

## Time to re-think welfare reform

This issue of *Poverty* is being published in the wake of the government's child poverty and social mobility strategies. Both strategies raise questions about the government's economic priorities and commitments on child poverty. On the one hand the government argues that 'throwing money at the problem' will not tackle child poverty. On the other, it has introduced swingeing cuts to benefits and tax credits that take money away from the poorest groups. The cumulative impact of cuts will be massive, plunging a further 300,000 children into poverty. By the time universal credit is introduced, many families will be in crisis and there will be further losers. Single parents may lose out, while support for children with disabilities could be halved. Introducing radical change at a time when cuts to local authorities and legal aid are decimating the advice and representation sector is reckless. The erosion of vital services that support the most vulnerable groups in relation to employment, social security and housing rights leaves already vulnerable groups at significantly greater risk.

And as the Archbishop of Canterbury powerfully notes, the government's approach is heavily reliant on 'a resurgence of the seductive language of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor'. The relentless stigmatisation of benefit claimants by large sections of the media and by politicians of all parties means public understanding of the realities of the system has been distorted and real problems sidelined.

This issue of *Poverty* highlights problems with the government's overall approach. An overview of the impact of cuts in Hampshire confirms that they will have a significant effect on vulnerable individuals and communities, on local authorities, public services and jobs. Restrictions on child benefit put us at odds with other European countries, while cuts in initiatives like Aimhigher will make it harder for disadvantaged students to access higher education.

As Sharon Wright argues, the government's blinkered belief that paid work is the only route out of poverty and its determination to introduce punitive welfare-to-work measures ignore a substantial body of research which suggest this approach is unlikely to work. Driving people who face significant barriers to work to seek what are all too often demeaning and transitory jobs or have their already inadequate benefits sanctioned, is not good for adults or children. And yet mothers with children as young as 12 months will be compelled to engage in jobseeking activities, irrespective of whether appropriate childcare – or jobs – are available. This hardly supports a 'family-friendly' approach to policy.

Policies that punish parents also damage children. And yet, research from the Children's Commissioner confirms that children themselves remain invisible and irrelevant in discussions on child poverty and the policies put in place to tackle it. If Ministers want to understand what poverty is and its impact on children's lives, they should watch the BBC1 documentary *Poor Kids*. In this programme, poor children explain that poverty means not having enough money to buy food, buy school uniforms, or go on trips or outings. It means living in cold, damp houses, with nothing to do when they go out and nothing to do if they stay in. It means worrying about parents, and debt, being bullied at school and confronting bleak futures. Tragically, without a change of approach, things are going to get much, much worse for those children. ■

<b>In brief</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Diary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Open space</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Can welfare reform work?</b>	<b>5</b>
Sharon Wright outlines the pros and cons	
<b>Trying to get by</b>	<b>9</b>
Kerry Martin and Ruth Hart hear what children have to say about living in poverty	
<b>Child benefits in the European Union</b>	<b>13</b>
Jonathan Bradshaw compares the UK with other European countries	
<b>Research review</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Poverty watch</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Listings</b>	<b>21</b>

**Poverty** is the policy journal of the Child Poverty Action Group. It aims to carry articles and features that will inform, stimulate and develop the debate on the nature and causes of poverty in its various forms and on the action required, especially by governments, to relieve and ultimately prevent it. Our objective is to publish material that achieves a high standard of analysis, without sacrificing clarity or accessibility, to specialist and non-specialist alike.

### Editorial staff

*Editor:* Gabrielle Preston  
*Production editor:* Kathy Armstrong  
*Research review:* Guy Standing, Geoff Philpotts  
*Poverty watch:* Rys Farthing  
*Diary:* Caroline Paskell  
*In brief:* Gabrielle Preston  
*Listings:* Eileen Dacey  
*Advertising and circulation:* Liz Dawson

The views expressed in **Poverty** are not necessarily those of CPAG

**Poverty** is published three times a year by CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF  
 Telephone: 020 7837 7979  
 staff@cpag.org.uk  
 www.cpag.org.uk  
 Registered Company No. 1993854  
 Charity No. 294841 (England and Wales); No. SC039339 (Scotland)  
 VAT No. 690 808117

**Poverty** is sent to all CPAG members – write for details or visit [www.cpag.org.uk/membership](http://www.cpag.org.uk/membership)

© Child Poverty Action Group 2011  
 ISSN 0 0032 5856

*Cover photos:* John Powell/Photofusion; Philip Wolmuth/Reportdigital; Timm Sonnenschein/Reportdigital  
*Design/Page make-up:* studio@deviousdesigns.co.uk  
*Print:* Calverts, info@calverts.coop