



Understanding Lived Experience: Insights from Poverty Proofing®

**Helping babies,
children and young
people grow up to be
happy and healthy
since 1891**



About Children North East

Children North East is a North East charity with a long history of supporting children and families. We exist because growing up can be hard. We want all babies, children, and young people to grow up feeling safe, loved, resilient, valued, and confident.

Since 1891, Children North East have helped to transform the lives of babies, children, young people and families across the North East. In challenging circumstances, our teams are there to provide compassionate, expert support, often when there is no where else to turn for help.

We deliver services, support and initiatives that provide a platform for babies, children, young people and families to work through issues, take action and which gives them the tools to reach their full potential.

Our comprehensive support services include mental health support, family support, youth work, and community-based initiatives and we are dedicated to creating positive, lasting changes in the lives of children and young people. Our work spans across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, making a significant impact on a local and national level.

What is Poverty Proofing?

Over 14.4 million people in the UK are living below the poverty line, including 4.2 million children. Minimising the impact of poverty on healthcare provision is essential to breaking the link between an individual's income and their opportunity to live a long and healthy life.

One of the most important parts of that is increasing people's ability to attend appointments, thus empowering them to become active participants in their healthcare.

Poverty Proofing©, delivered by the charity Children North East, is a powerful tool that listens to the experiences of service user/carers, staff, and stakeholders to understand how poverty affects them. It identifies key barriers and challenges individuals face when accessing healthcare, then supports healthcare teams in making transformational changes towards more inclusive access.

However, an organisation cannot officially call itself Poverty Proofed© until Children North East has formally assessed and recognised the organisation using the Children North East, methodology.

There are three key pillars to the Children North East Poverty Proofing:

Voice

To see real social change it is imperative that the voice of those affected by poverty are central in understanding and overcoming the barriers that they face.

Place

Poverty impacts places differently so it is essential that we understand the context of the community and place which we seek to Poverty Proof, along with clarity on the organisations decision making processes.

Structural Inequalities

While tackling poverty can feel like an impossible and unachievable goal, the knowledge that the root causes are structural gives us reason for hope. If poverty can be addressed, or at the very least alleviated, by making structural changes within society, then what structural changes can we make at an organisational level to eliminate the barriers that those in poverty may face?

The guide that follows will help individuals and organisations by providing an introduction to aspects of poverty proofing. This framework reflects lessons learned from Children North East's work over a number of years across a wide range of healthcare and community organisations.

Framework for Assessing Barriers to Attendance in your Service

Using this framework will not mean that your service or organisation is Poverty Proofed by Children North East, it will help guide you in the journey to understand and consider how patients' perspective and experience might be affected by policies and practices that contribute to healthcare access. At CNE we know that to understand this experience properly, we must never make assumptions and service user/carers must be at the centre, via consultation on what the barriers they face are, and how they can be overcome. We can then take appropriate action to eradicate, or mitigate, for the effects of poverty.

Ask

Open up conversations routinely and universally as an integral part of service user/carer care.

Listen

Listen non-judgementally and without making assumptions. Be aware that service user/carers may not be used to advocating for themselves so be prepared to ask follow up questions. Even if it feels like you are powerless, just being poverty aware and informed helps you become more empathetic and builds trust.

Act

What can you do to help? Often, solutions will be changes in policy or practice rather than costly endeavours.

Advocate

Gather voice and if there are barriers that come up time and time again that are out of your personal control consider bringing them to Trust level.

Transport

Considerations: Both financial and time cost of transport and travel.



Ask

- How will you be getting to your appointment?
- Do you know how long the journey is and how much it costs?
- Do you have other commitments that might make this difficult?
- Could any of that present a problem?



Listen

- Is it the time or the cost of the journey that makes it difficult?
- Are there other factors that are contributing to making this journey difficult?



Act

- Schedule appointments around service user/carer preference.
- Read up on the low-cost travel scheme and make sure you know how it runs in your department.
- Take steps to make the process for claiming back travel expenses in your department easy. Have a way of making emergency travel money or transport available in a way that can be signed off and utilised effectively for people who really need it.



Advocate

- What can the trust do to improve transport barriers?
- Can links be made with local operators to help provide travel passes to those who are struggling?
- How can you raise this?
- Can hubs in the community be utilised to see people where they'd like to be seen?
- Explore whether your Trust operates any local schemes e.g. parking passes.

Communication

Considerations: Methods of communication, transparency and readability of letters, language and cultural barriers.



Ask

- How do you usually contact the service and is it easy to do?
- How would you prefer to be communicated with?
- Would you prefer any language or cultural support?



Listen

- Are patients always aware of when their appointments are or what they are for?
- Are letters / emails / texts transparent and readable?
- Are service user/carers told when / where / with who their appointments will be?
- Are they able to understand the information given to them?



Act

- Note people's communications preferences as part of their service user/carer record. Offer multiple ways to contact the services (telephone, online, WhatsApp, social media, SMS) and advertise these options.
- Assess clarity and readability of written communications - consider using the Flesch-Kincaid calculator.
- Make interpreters available and advertise this service in many languages.
- Offer written communication in different languages, Braille, etc.



Advocate

- Does the Trust need to do more to help with communication?
- Can partnerships be made with charities to help provide service user/carers with digital devices if they need it?
- Can NHS devices be repurposed and shared across the trust?
- Can interpreting services be more integrated at Trust level?

Patient Empowerment

Considerations: Promoting health literacy, service user/carer engagement and empowerment.



Ask

- Do you feel like this service is welcoming and inclusive?
- Do you feel like everything is explained to you in a way that makes sense?
- How do you feel about coming here for appointments?
- Have you been given an opportunity to voice your opinions / suggestions about the service?
- Do you know how to make a complaint if you need to?



Listen

- Are service user/carers intimidated by over-clinical language that may make them averse to attending appointments?
- Do they feel empowered to actively participate in their own healthcare by attending appointments?
- Do they feel listened to?
- Do they feel like they have a stake in the service and are able to affect positive change?



Act

- Try new ways of actively gathering service user/carer voice and act on the feedback received.
- Actively contact people who miss their appointments and ask how the experience could have been made easier for them.
- Create a private space where service user/carers can get help with things like filling in forms or explaining their needs.
- Encourage clinicians to check understanding with service user/carers during appointments, and that service user/carers know where to get more information after.



Advocate

- Set up service user/carer participation groups in different ways - can they be via social media or online?
- Partner with local community groups and services and regularly go out to their groups to gather service user/carer voice.

Staff Awareness and Guidance

Considerations: Signposting to appropriate services for a holistic view of patients.



Ask

- Consistently and universally create a financial snapshot using financial assessment tools for service users and carers upon their entry into the service. Ensure that this information is regularly updated to accurately capture the changing needs of individuals.
- How are things at home? Do you have much support?
- Do you think there will be any cost barriers to you receiving this help? Don't worry, we're asking everyone.
- We just need to make sure that during this cost of living crisis, all our service user/carers are adequately fed, heated and clothed - is there anything we can help with there?
- Do you attend any community or support groups?



Listen

- Do service user/carers have enough resources to take care of their basic necessities?
- Are service user/carers isolated, and either may be making too many appointments or not enough?
- Do service user/carers know where to go for help with the basics?



Act

- Create a databank of local organisations and make sure all staff are aware of exactly what services offer (i.e. Foodbanks, baby banks, fuel vouchers, etc.)
- Create a universal financial screening tool to be asked of every service user/carer.
- All staff to access Poverty Awareness training, Trusts and individual settings can arrange this directly with Children North East using the contact details at the end of this guide
- Direct service user/carers to Turn2Us website to check if they're eligible for benefits.



Advocate

- Can services team up with local Citizen's Advice or welfare advice charities on a referral basis rather than just signposting?
- Can the trust create materials to advertise that everyone will be asked about their finances to help remove the stigma and ensure everyone is prepared?

Navigating the System

Considerations: Offering different appointment options to patients, ease of access.



Ask

- Tell me what does booking an appointment look like for you?
- Do you have to take time off work or secure childcare to attend an appointment?
- How do you contact this service to book appointments? How do you find this?
- Is there anything you think would hinder you being able to make your appointments in future?



Listen

- Actively listen and clarify understanding.
- Are the service user/carers physically able to navigate the booking systems?
- Do they have devices that allow them to do this?
- What method is best for people to contact the setting, i.e. telephone call, email, social media, etc.
- Are there particular times of day that could be a problem?



Act

- Add notes to service user/carer records that show how they like to be contacted, what time of day will work best for them and whether they have care or other responsibilities.
- Is there a way that they could rearrange appointments using apps like WhatsApp, which can be used with public Wi-Fi?
- Are there any tech schemes in your area, or could you start one, for service user/carers who don't have any way of contacting the setting?
- Can reminders be sent to service user/carers about upcoming appointments?
- Can food be provided for those who have long waits?



Advocate

- Can the trust look at partnering with tech charities to provide devices to people who may need it, or look at repurposing old NHS staff devices? For example, in Gateshead, a paediatric diabetes clinic worked with their Trust to distribute refurbished old NHS staff devices to families that weren't able to afford the technology needed to effectively monitor their child's condition.
- Could the trust add an appointment preferences tab to the system?
- Can the trust look at how people are being contacted and assess their effectiveness?

Tools & Resources

[Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Readability Calculator](#)

[WHAM Project Tools](#)

To learn more about how Poverty Proofing can support your service, contact us on povertyproofcne@children-ne.org.uk