

## **Transcript for Working Together for Change: Southend anti-poverty strategy**

Tracy Harris, Head of Communities: We invested time, the whole team out for a whole week just chatting to people. We went out to the food banks, we kind of blended in with people, also recruited while we were there, people for the workshops.

Louisa Thomas, Co-production leader: I went down to my local Citizens Advice and just sat in the waiting room without my lanyard on. I was kind of blended in the background and just started generating organic conversation with people, understanding why they were there, how they were and then I introduced myself and mentioned the work that we were doing.

Something that I did as well, I put myself in community groups that were relevant to me as a resident of Southend, as a disabled person, as a carer. I have this life experience myself: if the system doesn't work and the services don't work, I'm affected by that as well.

Tracy Harris: With the organisation for the workshops we researched as a team some really good venues. We found a really good venue on a bus route. We also decided to be really inclusive and provide a creche for people because we wanted families to come along and we wanted them to bring their children and feel comfortable in that environment.

We had food for everybody over the two days and we offered shopping vouchers to people that attended.

Louisa Thomas: Some of the reception that we got from some individuals....

Tracy Harris: Yes, two ladies on my table were like: 'Oh here we go, the people in their ivory towers have come to tell us how it's got to be..' But you know, it dissipated over the two days. I think we just lost our name badges - we just became, you know, citizens of Southend and yeah we kind of like mucked in.

Louisa Thomas: It was a really good positive session. Ali and Simon really helped us structure the session as well. We had some voices that were slightly more dominant in the room but over time those voices started to diminish and other people started to talk.

Those individuals will be coming back to close the loop on our co-production, so they will be looking at the strategy that we put in place, they will be providing honest feedback about that before we submit that into our senior management team.

I felt very proud to serve my community I felt very proud of the individuals that took part. A lot of them hadn't been and part of council conversations.

Tracy Harris: One of the major things that came out from it was the lack of knowledge of what's available. We are not good enough at communicating to the public what is out there and to help them help themselves and there's a lot of community facilities in the city that people just don't know about, so I think that was a big number one.

Louisa Thomas: A lot of our information that may be held on our website or in other forms may be out of date and maybe not relevant any more. Staff members have moved on since Covid and we need to have a review of that. We've also looked at using our social media channels as well to promote quick messages.

Like I said, we've got a really really strong relationship with our voluntary sector that spread the word and we have different community groups that we don't always tap into.

We were very open at the workshops that we're not going to be able to solve poverty. We are stuck on budgets, we can't always move things along but creating that community capacity and empowering people to do things for themselves and to have those ideas and those creative solutions that was really really refreshing to see and that appetite is there.

Tracy, you had a lady on your table, a young mum who naturally just knew so much because she'd moved to the area, she had to find out herself and she was advising professionals on the table of where to go and signposting. And that was just kind of there because she had to learn and she was willing to share that information.

There's a lot of community resilience there, it shows how we can support that because we can't - we're not going to be able to - fund everything.

Most people said to me at the end that they would be happy to come back without shopping vouchers next time, that they felt really included and it was a really nice atmosphere and they'd be happy to help with other areas of co-production in the council - there was lots of interest in mental health, homelessness around the table.

So yeah, we'll definitely be asking those people to come back and definitely, my health colleagues that were there as well, have engaged some of those people going forward for further coproduction work.