

# THIS WAS ACTION WEEK 2009

## Thank you for supporting Poverty & Homelessness Action Week in 2009!

Action Week this year ran from 31 January to 8 February. Incorporating **Homelessness Sunday** and **Poverty Action Sunday**, This second Poverty & Homelessness Action Week has been another resounding success.

From Invergordon in Scotland to Falmouth in Cornwall, and from Holyhead in Wales to Dereham in Yorkshire, groups up and down the land have yet again passionately and creatively responded to our call to bring poverty and homelessness to an end in the country. From performances of 'Voices from the Edge' (the script is still available online) to civic breakfasts, church services to sleep-outs, sponsored runs to the release of balloons, thousands of individuals, through over 100 events, have yet again shown how forceful the drive among you is to put an end to homelessness and poverty.

Our new, dedicated website took no fewer than 1,185 registrations from church groups, charities and dedicated individuals.

The website has enormously simplified operations, both for you and for us. You have been able to download free resources, where in previous years you would have had to order hard copies against payment. These resources will remain available in years to come, enabling you to use them at any time of the year. These resources will be moved to the archive area of the site in due course. As for us, as indicated, taking your expressions of interest online has greatly simplified the administration of managing the project and communicating with you.

As feedback forms attest, the online resources were very well received indeed. Not only did they assist you in developing your events in terms of content and organisation, a number of you also used them creatively. Thus one PowerPoint presentation was adapted and put to music. We have taken on board the concern expressed by some that the fancy graphics did not always print out well, if at all, so next year, simple words-only versions will be available, too.



"I have a strong feeling about poverty. I think it's an obscenity."  
Simon Callow

## Successful events

Some events were as modest as a dedicated service with just a handful of committed people; others were full-blown showcase performances of 'Voices from the Edge', such as those in Leeds, Edinburgh and London, attracting hundreds of paying spectators. As the case studies overleaf show, however, size does not always matter! The groups were chosen for the originality of their ideas.

Some initiatives were bigger, and some netted very substantial amounts in donations, but we thought that these three stories would show any of you who haven't participated yet that, with enough determination and imagination, you can make a massive impact, however small your team and limited your resources.

Finally, we would like to commend those church groups which, having organised dedicated services, invited one or more persons to speak about their experience of poverty and homelessness. The groups reported that this made a profound impact on audiences, bringing the issues much closer to home, demonstrating that falling into poverty and homelessness can happen to anyone, and that those affected are not to be blamed for their predicament.

## Voices from the Edge

We were already thrilled when we secured the partnership of Actors for Human Rights to enact the 'Voices from the Edge' monologues. Christine Bacon, director of the theatre company, collated real stories from people experiencing poverty and homelessness, and arranged them for the stage.

Imagine our excitement when, having contacted his agent, we heard that the actor Simon Callow, of 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' fame, agreed to be involved. For good measure, a little later Louise Jameson ('Dr Who', 'Eastenders'), came on board the project as well. In due course, performances were held in London, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Leicester, Truro, Sheffield and Falmouth. Simon and Louise, however, were able to commit only to the London performance at the Union Chapel.

On 2 February, a few days before the London performance, Simon Callow stated in 'The Times' that "all theatre is social work, and theatre regularly has to challenge itself with reality. And, while it's easy to imagine a celebrity doing this to glorify themselves, it seems absolutely right to me that if we are citizens, and not

living in some la-la-land separate from our fellow human beings, then we must speak up when we believe in something. I have a strong feeling about poverty. I think it's an obscenity."

Beyond the extensive radio and press coverage, our performances heralded a new phase in homelessness and poverty campaigning – bringing the issue much nearer the top of the agenda

In the same article, Christine Bacon, director of Actors for Human Rights, stated, "a huge sector of the population are poverty sceptics... some people don't believe poverty exists, or else they think it's to do with laziness rather than social injustice or bad luck."

The casting of Callow or Louise Jameson might attract those sceptics to the show. That is one of the key things we hoped to achieve with 'Voices from the Edge'. These performances attracted spectators in their hundreds. But beyond the extensive radio and press coverage, what these performances did was herald a new phase in homelessness and poverty campaigning – bringing the issue much nearer the top of the agenda. Over 90% of participants we surveyed said that Action Week events had changed their views on poverty and homelessness. We heard comments such as:

"Excellent! Makes you think what can we do? Many many thanks!"

"The overview produced by the Council was amazing and shocking, it has made me realise that poverty is much more widespread in the Borough. Low literacy and numeracy with low aspirations"

Please visit Action Week partner websites to find out about campaigns to bring poverty and homelessness to an end in the country – and get involved in the Get Fair campaign.

Guy Cruis, Housing Justice

### Case study 1: Kirkbymoorside sleep-out

Seven adults and four children did a sponsored sleep-out in Kirkbymoorside, 30 miles north of York, in support of the charity York Nightstop. The scale of the initiative may look modest, but wait. A press release was issued locally, and the event was advertised during a radio interview. Result? Every business and trader in town ended up sponsoring the event! Not to mention further coverage on both radio and in the press. Our online resources such as 'Organising an Event', 'Organiser's Checklist', 'Media Sheet' and 'Press Release' can make a world of difference to your event.



### Case study 2: Congleton High School

Four school assemblies over four days were dedicated to presentations highlighting issues of homelessness, reaching some 1,200 students, as well as teaching staff. A PowerPoint presentation downloaded from the Action Week website, giving statistics on homelessness and poverty in Britain, was used. The presenter pointed out that the figure of 20,000 people having died in the UK as a result of fuel poverty was like two thirds of Congleton being wiped out. The clever bit was a member of New Life Church, who had organised the presentations, posing as a homeless person and disrupting proceedings, with the view to exploring attitudes towards the sometimes challenging behaviour of homeless people and perceptions of homeless people generally.



### Case study 3: Telford Salvation Army Kip Project

Two events were organised; one a Homelessness Sunday service, the other a show. Both events were enhanced by an exhibition on the theme of homelessness. Under the roaring title of the 'Sofa Surfers Variety Night', the audience was treated to performances by a variety of groups and artists, including a Dixie band, as well as the Abbey Carol Singers, who performed both secular and sacred songs. The Salvation Army Timbrels performed 'Mr Tambourine Man' by Bob Dylan, and two local girls choreographed and performed a dramatic portraying the plight of the homeless.



# 22%

of people in the UK live below the poverty line.

Tell your MP it's 100% wrong.

We are asking everyone concerned about poverty and homelessness to meet with their MPs in their constituency surgeries on 26 and 27 June.

We want you to ask them to commit to measures that will help bring an end to poverty in the UK: an income that meets minimum living standards; affordable housing and decent neighbourhoods; and fair access to services, without discrimination.

## GET FAIR

Carry on the work you started in Action Week.

Join the Constituency Lobby and tell them it's time to Get Fair.

Call 0161 236 9321 or visit [www.getfair.org.uk/lobby](http://www.getfair.org.uk/lobby) to find out more.