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**REACH Hardship Findings Mirrored in Major Report Just Released**

*The last major report, before the general election, on hardship with the UK, resonates with the findings of REACH Community Projects, both in the very sad state of affairs and in what can be done to tackle it.*

Just now, one of the most important things in the minds of the team of staff and volunteers at REACH Community Projects, based in Haverhill, Suffolk, is the extent of the hardship problems within the local community and how these might change into the future.

The publication last week of “UK Poverty 2024 – The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK” by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk) , provides a substantial core of data and narrative which will considerably help REACH, and other like minded charities, to address these needs which continue to increase.

The experience and findings of REACH, in the local communities of Haverhill and surrounding areas, has very much mirrored the current situation described by JRF, some of which is truly shocking especially as many of the statistics quoted have continually worsened over the decades since the Second World War.

In just one of the sentences in this 178 page report some facts are recorded that would leave most reasonable people feeling very uncomfortable. This is that more than one in five people (22%) of people in the UK were in poverty in 2021/22, that’s 14.4 million people of whom 8.1 million were working adults, 2.1 million pensioners and, very sadly, 4.2 million children. Its figures like these that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation describes as “a story of moral and fiscal irresponsibility and a story we must change”.

Other heartbreaking data includes the 148% increase in destitution to nearly four million in just five years, a figure which encompasses one million children, three times as many as in 2017. JFR finds that children in the UK have consistently had the highest poverty rates and this is one of the major targets of REACH in its campaign to not only deliver essential support to needy families but also to put in place measures aimed squarely at prevention.

But one very concerning finding of the JRF report is the extent to which hardship is deepening, with, in 2021-22, the poorest families having an average income almost 60% below the Poverty Line and the average gap upwards, to just reach the poverty line, was equivalent, for a family with two primary-school-aged children, to a staggering £12,800 per year.

JRF not only lists the needs but proposes solutions within its very comprehensive report and these include helping people accrue modest savings, access affordable credit, gain relief from problem debt and hold assets (especially those people without access to family wealth).

REACH too is driving forcefully in this direction with the budgeting, money skills and cooking education now being provided through schools and other groups. Speaking just after the JRF report was published, REACH CEO Henry Wilson said “We, at REACH, have been anticipating this report but absolutely not looking forward to reading what is contained within. It makes awful and tear-jerking reading and is a pretty damming indictment of the social failure in the UK over many, many decades. It’s the job of REACH to tackle this situation with all the energy we can muster.”

REACH Community Projects responds positively to family and individual hardship by providing debt counselling, welfare support and emergency food but also seeks to prevent the causes of so many falling to such levels of need. REACH is active, from its original base in Haverhill, throughout West Suffolk, South Cambridgeshire and North Essex.

**ENDS**

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*REACH Community Projects (registered charity 1169108) was founded in 2010 by Henry Wilson MBE, a lifelong resident of Haverhill. The charity aims to help people facing financial crisis in Haverhill and the surrounding areas by meeting needs and reviving hope. As well as operating a foodbank (part of the Trussell Trust national network) and providing emergency aid (help with utilities, basic bedding, and kitchenware through partnerships with other organisations), REACH works longer term with clients to help them rise above and out of their crisis. This includes offering debt and budgeting advice (REACH is part of the Community Money Advice network), signposting clients to other appropriate support (help with mental health, homelessness, legal advice etc.) and supporting clients in other ways including helping them to complete forms, apply for jobs, accompanying them to court hearings and more.*

*For further information, contact Emma Wilkins, Communications Team Leader, REACH Community Projects.*