of Public Health Report 2025/2026 in partnership with the Directors of Children's Services for Cornwall Council and The Council of the Isles of Scilly.



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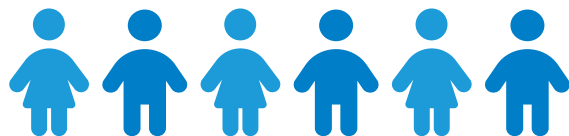
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Foreword | Raglavar

I am delighted to share this report with you, my first as Interim Director of Public Health for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. I have chosen to focus on one of the most pressing issues facing our communities - child poverty.

Director of Public Health reports are traditionally quite formal. **This year, we've chosen to do something different.** While data and statistics remain vital, and you'll find these to explore in Appendix 2, **this report goes beyond numbers.**

With the support of local voluntary and community organisations, **we've been privileged to hand this report over to our babies, children, young people and families.** Through art, storytelling, and other creative methods, they shared what it's like to grow up in poverty. **Their voices are at the heart of this report.** We are deeply grateful to every child, young person, parent, carer, practitioner and organisation who contributed.

Children and young people repeatedly told us that poverty and the worry it brings feels like an "adult issue" they don't want to be part of. Yet they live with its consequences every day. **Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life, including their physical health, social and emotional wellbeing, education and their future aspirations.** The evidence from babies, children, and young people in this report gives voice to a crisis that cannot be ignored.

Poverty is not inevitable. It is shaped by policy, systems and choices and it can be changed. This report is a call to action for all of us. We are committed to working with our partners, communities, and most importantly, our babies, children and young people, to respond to what this report tells us. We will use it to shape our strategies, inform our services, and challenge ourselves to do better.

I hope this report inspires reflection, compassion, and action, so that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can be a place where every child thrives.

Dr Eunan O'Neill

Director of Public Health (Interim)

Cornwall Council and Council of the Isles of Scilly

Pes da dres eghen ov vy dhe gevrenna an derivas ma genowgh, ow hynsa avel Kevarwodher Servadow Yeghes Poblek rag Kernow ha Syllan. My re dhewisas fogella war onan a'n materyow an moyha posek owth enebi agan kemenethow – boghosogneth fleghe.

Derivasow Kevarwodher Yeghes Poblek yw herwydh usadow formel lowr. Hevlana, ni re dhewisas gul neppyth dihaual. Kyn fo data ha statystygyon hwath posek dres eghen, ha hwi a gyv an re ma yn Ystynnans 2 rag aga hwithra, an derivas ma a dhyght moy es niverow.

Skoodhys gans kowethyansow kemenethel ha bodhek leel, enorys re beun delivra an derivas ma dh'agan babanes, fleghe, yonkers ha teyluyow. Der art, hwedhla, ha methodys awenek erel, i a gevrannas fatel yw tevi yn boghosogneth. Yma agan levow orth kolon an derivas ma. Synsys dres eghen on ni dhe bub flogh, yonker, kar, gwithyas, praktisyor ha kowethyans re gevros.

Fleghe ha yonkers a dherivas dhyn arta hag arta yth hevel dhedha bos boghosogneth, ha'n bern a dheu ganso, kepar ha "mater tevesik" na vynnons i bos rann anodho. Byttegyns, i a vyw gans y sewyansow pub dydh oll. Boghosogneth a wra tochyha pub rann a vewnans flogh, ow komprehendya aga yeghes korfek, aga sewena socyal hag amovyanssek, aga adhyskans ha'ga gwaytyansow rag an termyn a dheu. An dustuni dhyworth babanes, fleghe, ha yonkers y'n derivas ma a re lev dhe varras na yllyn ni skonya y aswon.

Nyns yw boghosogneth anwoheladow. Shapyes yw gans polici, systemow ha dewisyow ha hi a yll bos chanjys. An derivas ma yw galow dhyn ni oll a wul neppyth. Omres on ni dhe gesoberi gans agan keskowetha, agan kemenethow, ha moyha posek oll, gans agan babanes, fleghe ha yonkers, dhe worthebi dhe'n kedhlow y'n derivas ma. Ni a vynn gul devnydh anodho rag shapya agan stratejiow, kedhla agan servisyow, ha chalenjya agan honan dhe wul gwell.

My a wayt y hwra an derivas ma aweni ombrederow, tregeredh, ha gwriansow, may hallo bos Kernow ha Syllan le may ma pub flogh sewen.

Dr Eunan O'Neill

Kevarwodher Yeghes Poblek (Servadow)

Konsel Kernow ha Konsel Syllan

Foreword | Raglavar

As Directors of Children's Services we are proud to stand together alongside our colleagues in Public Health in presenting this report. It is a report that does not shy away from the difficult truths.

Children and young people told us how it feels not to have enough money. They spoke about the shame and stigma of living in poverty, feeling judged, excluded and like there is little room for hopes, dreams and aspirations.

One young person told us: **"It's a hard place to grow up but it definitely makes you a better person, after growing up there and experiencing the harsh reality of life."** This insight captures both the hardship and the resilience that many children and young people expressed, but this should not be the reality for our children. **Poverty is a problem we must not ignore.**

This report is grounded in a 'think family' approach, recognising that children cannot be separated from the environments and relationships that shape their lives. It explores the impact of poverty across the life course, from infancy to young adulthood, and highlights how poverty can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage across generations.

It is also firmly aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. **Every child has the right to be heard, to be safe, to be healthy, and to thrive. Poverty undermines these rights.**

Importantly, this report also offers hope. It highlights examples of good practice already happening across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, initiatives that are making a real difference in children's lives. These examples show us what's possible.

“

Every child has the **right** to be **heard**, to be **safe**, to be **healthy**, and to **thrive. Poverty undermines these rights.**

Avel Kevarwodhoryon Gonisyow Fleghe, yth on ni gothus dhe vos war-barth ryb tenewen agan kowethysi yn Yeghe Poblek ow profya an derivas ma. Derivas yw na avoyd an gwiryow kales.

Fleghe ha yonkers a leveris dhyn a fatel omglewons nag eus dhedha arghans lowr. I a gewsis a'n veth ha'n mewl a vewa yn boghosogneth, owth omglewes breusys, ekskludyes, ha bos spas boghes rag govenegow, hunrosow ha gwaytyansow.

Unn yonker a leveris dhyn: "Tyller kales yw dhe adhvesi mes gwella person os wosa adhvesi ena ow perthi gwirvos garow bewnans." An wolok ma a syns ha'n anken ha'n gwedhynder hag a dherivis meur a fleghe ha yonkers, mes ny godh bos hemma an gwirvos rag agan fleghe. Boghosogneth yw kudyn na dal dhyn skonya aswon.

Selys yw an derivas ma yn towl 'prederi a deylu', owth aswon na yll bos fleghe diberthys a'n kerghynnedhow ha'n keskolmow usi ow shapya aga bewnansow. Ev a hwither an effeyth a voghosogneth dres an bewnans, dhyworth flogoleth bys yn tevesigieth yowynk, ha golowboyntya fatel yll boghosogneth gul pesya troyow a anles dres henedhow.

Fest alinyes yw ynwedh orth Akordyans a Wiryow Fleghe an Kenedhlow Unys. Yma dhe bub flogh an gwir dhe vos klewys, dhe vos yagh, ha dhe seweni. Boghosogneth a bal yn-dann an gwiryow ma.

Yn posek, y prof ynwedh an derivas ma govenek. Ev a wolowboynt ensamplys a braktis da ow hwarvos seulabrys a-dreus Kernow ha Syllan, tolow a wra dyffrans gwir dhe vewnansow fleghe. An ensamplys ma a dhiskwedh dhyn an pyth yw possybyl.



We would especially like to recognise our inspirational Youth Council who have been integral to the development of this report – you will see their insights and reflections throughout.

To every baby, child, young person and parent who shared their story: thank you. Your honesty, creativity and courage to share your story is powerful.

Kate Evans-Hughes
Strategic Director:
Together for Families

Cornwall Council

Anne Coyle
Director of Children's Service
(Interim)

Council of the Isles of Scilly

Ni a vynsa aswon yn arbennik agan Konsel awenek a Dus Yowynk neb re beu kresel dhe dhisplegyans an derivas ma – hwi a wra gweles aga gologow ha'ga frederyansow dre bub rann.

Dhe bub baban, flogh, yonker ha kar neb a gevrannas aga hwedhel: meur ras. Gallosek yw agas onester, awenekter ha kolonekter dhe gevrenna agas hwedhel.

Kate Evans-Hughes
Lewydh Stratejek:
War-barth rag Teyluyow

Konsel Kernow

Anne Coyle
Kevarwodher Gonisyow
Fleghes (Anbarghus)

Konsel Syllan

A note on language

Poverty stigma can be understood as a specific form of stigma in which people and communities are 'devalued because they live in poverty or access services designed to support people living on low incomes'.¹ Poverty stigma impacts on people's mental health and wellbeing and their willingness to access services and support, or to participate in their communities. It is therefore important that the topic of poverty is discussed in a way that does not create stigma or reinforce societal prejudices.

The language we use matters.

“

Stigma is a powerful glue that holds poverty in place, enabling and exacerbating inequalities of wealth, health and opportunity.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

A Children's Commissioner for Wales consultation found that children and young people felt that the term “poverty” was sensitive and age appropriate.² They also viewed the phrases “families living on a low income” or “families who do not have enough money for the things they need” as sensitive alternatives. A consultation by the Association for Young People's Health found that young people have a strong preference for their identity not to be defined by the single characteristic of “poor” or “deprived”.³ We have taken these insights, along with guidance from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Poverty Framing Toolkit⁴, into account when writing this report.



Introduction and background



Introduction

Each year, Directors of Public Health produce an annual report that explores the health of their local population.

This year, in partnership with the Directors of Children's Services for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, we've chosen to use this report to **shine a spotlight on one of the most urgent challenges facing our communities: child poverty.**

Poverty affects every part of a child's life, including their health, social and emotional wellbeing, education and their future aspirations. It's not right that **over 27,000 babies, children and young people (0-19 years old) in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CIOS) are growing up in relative poverty.**

“
That seems like
a lot! I didn't
expect that!”

Cornwall Youth
Council member



For many, poverty means going without basic necessities – living in a cold home, going to school or bed hungry, not having a warm winter coat, missing out on family activities, or being denied the chance to try new things or hobbies through extra-curricular clubs and school trips. A recent report by the Commission on Young Lives stated that it is impossible to overestimate how important poverty is as a driver for so many of the social problems ruining and holding back lives.⁵

Low pay, insecure work, inadequate benefits and financial support, and high living costs are locking families in poverty and limiting their options. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience poorer health, lower educational outcomes, and reduced opportunities in adulthood, creating a cycle of poverty that can persist across generations.

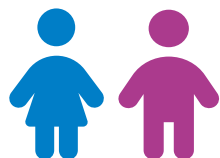
Tackling child poverty is not only a moral imperative, it is also an economic one. It is estimated that child poverty costs the UK £39 billion a year due to the greater risk of unemployment and lower earnings potential of adults who grew up in poverty, and the additional amount spent on public services to help address the damage done to children growing up in poverty.⁶

“
It's not just a holiday
destination... **it's our home.**”

Cornwall Youth Council member

If we are to effectively tackle poverty in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, first we must understand it. In this report we will examine what causes child poverty, why it is a problem, and what the data tells us in numbers. But the report goes beyond statistics on child poverty. It shares the realities of living in poverty for our babies, children and young people in their own words.

Their voices are at the heart of this report.



Child poverty and its impact on health is not inevitable. We can take action to both prevent poverty and reduce the impact it has on people's lives. But poverty cannot be addressed by one action alone, it requires collaboration, commitment and brave decisions at national, regional and local levels.

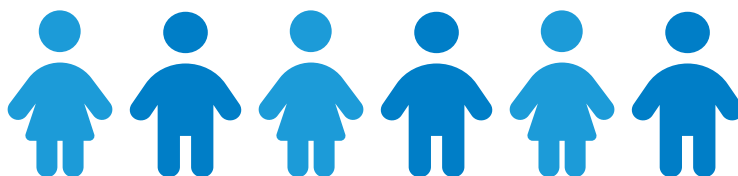


1 in 5 (20%)

of **children and young people** in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are **growing up in relative poverty.**

In July 2024, the Government announced the creation of a new Ministerial **Child Poverty Taskforce**.⁷ The Taskforce will oversee the development of a national Child Poverty Strategy, which aims to improve children's lives and life chances now and tackle the root causes of child poverty in the long term.

Child Poverty Taskforce
aims to give all children
the best start in life



Addressing child poverty is also a priority for England's Children's Commissioner and the focus of their recent report which explored children's experiences of growing up in low-income families.

...poverty cannot be addressed by one action alone, it requires collaboration, commitment and brave decisions at national, regional and local levels.



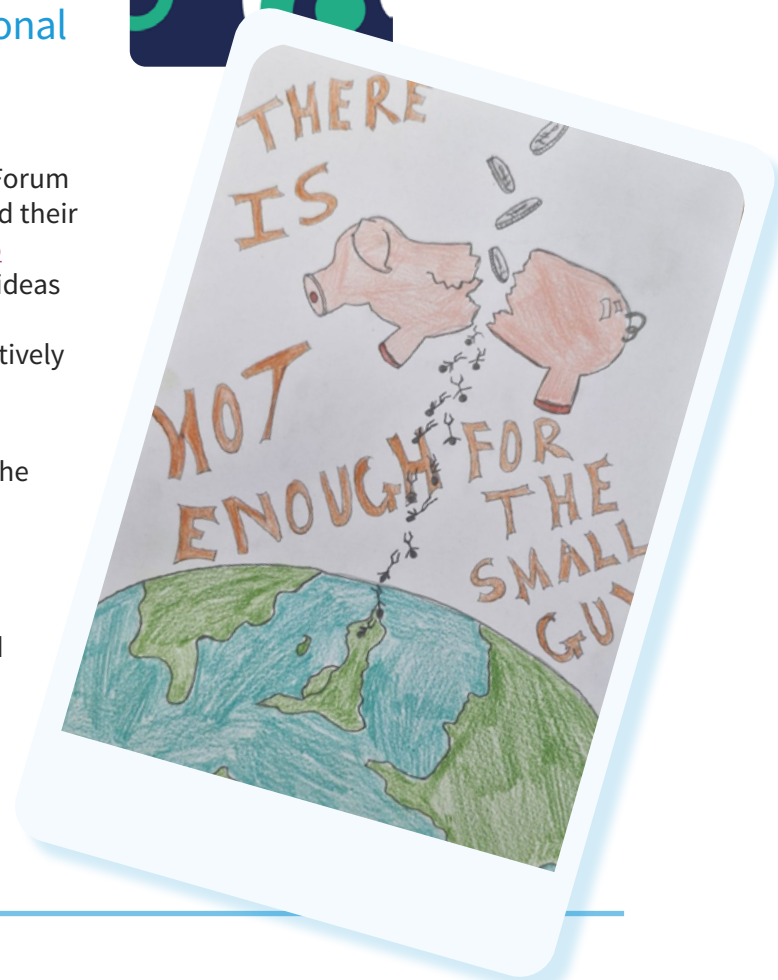
Locally, Cornwall Independent Poverty Forum have recently published their **Community Manifesto** which brings together ideas from local people and organisations to proactively address poverty.⁸

This report presents valuable insights into the experience of child

poverty across CIOs. It is our duty to use these to drive meaningful change. The report begins to explore practical and informed local recommendations which should be considered and implemented across CIOs.



These actions aim to unlock poverty's constraints on our babies, children and young people and to help ensure that CIOs is a caring place for families, **where every child can build a bright future and thrive.**



Creating this report

Reading and research

We explored a range of information about poverty and its impact on children. This included reviewing local data on child poverty in CIOS, as well as national research on how poverty affects children's health, wellbeing, and future opportunities. We looked closely at key articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to understand how poverty can affect these rights.

Partner engagement

We worked closely with a group of partners from local authority teams and the VCSE sector. This group helped guide the development of the report. We also ran an online survey for professionals from all sectors who work with babies, children, and young people across CIOS. The survey asked about the impact of poverty on children, and how supporting children and families in poverty affects their organisations.



“
Really cool how
they communicate
with babies.”

Cornwall Youth
Council member

Listening to babies, children and young people

Through partnerships with local VCSE organisations and schools, we connected with babies, children, and young people across CIOS. All children, including babies and young children, have a right to meaningful participation. To elicit the voice of babies and very young children, we worked with VCSE organisations trained in evidence-based Newborn Baby Observations. These observations give insight into very young babies' lived experiences and were translated into first-person written records of their experiences. Cornwall is pioneering this approach, using learning from Scotland's Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines, to ensure non-verbal babies, children and young people are given voice.⁹

VCSE organisations hosted creative engagement sessions, where participants used art, storytelling, and other creative methods to share what it's like growing up in poverty. Some of their powerful contributions are featured throughout this report. Guided by an evidenced based approach, all of the responses shared with us were analysed for themes and subthemes¹⁰. These are presented throughout this report, alongside creative outputs and quotes that are illustrative of these themes.



Children and young people in schools and youth groups were invited to draw or describe what 'health and happiness' means to them. This activity was not designed to document children's direct experiences of poverty. Instead, it aimed to capture what children in CIOs feel they need to be able thrive, helping to shape our recommendations for action.

A call to action

To complete this report, we brought together the key themes shared across the engagement activities into an open letter. This letter reflects the voices of babies, children, and young people across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. They describe what it's like to grow up in poverty, how it affects their lives, and the changes they want to see. The letter is a call to action, asking for meaningful steps to reduce poverty and its impact in their communities.



We partnered with



local VCSE
organisations

We held



engagement events
with **Cornwall Youth
Council** members



195 parents and carers
took part in creative sessions



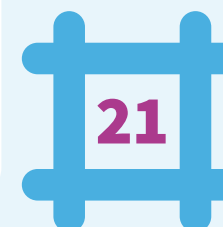
**babies, children and young people shared
their voices through creative sessions**



**practitioners
told us what
they are seeing
through our
online survey**



We
received



**pieces of
artwork from
schools.**

What is poverty?



What is poverty?

People experience poverty when they don't have enough money or resources to meet basic needs, like not being able to pay their rent, buy food, or heat their home.¹³

There is no single, universally accepted definition of poverty.¹⁴ It is a complex problem that needs a range of measures telling us different things. Some measures focus on people's incomes, while others look at people's ability to access or afford everyday goods and services. These measures help us to understand the scale of the issue, but they don't fully capture what it is like to live in poverty. We therefore need to use these measures alongside listening to the lived experiences of children affected by poverty. The two most common ways to measure poverty focus on household income.

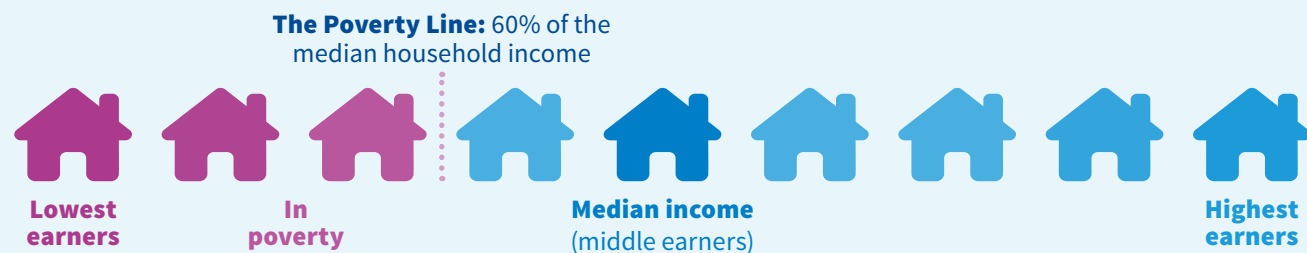
Absolute poverty

Children in households with incomes below 60% of the UK median household income (the point at which half of households have lower income and half have higher income) in 2010/11, adjusted for inflation. This measure shows whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms.

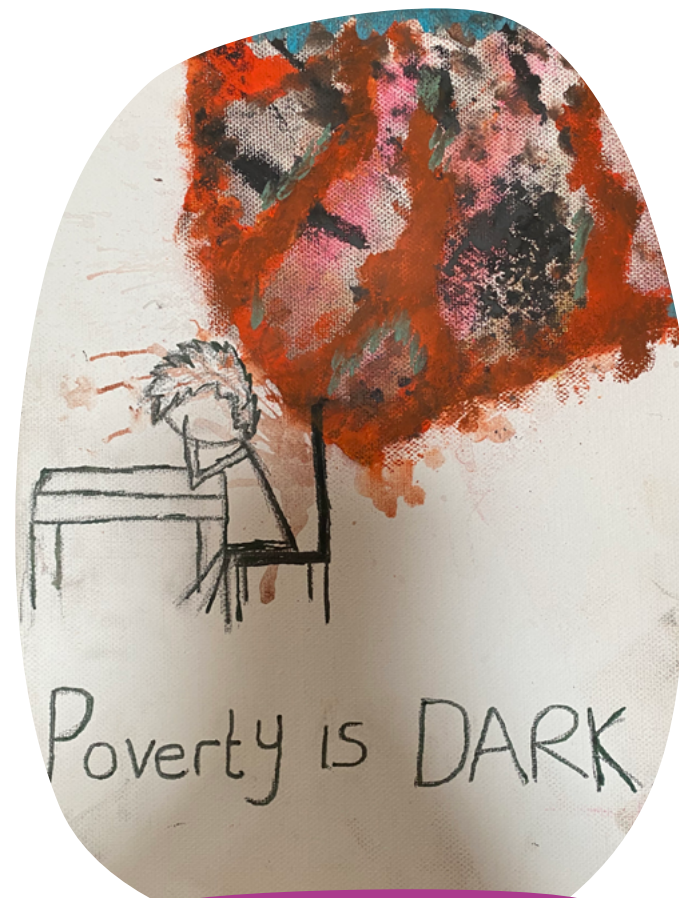
Relative poverty

Children in households with incomes below 60% of the UK median household income in that year. This shows whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.

Household income and poverty



Additional measures of poverty are described in our Child Poverty Measures Glossary (Appendix 1). These include indicators that look beyond income, and consider the nature and experience of poverty.



“
Wow this is really clever to show poverty.

Cornwall Youth Council member



Case study | Ffion, age 16

In discussion, Ffion explained that **poverty could affect anyone at any time and that its impact is not limited to just one area of life.** She shared that it was **hard to think of just one issue because poverty affects so many things at once**, such as having enough food to eat, a safe place to live, and suitable clothing to wear. Her poster reflects this reality, showing how poverty creates multiple challenges that are all connected, making daily life harder and creating constant worry about meeting even the most basic needs.



Causes of poverty

“Children are more likely to live in poverty than working-age adults and pensioners”¹⁵

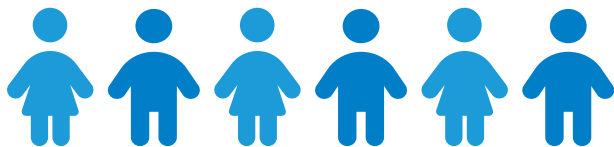
Families with children face greater costs and often have lower incomes.

Higher costs for families

Families with children at home have to spend more on particular things, including larger housing, bills and food. There are also costs for childcare, school uniform, days out, toys, learning supplies, and clothes and shoes. In 2024, the cost of providing a minimum standard of living for a child to age 18 was £260,000 for a couple and £290,000 for a lone parent.¹⁶

Families on low incomes spend a higher proportion of their earnings on essentials such as food and energy. The cost-of-living crisis has driven up the prices of these necessities faster than most other goods, hitting low-income families hardest.¹⁷

This is made worse by the **poverty premium**, where families on lower incomes often pay more for goods and services.¹⁸ For example, low-income families are more likely to have to use a pre-payment meter for their energy and pay a higher rate per unit than customers on a direct debit. Without savings, families may also be forced to buy large household items e.g. a cooker, on credit, incurring interest charges.



Families on low-incomes are also more likely to be in problem debt, and struggle to build up savings and access affordable credit, impacting on their financial resilience.

The UK Poverty Premium

Low income households pay an average

£490

more

per year for essential goods and services

Source: The Poverty Premium, University of Bristol

Low income and barriers to work

Parents and carers of young children are less likely to be able to do paid work because of the need to care for their children. In larger families, childcare costs make it difficult for parents to work more hours and still have any money left after paying for childcare. Many parents and carers are in insecure, low-wage service sector jobs which do not pay enough to support their family. They may not be able to find work that offers better pay and conditions. Parents and carers who are disabled or experiencing temporary or long-term sickness are less likely to be in paid work. Their health conditions can make it difficult to find suitable employment or may prevent them from working altogether.¹⁹

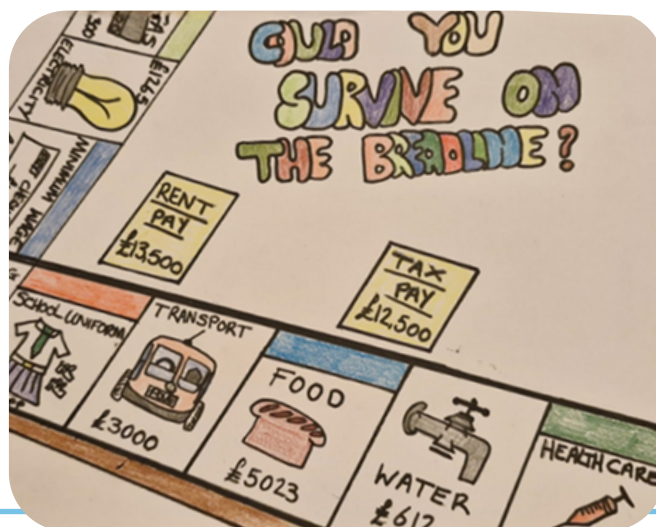


7 in 10 children living in relative poverty in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly have at least one working parent.



Benefits and financial support

Social security policies have the potential to move families out of poverty. However, changes to social security benefits since 2010, such as the introduction of the two-child benefit cap, have made it harder for some families to make ends meet. Not all parents will be in receipt of the benefits they are entitled to, and many will struggle to navigate the benefits system.



Family types at greatest risk of poverty

Some children are more likely to experience poverty than others. The Scottish Government has identified six 'priority groups' who are at higher risk of child poverty. Together, around 90% of children in poverty in Scotland are in households from at least one priority group:

- Lone parent families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Families with a mother aged under 25
- Families with a child under one
- Larger families (3+ children)

While these characteristics are strongly linked to poverty, it is important to recognise that every family's circumstance is different. There are children experiencing poverty even though their family has none of these characteristics. There are also children living in families which have one or more of these characteristics, yet they do not live in poverty.

At the time of writing, local data was not available to explore how these priority groups are represented in CIOs. However, carrying out this analysis locally would help ensure that our efforts to address child poverty are responsive to the needs of the families most at risk.

“

Poverty does not equal neglect.

Cornwall Youth Council member

Impact of child poverty

Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life. Growing up in poverty not only affects children's wellbeing and opportunities during childhood but also the opportunities and experiences they have throughout their lives.



In Cornwall, only

52.5%

of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) had a **good level of development at age 5**

Compared to
69.7%
of all children

Babies and very young children

- Children born to parents living in poverty are **more likely to be low birthweight** and are **less likely to survive the first year of life**.^{20, 21}
- Children born in the most deprived areas are **less likely to be breastfed**, and breastfeeding has many benefits, including protecting babies from infections.²²
- In order to thrive, babies require the nurture and love of their caregiver, stimulation and interactions. **Hardship, debt, and 'feeling poor' is associated with poorer mental health for mothers** and lower life satisfaction, which can make it more difficult to find the mental and emotional space to be an attentive and responsive parent.²³
- **By age five, there is five-month learning gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children.**²⁴ In Cornwall, only 52.5% of children eligible for FSM had a good level of development at age 5, compared to 69.7% of all children.²⁵ This learning gap widens throughout primary and secondary school.

Children

- Children living in poverty are **more likely to suffer from diet-related issues** such as **tooth decay, malnutrition, obesity and type 2 diabetes**.^{26, 27, 28} 23.7% of year 6 children living with obesity are living in the most deprived areas of Cornwall, compared to 13.2% in the least deprived areas (2023/24).
- Children persistently living in accommodation with inadequate heating and poor conditions are **more than twice as likely to suffer from chest and breathing problems**, such as asthma, compared to those living in warm homes.²⁹
- Children living in the most deprived households are **four times more likely to have serious mental health difficulties by the age of 11** compared to those living in the least deprived households.³⁰
- Children who live in insecure housing may also be forced to **move schools often and struggle to maintain networks of friends**, which can impact both their education and wellbeing.
- Children eligible for FSM are **more than twice as likely to be persistently absent from school** and **more than six times as likely to be permanently excluded**, harming their education and employment prospects and their ability to overcome poverty in the future.^{31, 32} In Cornwall, in 2022/23 the rate of permanent exclusions was 5 times higher among children eligible for FSM, compared to those not eligible for FSM.³³



“

Children should not have to face this - it's unfair!

Cornwall Youth Council member



In Cornwall

7%

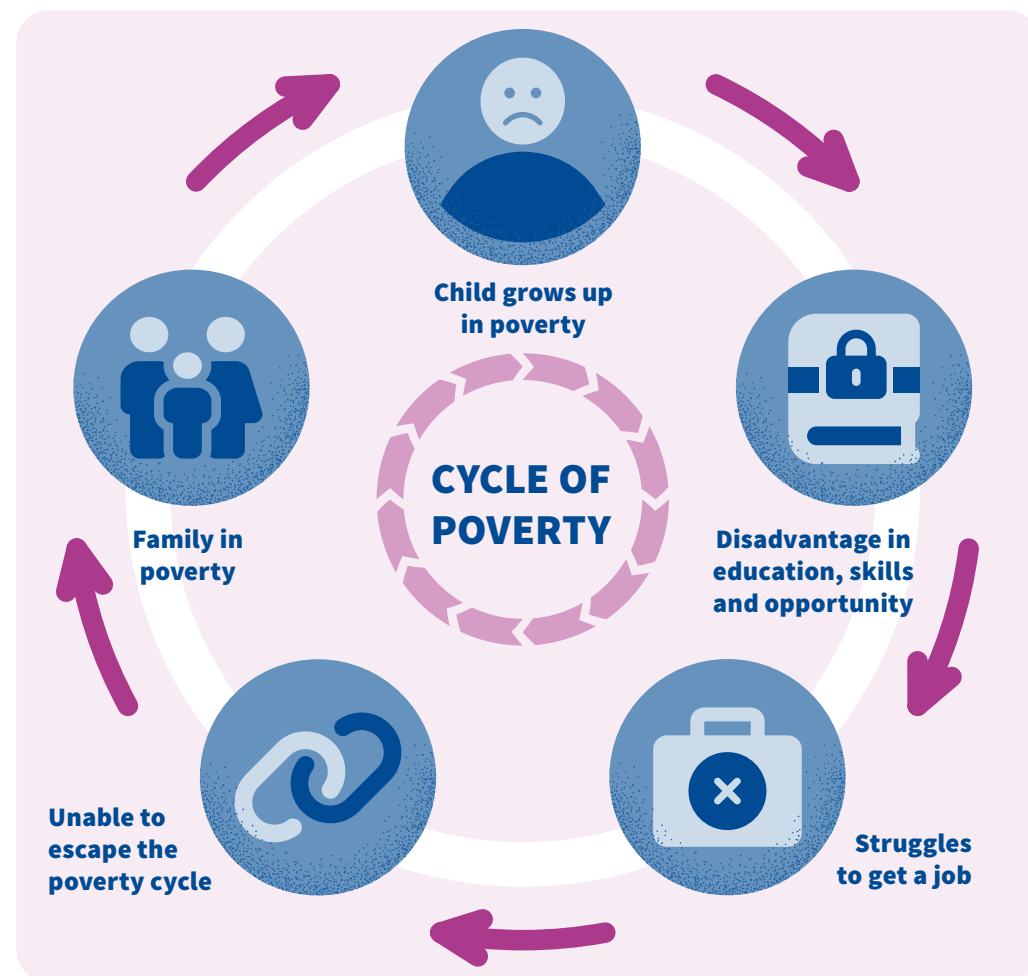
of 16 and 17 year olds are **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)**

Compared to
5.4%
national
average

Young people

- Young people aged 17 to 25 years old with a probable mental disorder are **three times more likely to not be able to afford to take part in activities** such as sports, days out, or socialising with friends, compared with those unlikely to have a mental disorder.³⁴
- Young people living in poverty are **more likely to become not in education employment or training (NEET)**, which increases the risk of poor physical and mental health, unemployment and low-quality work in later life. **In Cornwall, 7% of 16- and 17-year-olds are NEET** – this is higher than the national average of 5.4%.³⁵
- **Under-18 conception rates are higher among young women living in the most deprived areas.** Children born to teenage mothers have a 63% higher risk of living in poverty.³⁶
- Many young people take on the family's money worries. Some feel they need to step up and put food on the table. Criminals take advantage of this, targeting young people in desperate situations and promising quick cash, gifts, pocket money, or lifts to and from school or work.³⁷ In the Right On! Survey 2025, undertaken by Cornwall Council, **17% of secondary-age young people, and 27% of college-age young people told us that they worry about money so much that it affects their day to day lives**³⁸.

Living in poverty can create a self-perpetuating cycle. Children in poorer households may experience poorer health, which limits their education or employment opportunities, which continues to trap families in poverty from one generation to the next.



Children's rights and poverty



All children have human rights, just as adults do.

“Child poverty is both a cause and consequence of children’s human rights violations.”¹²

As a public authority, we are a duty bearer of the UNCRC. This means we must do all we can to implement the Convention and uphold children's rights. Throughout this report, we highlight how child poverty interacts with children's rights in CIOs, drawing attention to specific articles where relevant.

“ This is really important if things are going to change. ”

Cornwall Youth Council member

Every child has the right to be heard

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that all children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. The voices of children and young people feature throughout this report. As well as sharing their views, their voices, ideas, and experiences are central to shaping the solutions we need to prevent and reduce the impact of poverty in CIOS. We will be sharing this report with children and young people themselves and look forward to continuing the conversations together about the learning from this report.



Child poverty in numbers



Child poverty in numbers | Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CIOS)



1 in 5
(22.9%) of children and young people (0-19 years) in CIOS live in relative poverty.



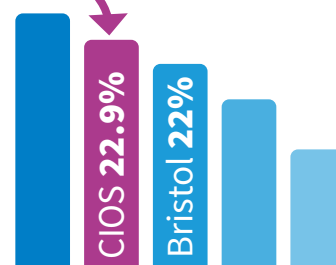
This is **above** the South West average of

17.9%

and **above** the England average:

21.9%³⁹

This is the **2nd highest rate in the South West**



7 in 10

children living in relative poverty in CIOS **have at least 1 working parent** (2023/24)

21% of children and young people (0-24yrs) live in the **20% most deprived neighbourhoods** (2022).

44.9% of households in **temporary accommodation** have children (Jul-Sept 24)

Over

27,000

children and young people are growing up in **relative poverty in CIOS** (2023/24)



Equal to **1080 classrooms*** of children.

*Average local class size: 25

Breakdown by age:

0-4	5443
5-10	7880
11-15	8160
16-19	5624



51%

households on **Universal Credit** have at least **1 child**

13,785

single parent families live in **relative poverty in CIOS**



1366 households in Cornwall,

and **21** households in IOS

have **dependent children and no central heating**

have children (Jul-Sept 24)

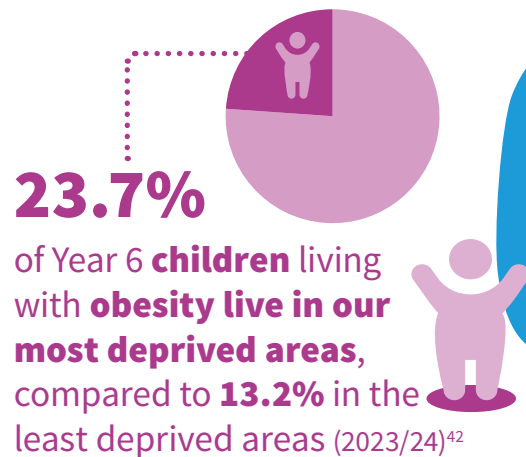
765

under 18s living in **temporary housing** (Sept 2024)

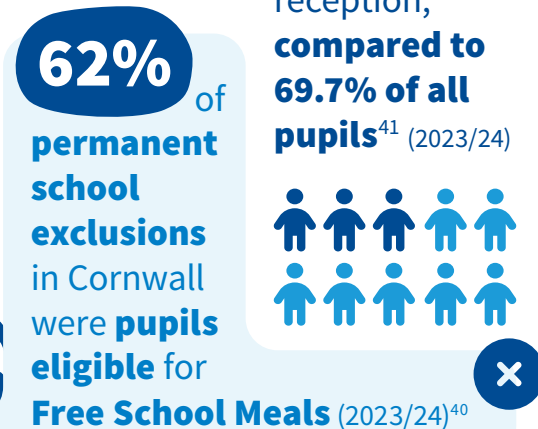
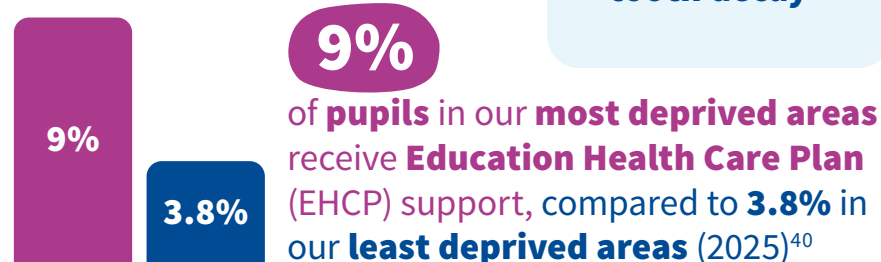
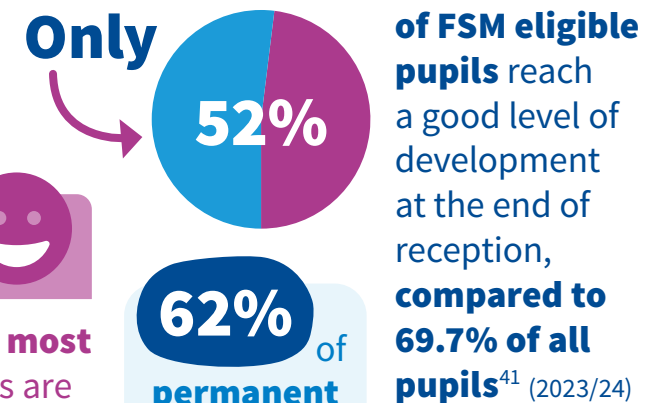
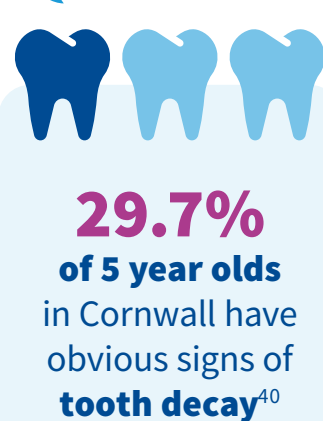
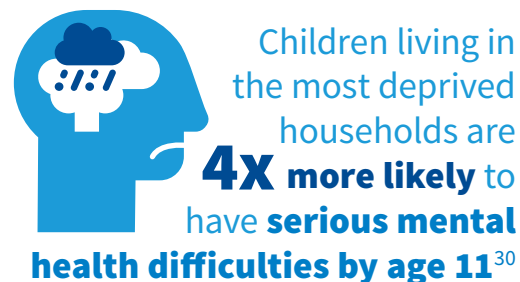
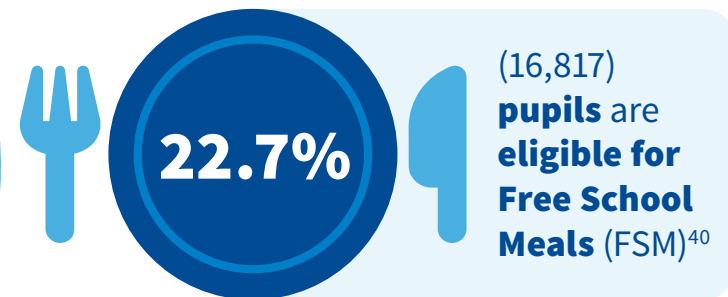
A note about the Isles of Scilly

To preserve confidentiality of individuals, data for the Isles of Scilly are often combined with Cornwall. Due to Cornwall's larger population (relative to IOS) where data is combined, the experiences of children and young people on IOS may be overshadowed by the Cornwall narrative. In some cases, it has been necessary to suppress IOS data to preserve confidentiality. Data presented on this page refers to Cornwall and IOS combined, unless otherwise stated.

Child poverty in numbers | Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CIOS)



“
It’s not fair that **children living in poverty** are more likely to have **tooth decay or obesity**.
”
Cornwall Youth Council member



Community insights

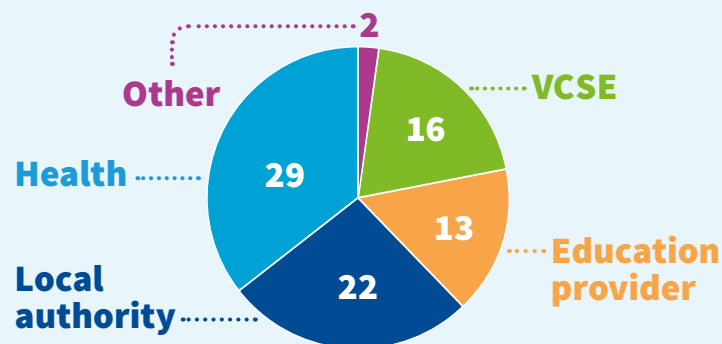


Insights from our workforce

“I am seeing more children in poverty than at any point in my professional life (15 years).”

We invited practitioners across CIOS to share their perspectives on how poverty impacts children and families, and how the challenge of managing poverty is affecting their roles and organisations. A total of 82 practitioners representing a range of services, responded:

Respondents by sector



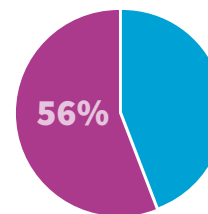
What are practitioners seeing?

Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) of practitioners indicated that they have seen an increase in the number of children they are supporting who are experiencing poverty. They are seeing more families struggling to meet their children's basic needs. Many described seeing more children who are hungry, tired, and lacking appropriate clothing and more families living in insecure, overcrowded or poor quality housing. They noted a growing reliance on food banks and emergency grants. Parents are needing support to breastfeed because they cannot afford to buy formula. Practitioners also spoke about the strain poverty places on parents, and the impact this has on mental health and family relationships. Children are telling practitioners that they are worried that their parents don't have enough money.



Nearly 9 in 10 (87%)

of practitioners indicated that they had seen **an increase in the number of children** they are supporting who are **experiencing poverty**.



Over half (56%)

of practitioners reported that they are spending **more time addressing the effects of child poverty** within their school, group, organisation, or service.



Half (50%)

of practitioners reported **introducing measures** in their organisations, such as subsidies, or relaxing uniform policies, **to help mitigate the impact of poverty on children**.

Every practitioner surveyed felt that **poverty is harming children's lives**, with

89%

stating it **'very much' contributes to poor outcomes**. Not a single respondent believed it had no impact.

We asked practitioners to describe the experiences of children in their schools, groups, organisations, or services, who are living in poverty. **The following key themes emerged.**

To reflect the reality of these experiences, we have included direct quotes from practitioners across CIOS for each theme.

Food insecurity and hunger

“(The) main issue I have come across is **families struggling with cost of food**, since food has increased so not being able to afford healthy and varied food.

Children and Families Service
Cornwall Council

Housing instability and quality

“**One of my families are currently homeless and sofa surfing with their 2 month old baby.** This involves taking the baby on the bus each day to stay at different friends’ houses and the Mum has to carry around a moses basket to ensure safe sleeping at the different houses.

Foundations for Life Team
Cornwall Council

Social isolation

“**Some families are being moved into areas where they are severely isolated**, having no support network, no transport connections, they are stuck and this means their children are not getting the opportunities to thrive they may have had if they were able to stay close to the family’s support network.

Public Health Nursing Cornwall Council

Digital exclusion

“**Some children do not have reliable internet access or devices at home**, which affects their ability to complete homework or engage in remote learning.

VCSE Organisation

Parental stress

“**Parental mental and emotional health is fraught** - I need to have chats and cups of tea with parents who are emotionally exhausted and unstable from the stress of everyday life and making ends meet.

Mainstream education provider

“

These children are often at risk of exploitation. They seek distraction, escapism and therefore may use substances.

They are unable to purchase for example cannabis or ketamine and are being told to meet people to exchange drugs for money to pay off their debt.

Children and Families service
Cornwall Council

“

Transport costs really limit their lives and the bus/transport services in Cornwall make it impossible to access work and medical appointments.

Neighbourhoods
Cornwall Council

Practitioners' perspectives on the impact of poverty

Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) practitioners report that poverty is “very much” impacting children’s outcomes, with significant and wide-ranging effects on their physical and mental health, development, and future opportunities. When children arrive at school hungry, tired, or without appropriate clothing, it affects their ability to learn, engage, and thrive. Practitioners also highlight the social isolation many children face, missing out on enrichment opportunities such as school trips and activity clubs. On the Isles of Scilly, practitioners noted that poverty prevents children from visiting the mainland, limiting their opportunities to visit family and their preparedness for post-16 education.

Safeguarding concerns are growing, with some children exposed to unsafe home environments, neglect, or harmful behaviours. There is also increasing concern about exploitation, as financial hardship can leave young people vulnerable to the risk of being drawn into criminal activity or risky behaviours. Practitioners also spoke about how poverty can lower children’s aspirations. They noted that it not only harms children’s education but also denies them access to positive, formative experiences that help shape their future. This can make it harder to break the cycle of poverty, from one generation to the next.

“When young people are anxious about the financial situation of their family, they are less able to focus on their hopes for the future.” – VCSE organisation

How are practitioners responding to poverty in CIOS?

Schools, groups, organisations, and services across CIOS are playing an important role in supporting babies, children, and young people affected by poverty. Almost half of respondents reported that their organisation provides access to food banks or food bank vouchers, and 43% are offering additional food to families. Nearly a third are supplying period products, and around one in five are providing toiletries to help meet basic needs.

Half of practitioners reported that their organisations have introduced additional measures to help mitigate its impact. Schools have relaxed uniform policies, reduced the requirement for branded uniform items, introduced uniform swap shops, subsidise school trips, and provide transport from after-school clubs. Many organisations now provide free or subsidised food and offer food education, such as affordable and accessible recipes to help families prepare healthy meals at home. Health services are delivering home visits or funding transport for families with limited access, supporting access to baby bundles (often personally donated by staff), and offering breast pump loan schemes to help families breastfeed for longer. Some local authority teams are also providing crisis grants and funding for nursery places. Children are also being supported to access rest, leisure, and play opportunities through funded equipment such as bikes, trainers, and books.

How does this impact practitioners?

“More and more of my work is taken up with finding ways around, additional support and resources to help people meet their basic needs.”

– Cornwall Council, Neighbourhoods

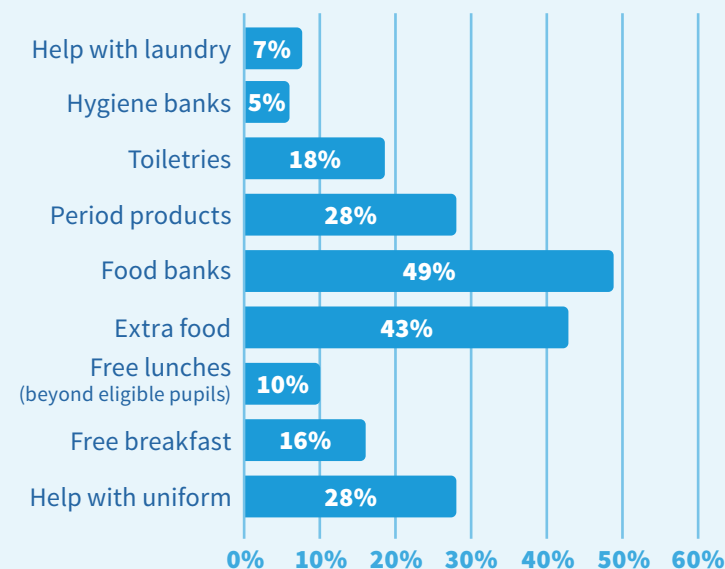
Over half (56%) of practitioners in CIOS said that they are spending more time supporting families in poverty. Practitioners are increasingly being diverted away from their core roles to provide guidance, signpost and make referrals for families struggling financially. Practitioners describe a growing number of families in poverty with more specific or complex needs, such as poor mental health, relationship breakdowns and domestic abuse, which require more time and support. With services stretched and issues like housing shortages and long waiting lists beyond their control, some practitioners say they feel “helpless”. In some education settings, staff have left due to the difficulty of balancing teaching responsibilities with the growing demands of poverty-related support.

“

The impact on the whole organisation can be hard as there are many complexities and systems to navigate which is time and resource heavy, this has a knock on effect on the staff and their need for support for themselves.

VCSE organisation

Proportion of survey respondents reporting their organisation provides additional support for children living in poverty





12

RESPECT FOR
CHILDREN'S VIEWS

Article 12

"All children have the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously."

Over to our babies, children and young people

We cannot understand or address the impact of child poverty unless we involve babies, children and young people with direct experience of poverty.

To explore poverty better, we talked with children, young people and their families in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Supported by an array of local voluntary and community organisations and embracing a creative approach, we are able to share insights into our residents' experience of poverty. This report includes a selection of the powerful contributions. We invite you to explore all of the contributions in our [online gallery](#). These experiences and thoughts come from the heart of our communities...



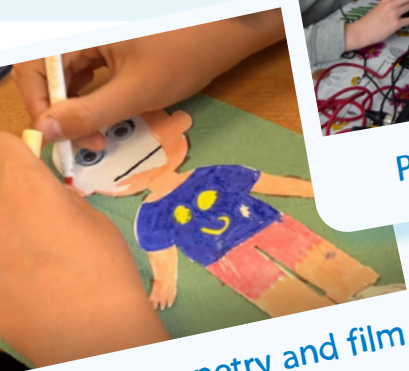
Podcasting



Postcards and drawing



Circus skills



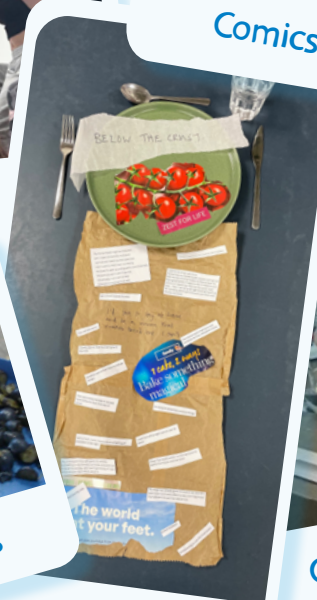
Puppetry and film



Play and poetry



Baby observations



Collaging



Physical storytelling



Comics and zines



Barnaby Chatbot



Conversations through cooking

Babies

Struggling to afford baby basics

Families of all ages shared the daily struggles they face in affording basic essentials like food, heating and clothing. But families with babies spoke about the additional pressures they experience. Essential baby items such as a cot, nappies and infant formula, place further strain on already stretched budgets, and for some families, these basics are simply out of reach.

“The worry and stress of not having what we need for the baby: milk, clothes, cot/next-to-me cot, buggy, just basic needs. We were using charity shops a lot as we were unable to buy new things and relying on being gifted nice things. We were sad and disappointed as couldn't do up a nursery or make a lovely space for our first baby like you dream of”.

“
I don't think my baby has ever had anything new. It's all clothes banks and charity shops.”

Baby 1's story

I'm hungry again. It hasn't been that long since I last had milk, I know that... but **my tummy is so small, and it gets empty so fast. It hurts when its empty and I need some more milk.**

Mummy tries. She really does. She holds me close and tries to feed me like we did in the hospital. It worked there, but now it's different, harder. We both try, over and over, but the milk just doesn't come. I don't know why.

I get so frustrated. My tiny hands clench tight, and I scream because I don't have any other way to say, “This hurts, I'm scared, I'm hungry”. I arch my back. **I cry until my whole body feels tired.** Daddy gives me my dummy. I suck on it furiously, I like the comfort the suck brings but is not enough. I need some milk.

A lady at the hospital told Mummy about a group that could help us. People who understand; who could show us how to make it work. **But we**

can't go, it's too far, we don't have a car and the bus is too much money.

Daddy goes out and brings back some powdered milk. Sometimes Mummy and Daddy add too much water - just to make it last longer. They're trying. I can feel it in the way they hold me, in the way they look at me when I cry.

The health visitor comes and visits us in our flat. **She puts me on the scales, and I can tell she's worried.** She asks Mummy and Daddy how much milk I've been having. They tell her... but not everything. They don't mention the extra water. She says she'll come back in two weeks to weigh me again.

I'm not growing like I'm supposed to. My newborn clothes still fit like they did the day I came home. I cry so much. Mummy rocks me, Daddy shushes me... but it's hard for them. **Mummy is sad and gets frustrated when I cry so much but I can't help it - I'm hungry.**



Article 24

“All children have the right to be as healthy as possible. Governments should make sure children can get good quality health care and have nutritious food and a clean environment”.

“£500 [Sure Start Maternity] grant for first child, 17-page form and can only claim until baby is 6 months old. I didn’t get it. Midwife told me it’s just for first child. I did the whole form and lost it, and I couldn’t get a new one but was told I’d have to pay a fee like getting a doctor’s note”.

Food poverty and the cost of infant formula

Breastfeeding can protect babies from food insecurity as it provides a reliable and safe source of food that meets all of a baby’s nutritional needs. But parents spoke about challenges breastfeeding and difficulties accessing breastfeeding support. As a result, some families switch to infant formula to meet their baby’s needs. However, the high cost of infant formula is forcing some families to resort to unsafe measures to feed their baby, such as watering down feeds to make it last longer.

“Healthy Start helped eased the pressure of buying fruit and milk for the children, I would have to be careful with how many times I use the card as it only gets topped up every few weeks”.

“**Weaning is worrying** as I will have to buy different foods.

Food poverty impacts weaning

The NHS recommend offering babies a wide variety of healthy foods from six months onwards, even foods they don’t seem to like, to support the development of healthy eating habits. But offering variety comes at a cost and parents spoke about their reluctance to risk food being wasted.

“**Healthy Start reduces** after 1 year old, and stops at 4. **I still need to feed my children.**

“**Food is so expensive, I want to buy things I know they will eat** - like 60p an egg and then they’ve thrown it on the floor.

The Healthy Start scheme relieves some of the financial pressure on families by enabling them to buy healthy foods. But the weekly payments fall far short of covering the costs of essentials for families with babies and young children, and many families are missing out due to confusion over eligibility and complex application processes.



Infant mental health and bonding

Early relationships between babies and their parents are incredibly important for building healthy brains and lay the foundation for lifelong mental and physical health. Living in poverty can make it difficult for parents to find the mental and emotional space to be an attentive and responsive parent.

“I was scared, stressed and frustrated, I was often upset at being in an inappropriate and unsafe environment and having no choices or support, I felt I couldn’t go out. I felt so bad and guilty unable to offer baby more than this, it was all so horrible and so hard. The physical environment was not good for my baby, not positive energy, people or environment. I was concerned about development and lack of stimulation. I worry about the impact on attachment, that my baby is not having varied interactions with other people and is with an unhappy Mum”.

Bonding can begin before birth, during pregnancy, as parents start to connect with their baby in the womb. The impact of poverty on parent-infant bonding can be felt even before a baby is born.

“

I’m only 20 weeks grown, floating here in the dark, listening to a world that already feels heavy. There’s lots of love, I feel it in the way Mum rubs her belly and talks softly to me when no one else is around. But I also feel fear.

“

I am due to be born in August. **My Mum is feeling worried and I can feel that from inside.** This could slow down my development and I may also be born early.



**Click here for
more baby
observations collected
by local charity WILD.**

Article 6

“All children have the right to life. Governments should make sure that children develop and grow healthily and protect them from things which could hurt them.”

Temporary Accommodation

Families also spoke about their experiences of living in temporary accommodation with their babies. They described the lack of basic facilities, feelings of fear and isolation, and the impact of issues such as overcrowding, damp and mould. Many shared concerns about how these living conditions were affecting their children’s health, wellbeing, and development.



Tiana’s story

“I was moving around from different temporary rooms, mainly hotels, in my late pregnancy and was in a single bed hotel room when my baby was born. My partner struggling to find work and then starting a new job, which meant a delay in income and much less money, much more stress.

The other people in the hotel were a challenge – alcohol, drugs, strangers, feeling unsafe. People fighting in kitchen. **I was trying to hide the baby and pretend to be invisible. I was really stressed and unsure how to cope.** I was concerned around how this was affecting the baby.

I was aware of my baby crying and the neighbour knocking on the door to be quiet. I couldn’t buy what we wanted for ourselves or the baby. No money for buggy, toys, bouncy chair, play mat etc to entertain and stimulate our baby. I was concerned for ‘lack’ of space, no contact with other people as we didn’t have anything. **Just a small, sparse room, single bed, mini fridge, toilet - a shared kitchen space”.**

Baby safety

Families living in unstable housing situations, temporary accommodation or overcrowded housing are being forced into unsafe sleeping practices with their baby, such as co-sleeping. As a result, babies living in poverty face an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

“The kids top and tail in bed and the baby has outgrown the cot but nowhere else to sleep so baby was in with us”.

These situations are a direct result of poverty, restricting families’ options. Parents are doing their best in difficult circumstances to provide a safe sleep space for their baby, even when the environment makes that incredibly hard.

Baby 2’s story

“I am six weeks old; my Nanny said that me and Mummy can’t live with her anymore. I liked living there. We swap between three different places, they all smell different, they sound different, they feel different, I feel confused. Mummy has two friends that let us sleep at their house, and she also has a new boyfriend, we can sleep there sometimes too. **We don’t have our own home anymore. Mummy takes my moses basket with us everywhere.** I still have my bed, and my Mummy, those two things don’t change”.



REST, PLAY,
CULTURE, ARTS

Article 31

“All children have the right to rest, relax and play. Governments should make sure children can be part of cultural and artistic activities”.

Pre-school children

Play and learning

Children deserve to thrive, not just survive, and all children have the right to play. Play lays the foundation for children’s wellbeing, social and emotional skills, and physical and cognitive development. But poverty limits young children’s opportunities to play. Parents told us how they struggle to afford books, toys, and access to activities and experiences. These opportunities are further restricted by the cost or unavailability of public transport. Overcrowded accommodation also restricts the space children have to play freely at home.

“There’s no space, we’re tripping over each other, all of our stuff is in storage...We didn’t have a table to eat round, we ate on the floor, we have no garden or outdoor space (which they had previously), kids not having any of their things/toys etc”.

Parents spoke about how they value access to the free and low-cost outdoor spaces that Cornwall offers, such as the beach and Tehidy Woods, which provide accessible opportunities for play.

“

Sometimes we have to prioritise food over fun experiences for the children.



Escape to cheap soft play



Fun day at the beach

“

One of the biggest challenges of not having the money I need is my children missing out on activities and learning to swim due to lack of money. I can’t pay for swimming lessons.

Extract from 'Time Together with Smiles and Cuddles'

I like the squirrels in the park, and I want to watch them
See where they go and what they do
Have time together with smiles and cuddles
But we have to go because it starts raining
My coat is too small and lets in the rain
And then everything needs a wash
And that's just a real pain
We used to go to the park down the road
I liked the shiny green swings where I could swing up high
Mummy told me I could touch the clouds
But some children were mean to my big Brother
So, we don't go any more
No time together with smiles and cuddles
It rains a lot, and I like splashing in the puddles in my red wellies
But then I get messy, and Mummy says it's easier to stay at home
I wish it didn't rain a lot and that being dirty was good
I like sandcastles and paddling at the beach

Chasing seagulls away from my ice cream
Looking at shells in the sunshine
Time together with smiles and cuddles
But the bus stop is a long way
I need a lot of stuff so it's real pain
Mummy doesn't have the money and she's worried
There might not be room for my buggy
We used to have a yellow car that made a lot of noise
It was too expensive, so it had to live with someone else.

This piece represents an illustration of the lived experience of some children in Camborne and Redruth and not a summary of any individual.

[Click here](#) to read the National Literacy Trust's poem in full.

Parents have a key role in supporting children's play

Parents and caregivers have an important role in enabling and inspiring fun and playful experiences for their young children. But the stress of poverty can make it much more difficult to find the emotional space to be a responsive parent and create the conditions that support rich playful experiences. This can impact young children's social and emotional development and outcomes.

“I want to do things with them. Sometimes my mental health means I can't go out with the kids and that makes me feel so bad. I'm feeling bad before it happens and then it happens and when it's happening. I feel like the worst Mum ever. Then I can be up all night beating myself up for not being able to go to the park with them and it's only over there”.



Opportunities for play are vital for learning. When play is restricted in the early years, children's readiness for learning in school is impacted and children are less likely to reach key development milestones. By the age of five, there is five-month learning gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children.

Toddler 2's story

"I am happy and I love to play. My Mum and her boyfriend play with me and read to me and I have all of the basic things that I need. **Some people notice that I am struggling though, and that I am tired.** My Mum sometimes stays up very late and **I don't have a routine.** Sometimes I will go to bed when I am really tired and stay in bed late in the mornings.

I think I could be speaking a bit better than I am at my age, but Mum doesn't spend enough time helping me with this. I think that my nan had the same worries as my Mum and not being able to afford much, and **my Mum didn't have the learning she needed from her Mum.**

I sometimes get upset too and I struggle to help myself calm down, and my Mum gets impatient with me. At times she will think I am being naughty, when all I am doing is playing. **She will be a bit rough with me and tell me off,** when what I need is a cuddle, or for her to join in playing with me, or to distract me if things are feeling hard. It would be nice to be able to do more things together."

Clothing poverty

Families told us about the difficulties they face providing their growing toddler with appropriate clothing, especially clothing for outdoor play. For some children, a warm winter coat simply isn't affordable. Parents spoke about the sadness they feel when their child takes part in messy play, knowing they have only a few outfits left. Some also shared that they can't afford a washing machine, making it even harder to keep up with the demands of daily life with a young child.

Toddler 4's story

"My Mummy works very hard and so does my Stepdad, Joey, but I know that they worry lots about money.

In the winter it was very cold at home, so we would wear our dressing gowns all day long and when we went outside too. I grew lots since last winter and I don't have a coat to wear. My dressing gown is cosy, but it doesn't keep me dry when it rains.

Sometimes Mummy's friends and family give us clothes, it's always exciting to have new things, **but they don't always fit quite right.** I have a lovely new pair of shoes from Mummy's friend, they are white and make me feel like a big boy but they don't fit my feet and I find it hard to walk in them, so I fall over a lot.

Mummy is very proud to work and have a flat for us to live in, **she finds it hard to ask, that makes her feel sad.** Wild gave Mummy a parcel of clothes, it had a coat in. I love my coat, it's warm and dry."



Article 27

"All children have the right to a proper home, food and clothing. Governments should make sure families have access to good housing, healthy food and warm clothing".

Unborn baby 3's story

“When Mum checks my sister’s clothes they are all looking a bit small. Although my sister is tiny for her age, 6-9 months is looking too snug now, and hand-me-downs are wearing thin. Mum loves letting my sister join in with messy play, but **she looks sad when the clothes get a bit too dirty,** because she doesn’t know how many more nice outfits she has left.”

Parents told us how living in cold, damp, and mouldy homes makes clothing poverty even worse. Families described having to throw away their own and their children’s clothes after they became mouldy. In many cases, parents spoke about the sacrifices they make, frequently going without essential clothing themselves to ensure their children’s needs are met.

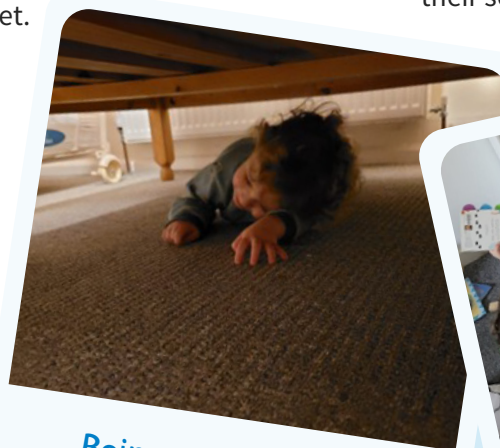
“My coat got so mouldy I couldn’t wear it, and I couldn’t afford a new one for myself once I bought second hand ones for the kids, so I went without”.

Housing instability impacts young children’s development

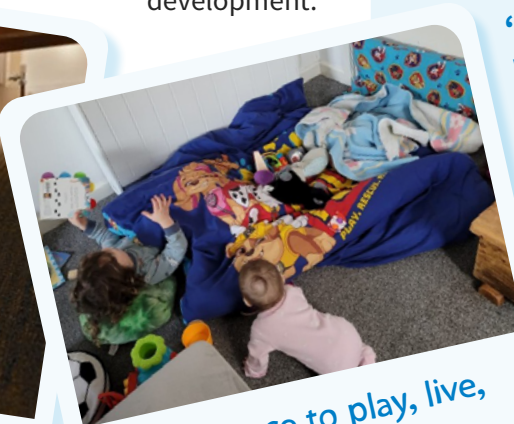
Families described insecure housing as an “overwhelming worry”, sharing how unstable housing situations affect their young children’s development. A shortage of affordable housing has resulted in many families living in overcrowded or temporary accommodation, where there is often little physical space to learn to crawl, walk and play. Despite these challenges, families spoke about how they adapt creatively, making ‘nests’ under beds and tables to make the most of their limited play space.

“My favourite place is under the table – it’s quiet and nobody can see me”.

Unwanted and frequent moves, often driven by high housing costs and evictions, can disrupt children’s routines and sense of security. This instability affects their social and emotional development.



Being creative with play space



No space to play, live, develop...

Michaela’s story

“I’m concerned that our circumstances are impacting, aggravating and exacerbating neurodiversity needs and behaviours: with **our newborn baby needing hourly feeds** and **our 2 year old with so much energy** - climbing everywhere and going stir-crazy - **our ten-year-old is struggling**. The challenges of keeping routines in place for kids amongst disruption... My 2 year old has hearing issues and is very active. **I’m concerned about the increase in stress, lack of routines and impact of the situation.**”

Toddler 3’s story

“I am nearly 3 years old. I live at home with my Mummy, my baby Brother and my Nanny and Grandad. **There are lots of people in our house and not a lot of room to play.** Me, Mummy and my baby Brother all sleep in one bedroom. **It’s a really tight squeeze!”**

High cost of childcare

For many families, the lack of affordable early years childcare is a significant barrier to increasing their earnings or is a significant cost that is keeping them in poverty. Parents reflected on the complicated balancing act they face, weighing up the cost of childcare against being able to access more or better work which would increase their income.

“

So how much would **childcare cost** you if you were called in **for a shift?**

“

£75 for a day

“

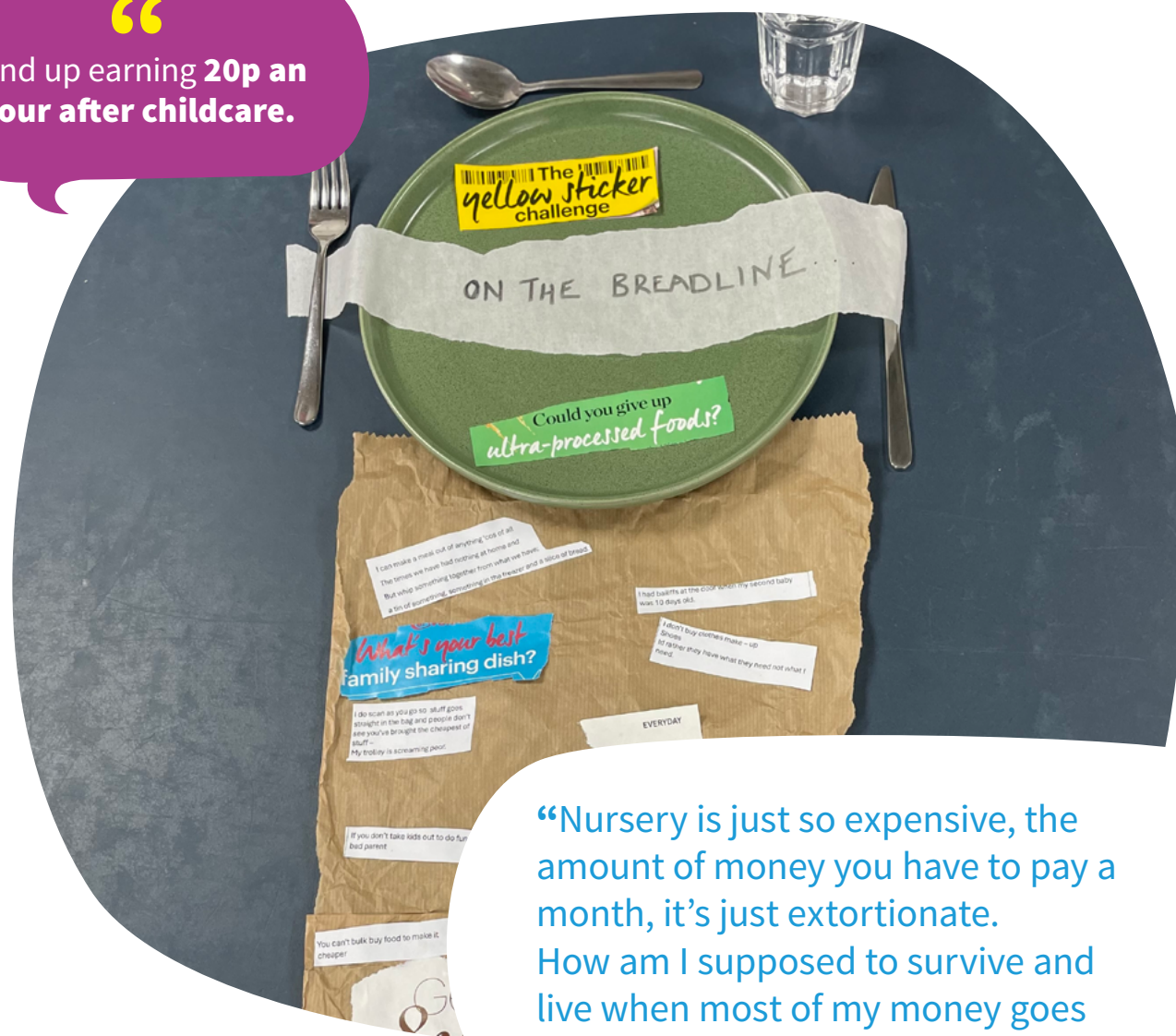
How much would you **earn for that shift?**

“

It depends how long the shift is - **if it's a long shift I'd earn £89**

“

I end up earning **20p an hour after childcare.**



“Nursery is just so expensive, the amount of money you have to pay a month, it's just extortionate. How am I supposed to survive and live when most of my money goes on childcare?”



28

Article 28

“All children have the right to an education. Governments should make sure children can get an education without it costing their family money”.

School-age children

The cost of the school day

Although education across the UK is ‘free’ to access, many children and young people spoke about the challenges their families face managing the hidden costs of going to school. The costs of uniforms, school trips, stationery and equipment, charity and dress-down days, and transport to and from school all place additional pressure on already stretched family budgets. When children don’t have access to these school essentials, it can affect their experiences of school life, their outcomes and their future life chances.

School uniform

Without the right uniform, children can feel out of place or isolated, worried about not wearing the right thing, or even bullied. Some children told us how they sometimes have to miss lessons because they don’t have the right uniform, losing essential learning time.

“There’s a school clothes bank that is still expensive: the school still charges you for a tie, which is like £7 in a uniform shop and £5 in school”.

“I got put in reset last week as I was wearing my trainers to school, my school shoes fell apart on the walk home, and Mum said she doesn’t get paid till this week so nothing she can do about it. Makes me not want to go to school until I can get new shoes”.

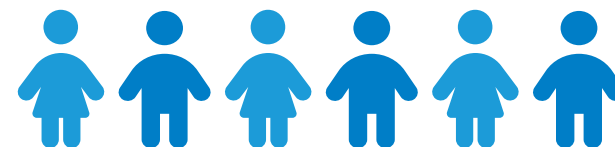
School policies can help to reduce and remove the financial barriers to education, but one child reflected on the unintended negative consequence of a school support scheme that was introduced to help parents with the cost of uniform.

“
I have 1 change of uniform for the whole week because it costs a lot.

“
School had a scheme where (if you donated your old school uniform) you got a premium prom ticket. My clothes are all going to siblings, so it’s unfair on me.

On average it costs
£1000
a year to send a child to state primary school and
£2300
for a secondary school

Source: Child Poverty Action Group



Trips and activities

Children, young people and parents described the additional costs of school activities like charity days, school trips and special occasions and leavers' celebrations. Many children and young people shared how they were unable to participate in activities and how this made them feel.

“

I didn't do the reindeer run at school at Christmas, cos Mum didn't have the £5 spare for me to do it, **everyone else did and I watched.**

“

I'm not going to prom, Mum can't afford the dress and the tickets, **makes me feel sh*t.**

“

We had to choose - **pay for the school trip or pay for heating.**

“Don't get me started on school trips - like my Mum can afford for me to go to Disney on the Paris trip... 3 coaches went from my year. 90ish kids, it's all my friends talked about for ages, the rest of us sat in school all week, so unfair, no way I'm ever going to get to go”.

“School is expensive, they don't warn you, the extra costs of the trips, the bring a £1 for this, bring money for that, buy a costume for book day, it's not a lot, but when you don't have it then its loads, and you feel guilty that your kid is missing out, especially when they only give you a couple of days' notice, and your kids

know that they don't have the money, it's so frustrating”.

School equipment and digital poverty

Some children spoke about the cost of school equipment and the anxiety they feel about not being able to afford the resources they need for their subject courses. Access to broadband is now considered essential for completing homework, yet it presents another barrier for families who can't afford the cost of providing internet access. The stigma felt by children and young people living in poverty means that some feel they have to hide their circumstances. One young person explained how they would rather say that their charger is broken, than admit they can't afford one. This sense of shame is a key poverty-related barrier to children and young people's ability to participate fully in their education.

“I'm worried about how we are going to afford the bus next year for college and how we will pay for the uniform and kit I will need for my course”.

“When I run out of data, I can't do my homework or log on to class charts, we don't have Wi-Fi at home”.

“I pretend my charger's broken so I don't have to say I can't do the homework”.



Poverty-related bullying and mental health

The cost of going to school doesn't only impact a family's finances, it can also contribute to feelings of social exclusion, social anxiety, or shame. Some children and young people described school as a place of "judgement" and shared their experiences of poverty-related bullying in school and the impact it has on their attendance.

“

Stuff like haircuts and hair dye cost a lot and it makes you stand out at school and then you get picked on, so then I just can't be bothered to go in.

“

I've been teased for having the wrong brand of bag at school, and the wrong trainers... I mean cos, they aren't the in brands.

“

Comparing what you got for Christmas with your friends can be hard, knowing they got the latest tech and there's no way I'm getting that.

“In my school, everyone had to pay out for expensive shoes that are black and polish-able. Cheap ones look funny, and you must pay a lot for black shoes that are nice, or you get bullied”.

Children and young people spoke about how growing up with “money troubles” made them feel “anxious”, “worried” and how it affected their mental health.

Many raised concerns about the availability of support services for “invisible” struggles such as mental health. Comparison to their peers and the pressure to have the latest brands can make these struggles even more difficult. Some children and young people explained that having more money would mean that they “have things like everyone else”.



Listen to school children in Redruth telling the stories of characters who do not have enough or have experience of inequality.

Poverty limits access to sports, activities and leisure

Poverty denies children chances to try new things and develop their interests through hobbies. One group of children reflected on the costs of participating in sports and how financial barriers shaped their aspirations. They shared a perception that elite sports were only accessible to those from wealthier backgrounds, saying that “only the rich could be in the Olympics” and that you “had to go to private school to be in the Olympics”. In contrast, they described aspirations of being famous football players as “you can do that even if you haven't got much money”.

Many children and young people also spoke about the lack of affordable and accessible leisure activities in their communities. They felt that Cornwall “caters for older people and not young people”, leading to a sense of disconnect from their local communities.

“
**There’s a playground, but
it keeps getting broken...**
we wish people would look
after it better.

“
**Mum doesn't drive, the bus
and trains cost a lot when
there are 5 of us kids,** so we
walk down the park and stuff,
but that gets boring.



'Belonging' is the feeling of being somewhere you can trust you'll fit in and feel safe in your identity.

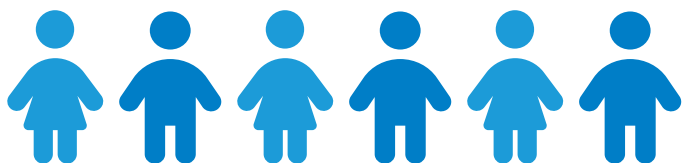
“We go Youthy a couple of times a week as nothing else to do, it’s safe, they feed us and listen to us, we get to go on trips. I’m going to Hangloose with them next week, it can be boring round here with not much else to do”.



Hygiene poverty driving poverty-related crime

Hygiene is the basic level of care needed to feel clean, confident and comfortable enough to engage fully in life. Some young people explained that they had witnessed their friends' families struggle to buy basic items such as deodorant. In some cases, this leads to young people resorting to crime in order to try and get hold of these items, highlighting the difficult choices some young people have to make to meet their basic needs.

“Some of my mates steal because they can’t afford it. One of my mates didn’t have any deodorants – she has 5 sisters, and her parents live in council housing, and she couldn’t afford deodorant, so she stole it. If you can’t afford it, how else are you supposed to get it? A lot of makeup wipes, wet wipes etc get stolen”.



For some young people, managing their period is a huge challenge due to the cost of menstrual products. Nationally, nearly 1 in 10 girls have missed school because they couldn’t afford or access the products they needed. One parent shared her concern about having three young daughters and the worry of how she would afford menstrual products for all of them as they grew older.

Housing and its impact on children’s education

Young people shared their experiences of living in overcrowded housing, including having to share bedrooms with their entire family. They spoke about the challenges of not having a quiet space to study or do homework, and their fears about how this might affect their exam results.

“Finding a space to do coursework in my house is hard. I share with my 2 little sisters, and my brother sleeps in the dining room. I want to do well in my exams.”



“I share a room with my Mum, we don’t have our own home - it’s my Nan’s house. My aunty and uncles and my cousins live here too, there’s not much space and its always loud. I don’t have anywhere of my own to go, trying to do homework is hard”.

Families living in temporary accommodation also spoke about being placed far from their previous homes. Parents are often faced with a difficult decision: either move their children to a new school or face long daily commutes to avoid disrupting their education. One family described how this affected their neurodiverse child.

“It’s a long commute to school for my eldest, which is tiring and challenging. He is neurodiverse”.

Poverty and SEND

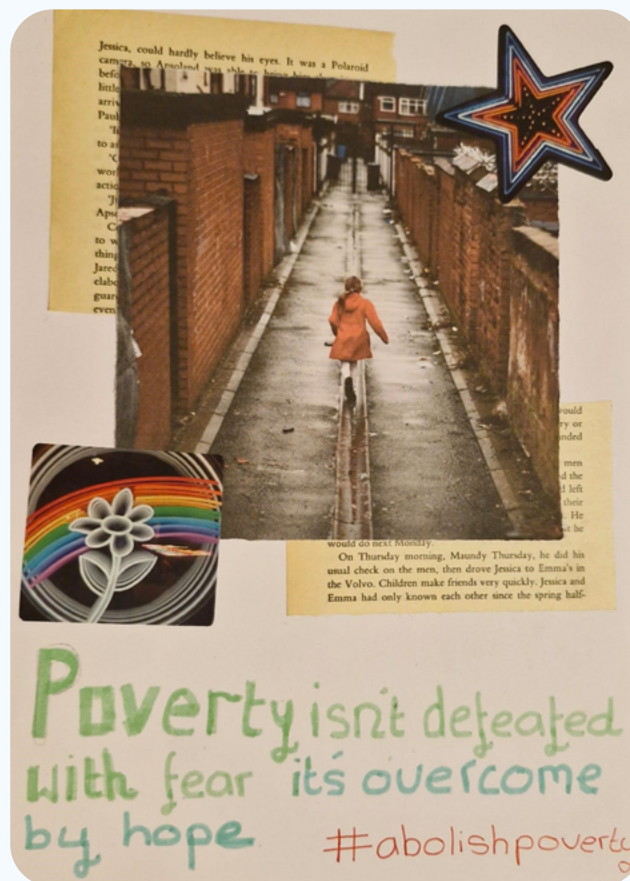
Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are more likely to experience poverty than their peers. Parents shared how the demands of providing care for their children with SEND often requires them to reduce their working hours or leave employment, leading to a drop in their family income. Some families also spoke about the additional costs they face, such as paying for specialist foods to manage allergies and intolerances, which place additional pressure on already tight budgets.

“

As a family of 5 with two SEN children, we only have one income and are struggling to meet basic bills. We have frequently had to access food banks and ask for support payments.

Hopes, dreams and aspirations

Many children and young people shared how living in poverty limits their dreams and aspirations. This is not because of an intrinsic lack of motivation among children and young people living in poverty, rather that living in poverty has a damaging effect of their sense of control over their lives.



Ameira | Age 15

This postcard demonstrates a young person's fear of always struggling at home with the cost of living. Through her artwork, she expresses anxiety about whether her situation will ever change as she grows older, given the lack of opportunities available to her in Cornwall. It reflects worries about her future where financial hardship continues, limiting her choices and quality of life. This poster highlights how growing up in poverty shapes young people's outlook in their future, often filling them with uncertainty and fear rather than hope and possibilities.



33

PROTECTION FROM
HARMFUL DRUGS

Article 33

“Governments should educate and protect children from dangerous drugs.”



36

PROTECTION FROM
EXPLOITATION

Article 36

“Governments should protect children from exploitation by adults.”

Children and young people in St Austell explored how poverty impacts crime and exploitation in their community...



Young people (16-24 years old)

The cost and availability of public transport

The affordability and availability of public transport in Cornwall was a key issue raised by young people. Many spoke about the high cost of getting to and from college, and how the cost of transport limits their access to education, employment, and social opportunities.

“
It's going to get up to £200 a
year for me to go to college
and it's 5 minutes up the road.

“Public transport is crazy;
it's £3 for a single and I can't afford
it. **I either walk places, or I don't
go anywhere because I just can't
afford it**”.



“Being so far from anywhere else,
**it's hard to get bus or train and is
always expensive**, I have to travel
far for shops etc”.

Beyond cost, young people also described the challenges of limited public transport routes in rural areas and one young parent described their struggle with unreliable public transport.

“**In the winter, two buses didn't
turn up** and I had to wait 45 minutes
with X, and it was -1. **Then the
replacement bus took us to the
wrong place** and we ended up stuck
there. **X was looking blue, so I had
to take off all my layers and put
them on him**, so I was just in a vest
top and **I was freezing**”.

“
Transport in Cornwall can be **late
or not turn up. It is hard to get to
some places** by bus or train.

Some young people felt that learning to drive was the only way to access more opportunities, but the cost of lessons and running a car was simply out of reach.

“

Lucas needs to learn to drive to have more access to work but **it's just unaffordable at £45 an hour.**

“I would love to get a car, **I can't afford lessons, I definitely can't afford to insure a car**, but it would make life so much easier with getting a job. I'm really restricted in the amount of time I have between doing the school and nursery trips because it's an hour round trip walk, so **trying to find a job that I can get too, when we live in the sticks, is tough without transport**”.

Employment opportunities

Young people spoke about the challenges they face in finding work and the limited career opportunities they feel exist in Cornwall. A lack of experience was highlighted as one of the biggest barriers to securing a job, creating a cycle that's hard to break.

“

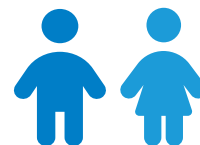
When my brother was my age, **he lied about his experience** on his job applications **so that he could get a job.**

“

I think more jobs should be available for people our age – **they all want experience**, but you can't get experience if you've not had your first job.

“

I volunteered with the Wave Project and put that on job applications, **and it got ignored.**



Many also shared concerns about low-paid and seasonal employment, which makes it difficult to achieve financial stability or independence.

“
£10 an hour, 4 months a year... 6 if I'm lucky.

Some described feeling a strong pull toward urban areas, believing they would need to leave Cornwall in order to access better job prospects and build a more secure future.

Right On!

In the **Right On! Survey 2025**, under-taken by Cornwall Council, **59% of college-age young people** said that **cheaper tickets would help them to use public transport more often.**

“
When I was 17, I did 2 shifts at a fish and chip shop, and I was paid 40p per hour below minimum wage.

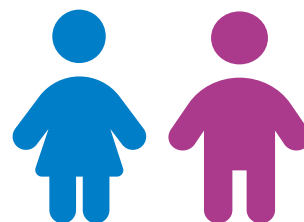
Mental health support

Young people spoke about how poverty is not just a lack of money, but it means not having access to the things that they need to support their wellbeing. They talked about wanting mental health services that are available when needed, not after months on a waiting list. Some young people spoke openly about their frustrations with systems that exist but don't always serve them. One young person reflected that a lack of support at school with anxiety and depression led to her dropping out without any GCSEs. She now faces significant challenges accessing opportunities as a result.

“
WE can't do anything to help you”

“
My school said they couldn't meet my needs.
So where do I go?

“
There are loads of kids who need help — but there isn't any.

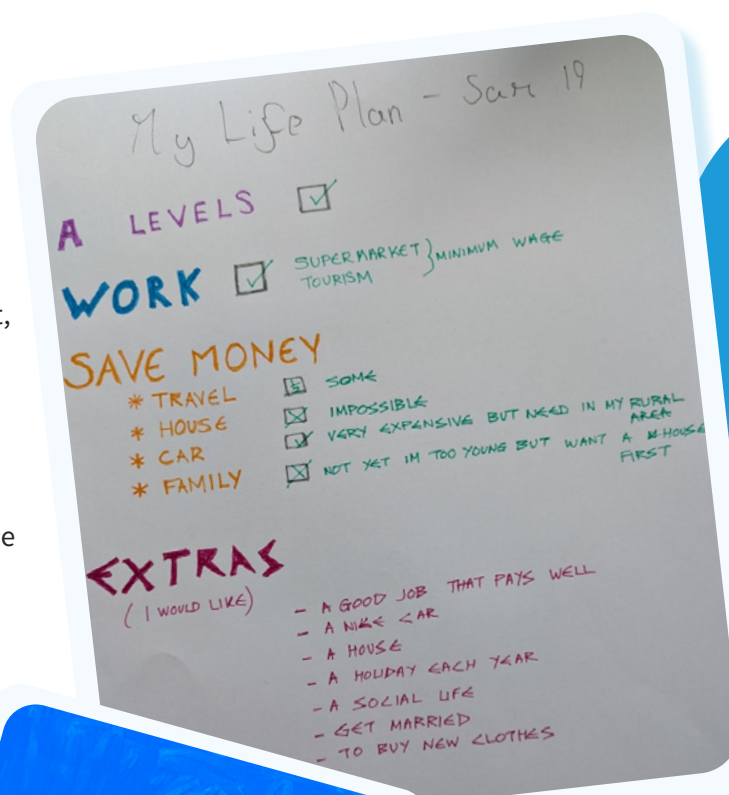


Lack of affordable homes for young people

Many young people described a deep sense of hopelessness about the prospect of ever affording a home in Cornwall. The lack of affordable housing, combined with low wages and insecure employment, as explored in this chapter, left them feeling that renting their own place or home ownership was out of reach. One young person described the idea of having a house as simply “impossible”.

They also felt that Cornwall’s rural location and the impact of tourism made the situation worse, with one young person explaining that “houses are expensive and local people get kicked out of where they are living”. This lack of affordable housing damages young people’s hopes and aspirations and sense of control over their lives.

This young person’s painting of a house up on the hill symbolises the ‘picture perfect’ home that is far away in the distance and therefore looks to be unobtainable.



“

(I earn) **£10 an hour,**
4 months a year... 6, if I'm lucky.

Average house price: £284,000

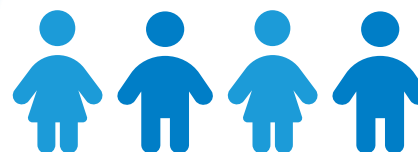
Transport is costly and unreliable.

These are just the things that affect me, but with no job security, **how am I meant to hope for the future?**

THINK!

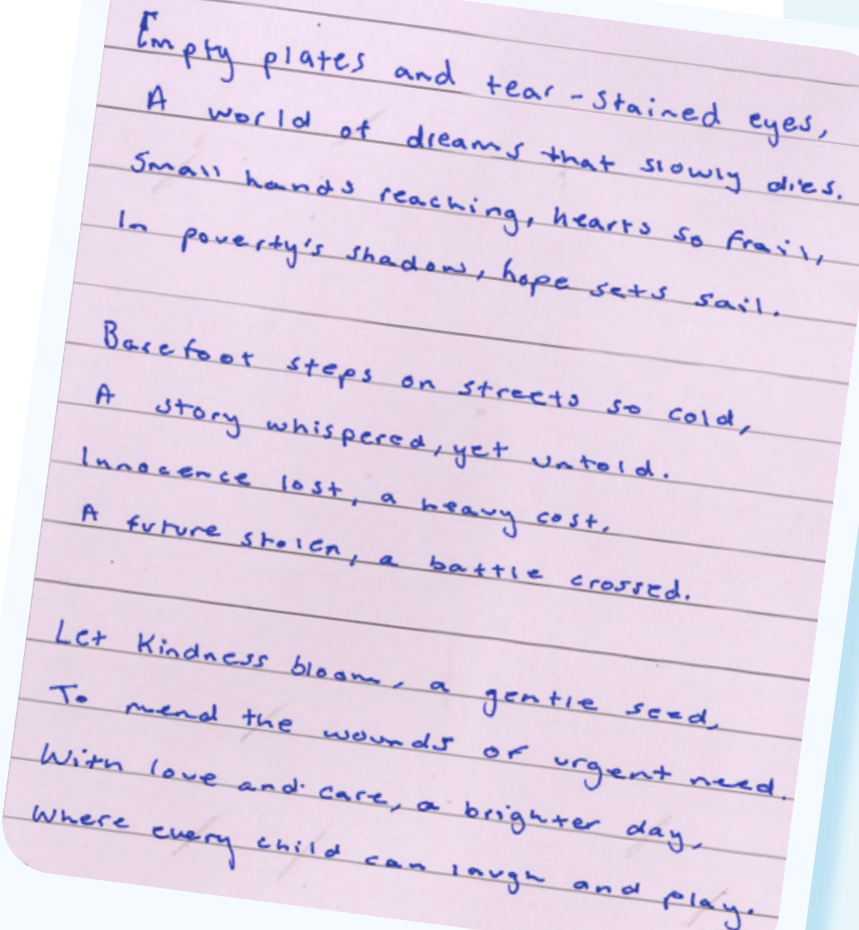
Where will the youth of Cornwall,
a beautiful and unique place
be in 15 years?

Some will be **gone and** some **stuck.**
And Cornwall won't
be the same.



Hopes, dreams and aspirations

We heard how young people's experiences of poverty leave little room for hopes, dreams, and aspirations, creating a feeling of being trapped in circumstances beyond their control. These two poems, written by young people in Cornwall, powerfully convey the emotional weight of growing up in poverty, and the hope for change.



Empty plates and tear-stained eyes,
A world of dreams that slowly dies.
Small hands reaching, hearts so frail,
In poverty's shadow, hope sets sail.

Barefoot steps on streets so cold,
A story whispered, yet untold.
Innocence lost, a heavy cost,
A future stolen, a battle crossed.

Let kindness bloom, a gentle seed,
To mend the wounds of urgent need.
With love and care, a brighter day,
Where every child can laugh and play.

Poem by Addie | Age 16

A teenager stands in a hollow house, a house that is more like a ship drifting on a sea of abandoned promises. The walls are maps, torn and frayed, the edges curling like old paper, each crease a different failed chance, each smudge the weight of a future too far to see clearly.

Their stomach is a cavern, not echoing hunger but absorbing it, a black hole where meals used to fall, the silence louder than any roar. Outside, the rain taps against the windows, reminding them that time keeps moving while their feet are stuck in the mud of their own small world.

The streets are a wilderness, branches reaching out to grab, pavement cracked like a forgotten trail. They walk without knowing if the path is leading anywhere or if it's just another loop, another wasted circle.

Dreams are strange creatures, flickering like candles in a draft, too fragile to hold, but still, they hold on. They are the only thing not crushed by the weight of bills, not drowned in the flood of promises that never made it to shore.

The teenager holds the wind in their lungs, waiting for it to change direction, hoping for a gust strong enough to shift the ship from its path.

Babies, children and young people on the Isles of Scilly

“

Just because we've got a small island doesn't mean we have less rights than people with, like, massive islands, like cities and stuff.

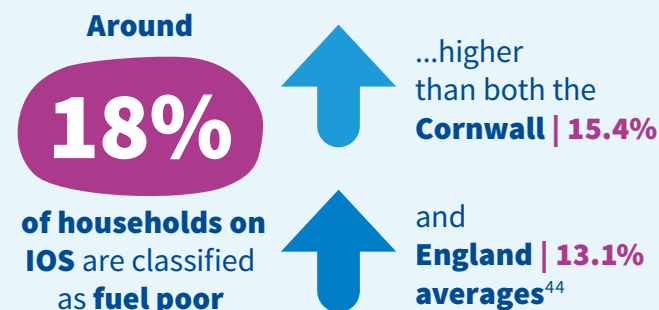
The Isles of Scilly are situated 28 miles off the southwestern tip of Cornwall, and comprise of five inhabited islands: Bryher, St Agnes, St Martin's, St Mary's and Tresco each of which has their own unique character and distinct identity. The Isles of Scilly face a unique set of challenges that can deepen the experience of poverty for babies, children, young people, and their families. Often, these experiences of poverty are hidden from view.

“There is more behind a smile on someone's face. They might have things going on that you don't know about. It's just the tip of the iceberg. Actually, they've got really tough things going on because their family doesn't have much money”.

The islands' geographical isolation, seasonal economy, and limited infrastructure create a complex environment where the cost of living is high, and access to essential services is often difficult.

Fuel and food poverty

Fuel poverty is a significant challenge for families on the Isles of Scilly, largely due to the reliance on expensive electric heating and solid fuels.



The cost of food on the islands is higher than on the mainland due to freight costs. With only one main food shop on the islands, families are vulnerable to supply chain disruptions. If a freight delivery is delayed due to bad weather, shelves can remain empty.

“

I don't think it is fair how expensive food is over here and at school we don't get served a lot of food and it is really expensive and my Mum doesn't have enough money to make me a packed lunch.





Lack of affordable and quality housing

Poor housing conditions such as damp, mould, and overcrowding are common on the islands. House prices are very high in relation to local incomes. Many young people spoke about the lack of affordable housing, and expressed their concerns about **“too many holiday homes”** and **“not enough homes for locals to live in”**.

“I feel the need for more proper housing to support families to ensure children don’t need to have to share a bed with parent”.

Lack of employment opportunities

The high cost of living in the islands coupled with lower-than-average wages makes it especially hard for families on the islands to meet their basic needs. The reliance on low-paid and seasonal employment, makes it difficult for families to achieve financial stability.



Access to post-16 education

There is no post-16 education on the islands. While grants are available to help with transport and accommodation costs, families spoke about how this support often falls short of covering the full expenses required for their child to continue education or training on the mainland.

“

We’re already in debt from compulsory Post-16 education, before then having a child who goes on to university.



Access to leisure, recreation and social opportunities

Young people on the islands spoke about both the joys and limitations of living on the islands. Whilst they valued being so close to the beach and the freedom island life brings, they also spoke about the limited access to more structured leisure and social opportunities that they feel their mainland peers have.

Barriers to accessing support

There is no dedicated benefits advice service on the islands, and take-up of support such as Free School Meals is low, often due to stigma and shame.



Access to healthcare

Families face significant barriers in accessing healthcare and need to travel to the mainland to access specialist medical care. While travel costs are covered, accommodation expenses are not, placing an additional financial and emotional burden on families.

“

Jobs are limited and pay doesn’t really support the prices of stuff over here.



Listen to young people from Five Islands Academy on the Isles of Scilly telling the stories of characters who do not have enough, or have experience of inequality.





Article 18

“All children have the right to support from both parents, if possible.

Governments should help parents by providing services to support them.”

Parents and carers

“Parents are put in this situation - feed children, heat their home, or wash their clothes. It's not a choice anyone should have to make”.

Parents and carers told us they are often faced with impossible decisions, living with the constant worry of how to meet their children's most basic needs. Many shared how they are judged negatively by others because of their circumstances. These harmful social attitudes and stereotypes are often internalised, leaving parents and carers with a deep sense of shame, guilt, and personal failure.

“

We are judged by others - **why do you think we judge ourselves?**



“

We all seem to have the same experience, **feeling judged and unsupported.**

“

I felt so bad and guilty (to be) **unable to offer my baby more than this**, it was all so horrible and so hard.

“

You can feel lonely.

Stigma and shame act as powerful barriers. They can lead to social isolation, worsen mental health, and prevent parents and carers from seeking the help and support they need.



“Pay it forward in the café gives me anxiety.. something in me shrivels up inside, everyone will look at me and say she hasn't got money. If I see other people, I don't think about it”.

While some parents spoke about their fear of accessing support, others described the frustration of trying to get help but being met with silence or delay.

“

You didn't hear our cries for help until it was too late.

“

I know **people who have called social** (services) **on themselves**, begging them for support.



“Improved communication from the council would have helped. We found out our house was ready 1-2 months before we moved in and we just weren't told”.

Parents spoke about the everyday demands of parenthood, juggling responsibilities, managing households, and caring for their children, while navigating the added pressures that poverty brings. But despite the daily struggles, what stood out clearly was the love and commitment parents have for their children. Many described the sacrifices they make to ensure that their children's basic needs are met, often going without themselves.

“I don't think my kids have been affected too much by my financial situation as I tend to go without what I want so they don't have to go without”.

“

My children
have given me a
life and focus.

“

The most honourable
and best thing I can do
is to **be a good Mum.**



Public Health working with Penlee Family Project and Transformation CPR



Davydenko-Orlova Nataliia, 2025

Summary and recommendations



Key themes

Our analysis identified seven key themes that reflect the breadth and depth of poverty's impact on children's lives in CIOS. These themes also represent the building blocks of good health.

While each theme affects children across all life stages, they are experienced differently from infancy to young adulthood. This is reflected in the structure of this report which takes a life course approach. As demonstrated in this report, as a baby, living in overcrowded accommodation can restrict the space available to play, impacting early development. As a young person, that same overcrowding might mean no quiet space to study, affecting educational outcomes. These differences show how poverty is a persistent and evolving challenge that shapes children's experiences as they grow.

These themes presented here will inform future action to address child poverty in CIOS. Importantly, many of these themes are interconnected. For example, access to affordable transport affects a child's ability to engage in leisure and social opportunities, which in turn can influence their mental wellbeing and sense of belonging. This highlights the need for coordinated cross-sector action to address child poverty.



**“
Poverty shouldn't limit
our opportunities.”**

Key themes

“This consultation confirms what we hear anecdotally: families are struggling and children’s needs are complex, urgent, and unmet” - Whole Again Communities, Penzance



Meeting basic needs

Many families living in poverty are going without the most basic needs - food, clothing, heating, hygiene, and essential baby items. Many parents described the sacrifices they make to ensure that their children’s basic needs are met, often going without themselves.



Housing

Poor quality and insecure housing was a recurring concern across all age groups. Families spoke about struggling to afford rent, living in overcrowded conditions, spending time in temporary accommodation, and coping with damp, mould and unsafe environments. These issues have a significant impact on children’s health, wellbeing and development at every stage of life.



Transport

The cost, availability and reliability of transport is a major barrier to babies, children, young people accessing education, employment, healthcare, and social opportunities. This challenge was felt across all age groups and locations, but especially in rural areas and on the Isles of Scilly.



Play, leisure and social connection

All children have the right to play, rest and leisure, but for many babies, children and young people in CIOs, poverty is denying them this right. We heard how the ability to take part in play, leisure and social activities is shaped by multiple, intersecting barriers. Overcrowded and poor-quality housing limits space to play and relax. Transport costs and availability restrict access to leisure opportunities. And the stigma and shame associated with poverty can lead to social isolation.



Stigma and mental wellbeing

Poverty doesn’t just affect what babies, children and young people have, it affects how they feel. They spoke about the shame of not having enough, the stigma of being judged, and their experiences of poverty-related bullying. Some spoke about how living in poverty makes them feel anxious, powerless, isolated, and hopeless about the future.



Parental support

The pressures of poverty affect not only children, but also their parents and carers. Parents shared how poverty contributes to poor mental health, isolation, and feelings of shame. Whilst work is often seen as a route out of poverty, many families face complex barriers to employment. This emphasises the need for a ‘think-family’ approach that ensures both parents and carers and their children are able to get the support they need.



Education

Children and young people told us that while education is meant to be free, there are hidden costs such as uniforms, transport, equipment, trips, charity events, and digital access. These costs place additional pressure on families and can prevent children from fully participating in school life. For some, these barriers lead to school absence and missed learning opportunities.

New message

To @CornwallandTheIslesofScilly

Subject A call to action

To everyone who plays a part in our lives,

We are the future of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Some of us are still learning to walk and talk. Some of us are navigating school, friendships, and growing up. Some of us are preparing for our futures, dreaming of what we might become. But many of us are doing all of this while living in poverty.

We want you to know what that feels like.

It feels like going to bed hungry and waking up cold. It feels like wearing shoes that don't fit and uniforms that don't match. It feels like missing out on school trips, birthday parties, and swimming lessons. It feels like watching our parents worry, and knowing, before we should, that money is tight.

It feels like being left out.

We know our parents are trying their best. We see them skipping meals so we can eat. We hear them on the phone, trying to get help. We feel their stress when the bills come in. We know they love us.

We want to grow up healthy and happy. We want to play, learn, and dream big. But poverty makes everything harder. It makes it harder to concentrate at school, to feel confident, to feel like we belong. It makes us feel ashamed, even though we've done nothing wrong.

As we get older, we start to understand more.

We see how poverty shapes our choices. Some of us miss school because we don't have the right shoes, equipment

Click to hear this letter read aloud by our young people

message

or period products. Some of us struggle to get to college because we can't afford travel costs. Some of us miss out on sports or clubs because they cost too much or are not for us. Some of us feel like we'll never be able to afford a home here, in the place we love. Some of us feel like we have to leave Cornwall or the Isles of Scilly to have a future.

We want people to understand that poverty looks different in different places. On the Isles of Scilly, it means expensive food and unreliable transport. It means fewer services, fewer choices, and sometimes feeling forgotten.

We don't want pity. We want change.

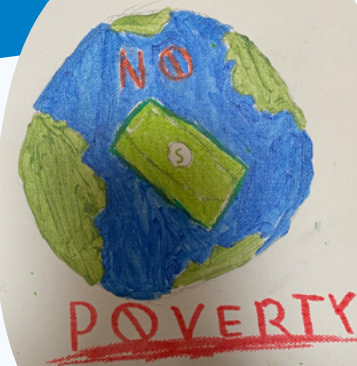
We want every child to have enough food, warm clothes, and a safe home. We want schools to understand that not everyone can afford the same things. We want travel that is affordable and run often, so we can get to school, college, or the beach. We want support for our parents, so they don't have to choose between heating and eating. We want to be listened to, not just in reports, but in real decisions.

We are not just statistics. We are your future.

Please don't let poverty decide who we become. Help us build a Cornwall and Isles of Scilly where every child can thrive, not just survive.

With hope,

The babies, children and young people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly



Send

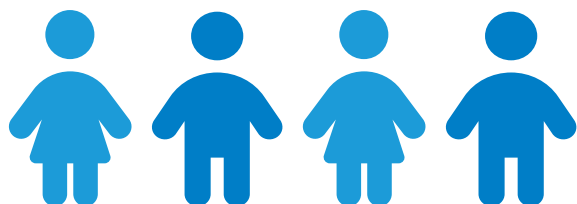
The way forward

This report brings together the voices of babies, children and young people, and the people who volunteer and work with them, from across CIOS. It highlights the urgent need to address child poverty. No single agency can solve the challenges of child poverty - we need to work together to make change happen.

Recommendations for action

For all readers and community members

- Reflect on how you, your organisation, or your community can create change and contribute to reducing the physical, emotional and social impacts of child poverty.
- Challenge poverty stigma by raising awareness of its harmful and powerful impact on individuals, promoting compassionate language, and raising awareness of the lived and living experience of poverty.
- Share and celebrate empowering and diverse stories from people and places across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to raise and encourage aspiration and hope.



For strategic leaders and policy makers

- Establish a local multi-agency Child Poverty Taskforce to develop and implement solutions informed by this report, aimed at reducing and mitigating the impact of poverty. This Taskforce will oversee the development of a local Child Poverty Action Plan which is aligned to national and local strategies, insights and priorities. This will drive forwards effective and efficient change.
- The Action Plan will be brought to Cornwall's Health and Wellbeing Board and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Partnership via the Committee in Common. It will also be shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board for the Isles of Scilly. This collaboration of senior leadership and insight will determine how to oversee and demonstrate impact in addressing childhood poverty.
- Ensure corporate policies and strategies (e.g. commissioning guidance, and safeguarding processes) consider both the immediate and

“

Educating other children and young people **about what poverty actually is** and **how people view it.**

**Cornwall Youth
Council member**

long-term impacts of child poverty. Champion a solution-focused approach that challenges individuals and services to do all they can to mitigate the impact of child poverty.

- Embed “poverty proofing” into service design to help remove barriers, mitigate the impact of poverty, and avoid unintentionally increasing adversity or reinforcing stigma. This will be supported by practical ‘toolkits’ and guidance which will enable organisations to address poverty related challenges.
- Increase access to good jobs, apprenticeships, paid internships, mentoring, and inclusive recruitment practices.
- Prioritise continued and regular engagement and reflection with our babies, children, young people and families and collaboration with our VCSE partners including Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) CYP Families Alliance.

“

Targeted funding creates an inherent stigma – this must be considered.

Cornwall Youth Council member

For organisations working with families

- Support income maximisation by promoting uptake of the full range of targeted statutory financial assistance that already exists and explore opportunities to make accessing support easier for families through initiatives such as auto-enrolment for Free School Meals, Healthy Start, funded childcare and parent/carer support programmes.
- Support dedicated activity that explores child poverty in the context of education and learning (e.g. Child Poverty Conferences, sharing of best-practice and guidance, increased understanding of the impact of poverty on attendance and school readiness, the role of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) to empower students).

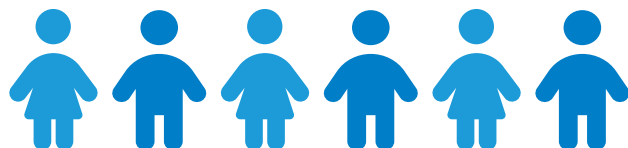
To further understand our data and intelligence

- Proactive focus on child poverty by our local Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) to further explore themes of this report and to identify where we need better insight (e.g. disabled children, kinship carers, impact of seasonal work).
- Better understand the temporal impact of poverty – the effect on a child’s ‘now’ and on their short- and long-term future outcomes.
- Proactive collaboration with all sectors (e.g. health, social care, youth justice, community safety) to better understand and interpretate the available data to further inform our local understanding of the impact of child poverty and identify opportunities for mitigating action.

“

It’s not just a holiday destination... it’s our home and children should not go without.

Cornwall Youth Council member



Local action to tackle child poverty: Building on good practice

Across CIOS, organisations and communities are already taking meaningful steps to mitigate and reduce the impact of child poverty.

This page highlights a selection of local initiatives that aim to improve outcomes for babies, children, and young people living in poverty. These examples offer valuable learning and inspiration and are a foundation for further action. We must continue to build on this to create lasting change.



Cornwall Living Wage Place Campaign

The Cornwall Living Wage Place campaign, launched in 2023, aims to increase the number of local employers paying the real Living Wage. Cornwall was officially recognised as a Living Wage

Place in February 2025. This Living Wage Foundation accreditation saw Cornwall become the first county in the UK to achieve this status. Cornwall has been recognised nationally for this pioneering work to tackle low and insecure pay, winning the 'Campaign of the Year' Champion Award at the Living Wage Foundation's annual Living Wage Champion Awards.

Time2Move Holiday Programme



An inclusive programme offering fun physical and creative activities, alongside a healthy meal, for all children between 5 and 16 years old during the school holidays. The programme is fully funded for children eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals. In 2024, the Time2Move Holiday Programme reached 3,855 children on benefits-related Free School Meals and provided 57,083 meals to the children and young people attending activities during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays.



A cash-first crisis response pathway supporting families with young children facing financial hardship or food insecurity. Health Visitors work directly

Household Support Fund: Early Years Crisis Support Grant

with families to understand the nature of the crisis, provide immediate financial support, and signpost to longer-term services, helping reduce the need for future emergency food support.

Redruth School: Poverty-proofing the school day

Redruth School offer a free Breakfast Club every day throughout the school year. The school also provides an after-school homework club with access to computers, resources and free travel home on the school mini-bus for those students who would normally travel by bus.

Craig Bonds, Headteacher at Redruth School, said: “Our approach to supporting students experiencing poverty often includes help with food, uniform, equipment, additional academic or pastoral support and also with access to clubs and trips. Our Governors and staff team fully support our philosophy, which makes it so impactful”.





Forward Together
War-rag War-barth

Penpol School: Poverty-proofing the school day

Penpol School partners with the charity Sponsor Stars to support families with the cost of essential school-related items, such as uniforms, shoes, and school bags.

Eligible families can submit claims and receive reimbursements up to an agreed annual amount. The school also maintains strong links with local food banks, enabling swift and responsive support for families in crisis. More broadly, Penpol School is committed to ensuring that financial barriers never prevent children from participating in school activities. Trips and clubs are subsidised for those who need it, and if funding cannot be secured, the activity is not booked, ensuring inclusion for all pupils.

The Rainbow Project



Since 2012, the Penlee Cluster of Churches has run a Summer Holiday Club for children attending schools in the local area. Building on this provision, in September 2022, they partnered with St Mary's C of E Primary

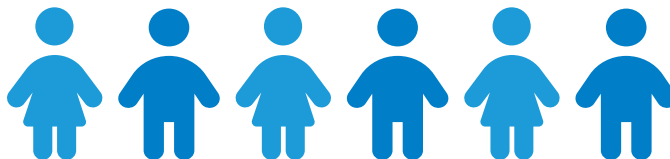
School to launch The Rainbow Project. This initiative employs a Family Worker to expand the Holiday Club and provide targeted support to families in need. The addition of the Family Worker has been invaluable - offering emotional and financial support, and creating lasting positive impacts for both children and their parents.



Healthy Start Champion Training

Many families with young children across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are missing out on [Healthy Start](#) payments they are entitled to. This training programme

is being rolled out to frontline practitioners to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to actively promote the Healthy Start scheme and support families through the national application process, to ensure all eligible families are able to access the scheme.



Healthy
Cornwall

Healthy Cornwall's Eat Well, Spend Less videos

A series of practical [recipe videos](#) designed to help families prepare healthy, tasty, and budget-friendly meals at home. The videos use simple ingredients and basic kitchen equipment, to make nutritious cooking more accessible.



Winter Wellbeing Guides

Both Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have dedicated versions of an annual Winter Wellbeing guide which is packed full of useful advice to support residents who are impacted by

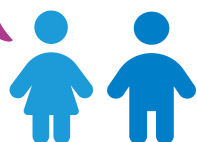
rising prices and the cost of living. This collaborative resource shares practical tips to keeping warm, well, safe and happy.

Our thanks to...

We extend our appreciation to all those who played a role in creating this report, including:

- All the babies, children, young people and families who took time to share their thoughts, stories and experiences. Your contributions are invaluable.
- All the practitioners from across a range of workforces who shared their insights and expertise.
- The community organisations who embraced and supported the creative and innovative ambition of this report.

**Special thanks to
Cornwall Youth Council**
whose insights have been
included throughout
this report



Appendices



Appendix 1: Child Poverty Measures Glossary

Income-related measures

The two most common ways to measure poverty focus on household income.

Absolute poverty

Children in households with incomes below 60% of the UK median household income (the point at which half of households have lower income and half have higher income) in 2010/11, adjusted for inflation. This measure shows whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms.

Relative poverty

Children in households with incomes below 60% of the UK median household income in that year. This shows whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.

Experience of poverty measures

To help us understand children's experiences of poverty, we can look at the nature of that poverty, including the depth of poverty families experience and the length of time spent in poverty.¹

Persistent poverty

Children in households with an income less than 60% of the UK median household income (before housing costs) in at least three out of the last four years.

Deep poverty

Children in households with an income less than 50% of the UK median household income.

Deprivation-based measures

Deprivation-based measures look at what essential everyday items and activities people can afford. These measures can reveal poverty that income-related measures might miss. For example, a family may not be classed as 'in poverty' based on their income alone, but may still struggle to access everyday necessities.

Material deprivation

Each year, the UK government collects data on material deprivation by asking families whether they can afford 21 basic items and activities that are considered to be necessities by the general population, including fresh fruit and vegetables, warm clothes, and school trips. If they cannot afford a given item this gives them a score, with items more commonly owned given a higher weighted score.

A family is considered to be in material deprivation if they have a score of 25 or more out of 100.

Destitution

Being unable to afford basic necessities, like food and shelter. People are considered destitute if they have either:

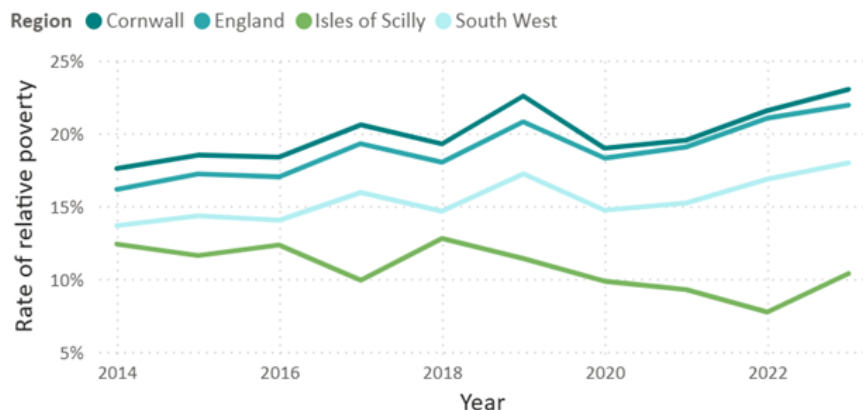
- Lacked two of the following essentials over the past month because they cannot afford them: shelter, food, heating their home, lighting their home, clothing and footwear, basic toiletries.
- Have an income so extremely low that they are unable to purchase these essentials for themselves.

Indices of deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small areas (neighbourhoods), known as Lower Layer Super Output Areas. It combines indicators across seven themes, including housing, health, income, and education, that reflect a different aspect of deprivation experienced by people living in the area. Within areas there will be households who are experiencing poverty and others who are not. The latest IMD was published in 2019 and showed that 17 neighbourhoods in Cornwall were in the top 10% most deprived in England. It is important to note that current measures of IMD do not reflect rural areas very well due to methodology.

Appendix 2: BCYP Poverty Technical Data

Rate of relative poverty amongst 0-19 year olds (2014-2023)



Rate of relative poverty

The broad trends within relative poverty rates in Cornwall have matched that of England, with similar rises and falls in line with the national story. What is indicated is the excesses Cornwall has seen in relation to the relative poverty national average, having more exaggerated peaks and falls in poverty rates in certain periods. Of note is the narrowing gap between Cornwall and England, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic (between 2020 and 2022). This is likely a result of both increased support schemes during the pandemic, as well as a national increase in the living wage – with England seeing wage stagnation in line with the already present economic inequalities in Cornwall.

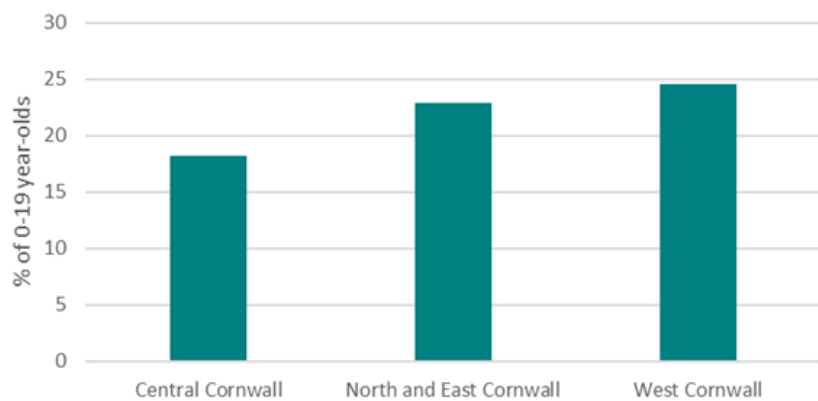
The Isles of Scilly has a lower rate of relative poverty than Cornwall and England, and is below the rate seen in the South West. The smaller population size of the Isles of Scilly means smaller changes in demographics can appear as more extreme changes in relative poverty rates, but the poverty rate on the Isles of Scilly remains increasingly lower than the South West and Cornwall.

The rate of relative poverty amongst children and young people is highest in West Cornwall Integrated Care Area (ICA), where 24.5% of 0–19-year-olds live in relative poverty. The West Cornwall ICA includes areas such as Redruth and Camborne and encompasses the Kerrier and Penwith Primary Care Networks (PCNs).

In establishing the complex patterns of poverty in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, hidden poverty in otherwise less disadvantaged areas presents a challenge in identifying ‘hotspots’ of poverty. To avoid issues surrounding data suppression and rounding errors, a minimum population of one hundred 0-19s in a given area was set, allowing for the major sites of relative poverty rates to be identified.

However, in doing so, some smaller areas will naturally be missed and remain ‘hidden’ in poverty research. Notably, areas such as St Ives Town Centre and Island, and Mevagissey South fell within the top 5 LSOAs with the highest rate of relative poverty in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The low population of children and young people in these areas however mean accuracy in the data is likely to be lower.

Rate of relative poverty by Integrated Care Area (ICA)



Of the top 5 LSOAs meeting the one hundred 0-19s population minimum, 2 are located in the West Cornwall ICA (Camborne College Street..., Penzance Wharfside...) and 3 are located in the North and East Cornwall ICA (Kinsman Estate..., St Blazey West, Bodmin Town Centre...). This, alongside the dramatically higher rate of poverty seen in Kinsman Estate is indicative of more concentrated pockets of relative poverty in the North and East Cornwall ICA, and a more widespread elevated rate of relative poverty in West Cornwall (indicated by the higher overall rate for the ICA, beyond only viewing the top 5 LSOAs).

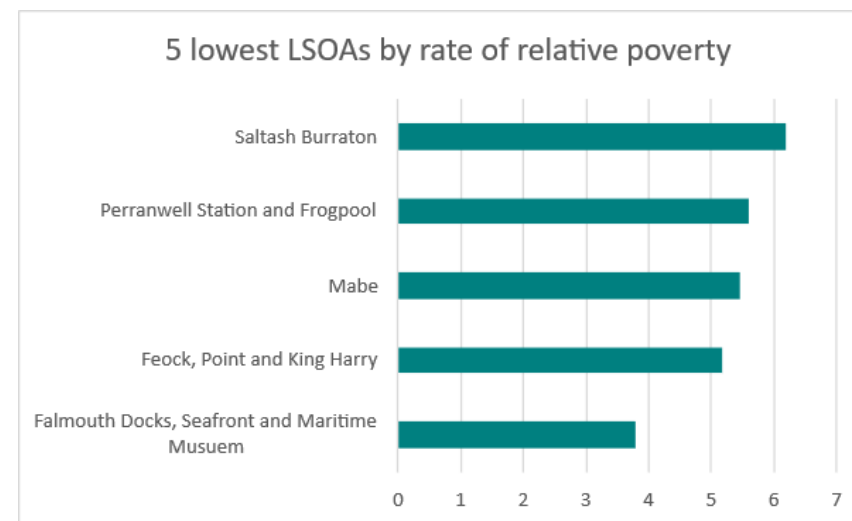
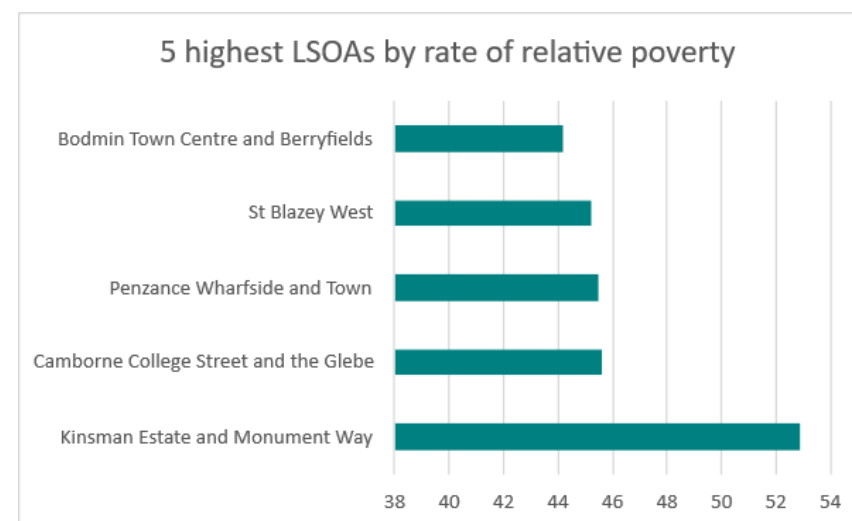
For comparison, of the lowest 5 LSOAs by relative poverty rate, 4 are located in the Central Cornwall ICA (specifically in and surrounding Falmouth). While this suggests Falmouth as a whole has a particularly low rate of relative poverty, certain areas are outliers – for example the Falmouth Laburnum Close, Acacia Road, Draceana Avenue LSOA is 7th highest in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly for rate of relative poverty (42%). This indicates geographical inequality in relative poverty rates both at county and local levels.

The disparity between the highest and lowest rates of relative poverty is stark – a 48% difference between Falmouth Docks and Kinsman Estate. This suggests that living in certain areas in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will likely have a dramatic impact on the quality of life of our children and young people, being a point of inequality separating communities.

Number in relative poverty

When considering the number of children and young people in relative poverty rather than the rate, the top 5 LSOAs are split with two in the West Cornwall ICA, two in the North and East Cornwall ICA, and one in Central Cornwall ICA.

The difference between the highest and lowest LSOA in the number of children in relative poverty is also dramatic, with 10 living in Falmouth Docks, and 250 in Redruth North, once again indicative of major inequalities between communities.



Demographics

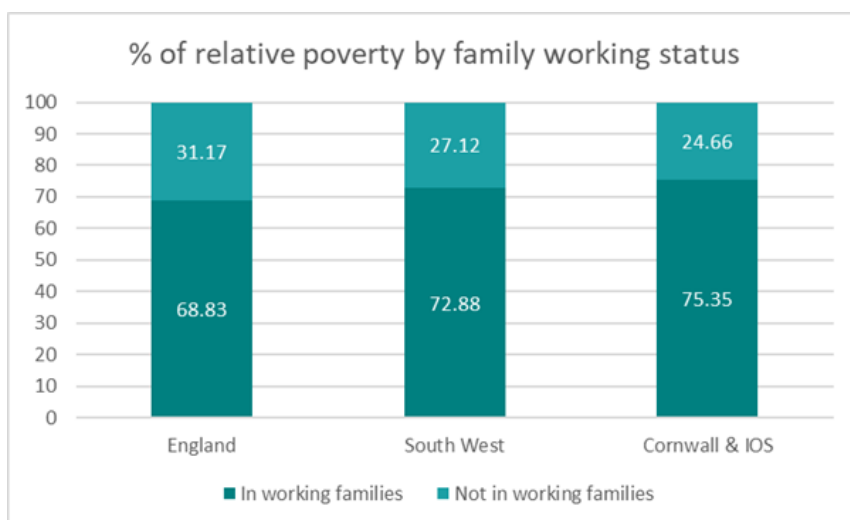
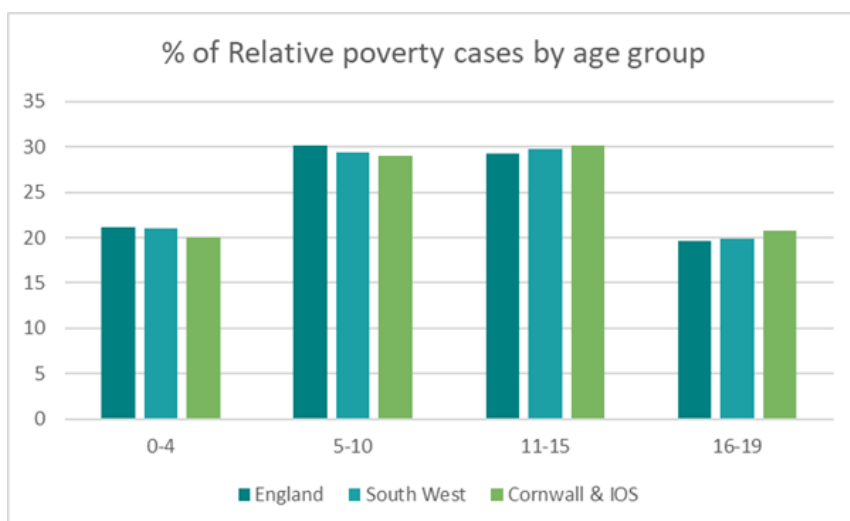
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly follow a similar pattern to the South West in comparison to England regarding the distribution of children and young peoples' relative poverty cases, being higher in the school age (11-15) and college/ further education (16-19), and lower amongst 0-4 and 5-10 age groups. However, while the pattern is similar, the actual scale is higher in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, exceeding the percentage of relative poverty cases in school/college/further education ages seen in the South West and England.

The lower rates seen in the 0-4 and 5-10 age groups suggests that those demographics living in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are less likely to fall within relative poverty than the same groups living in England and the South West, but the higher rate in the older demographic potentially indicates rising costs around education starting at the secondary school age.

Regarding the working status of families, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have the majority of children living in relative poverty within working family households – in line with England and the South West.

This majority is however 6.5% higher in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly than in England, indicating heightened challenges faced by working families in CIOS exceeding that of the South West and England. This may be attributable to lower wages seen in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, as well as less support for working families to prevent them from falling into the relative poverty threshold as they face day-to-day costs of living. This includes the cost of childcare and transport for education, to name a few.

The Isles of Scilly alone will also have unique costs within these demographics that are otherwise unseen when combined with Cornwall. Island living has heightened transport costs and the more logistically complex import of goods has the cost passed down to the consumer, and by extension the children otherwise on the threshold of relative poverty.



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