

What impact means to me? – Kerrie Friel, Community and Peer Researcher

Hi everybody, it's great to be here. So I would just like you to think for a minute that, I know your individual lives, it's like, you think, you know, 'I've worked hard, I play by the rules, and I've got all my ducks in a row, so everything's going to be fine.' So you think, 'I'm unsinkable, I've got everything organised, this is great.' But actually, you're on the Titanic, and at some point, the ship's going to hit the iceberg. So then, when that happens, you're plunged into emotional, financial, mental overtime, and you're drowning in despair. So when that happens, what do you look for? You look for a lifeboat. So hold that thought.

So I am a lone parent to four children, one of whom has additional support needs. Because I'm a lone parent, eight years ago I got involved with the Poverty Alliance in Fife Gingerbread. Fife Gingerbread is a charity that supports and empowers lone parents and families in crisis. And Poverty Alliance are awesome, so they train in Glasgow and made me do lots of research. So myself and a group of other members of Fife Gingerbread, came together between community researchers and we made this report along with Fiona McHardy at Poverty Alliance. And it's 'Surviving Poverty: The Impact of Lone Parenthood.'

So the impact that this has had on Fiona. Well, this was actually mentioned by Baroness Ruth Lister in the House of Lords, and we thought 'Oh, that's quite good, that's all right.' She's like 'Yeah, this is a big deal, this is really good.' So she was really happy. The impact that it had on Fife Gingerbread as an organisation is that we were able to use this as evidence to get a million pounds worth of funding, which we created the Making it Work For Lone Parents Project, which is still in existence. And what that does is supports and empowers lone parents and to further education and employability, and it's lifted a lot of lone parents out of spiritual and financial poverty. So that's the impact it's had on them.

The impact it had on the participants is that they actually felt that their stories were being heard, and that they were the stories behind the statistics, and that their voices were being heard and they trusted us to do good with it. And myself, the impact that it's had on me is, as a community researcher, I've become a community activist, I do speeches at places – I usually don't have dodgy microphones – I'm involved with the European anti-poverty network, so I've spoken a few times in Brussels, meeting Maria Tyson, one of the commissioners there. I've been involved in STV Children's Appeal recently and Joseph Rowntree and things. So the impact it's had on me as a community researcher has been huge, it's really given me so many opportunities, and really, what is the impact? So, the impact with your life, when your ship hits the iceberg (sorry stop me talking, thought I was gonna say something else there) and it will at some point you're going to want a lifeboat. And if we can make research turn that into a lifeboat, we're going to save lives. And what's more important than that?