

## Introduction

This Commitment is built on **dignity, equality, and inclusivity** – and doing right by all of Scotland's families.

Change the Story is a commitment to addressing and reducing the stigma associated with poverty that many families experience, particularly those who rely on support services. It is designed for anyone working to support individuals and families, including practitioners, project staff, community, and statutory organisations.

The Commitment was inspired by the experiences of families in Fife, Scotland, who collaborated with the **Making it Work for Families Project** to create a practical Stigma Toolkit. Developed in partnership with **The Poverty Alliance**, the toolkit offers concrete tools and strategies to combat stigma and enhance support practices. This Commitment aims to make a meaningful impact by fostering a more compassionate and understanding approach in all settings where families receive support.

## What is stigma, where does it come from, and why does it matter?

What?

We believe in treating all families with dignity and respect. Too often, our media – from TV shows to newspapers – churns out stereotypes of people in poverty as 'undeserving' or 'scroungers' who have made bad choices. Over time, these stories subconsciously affect people's attitudes and behaviours towards others, in ways they may not even realise. **This is stigma** – and it can affect all areas of life.

Where?

Stigma can involve negative assumptions, prejudice, and discrimination. Stigma is often **rooted in moral judgements** about what is wrongly assumed to be a choice. It can lead to discrimination, marginalisation, and the unjust treatment of individuals based on characteristics such as **race, gender, sexuality, health, or wealth**.

Why?

**Stigma holds Scotland back.** A Scotland free from stigma would be more inclusive, provide more opportunities, and promote better wellbeing for all. It would also end the profound and harmful effects of stigma on individuals, families, and communities, as it is absorbed and internalised by those of us who are subject to persistent stigma over time. Stigma and discrimination can shape the structures of institutions as well as social and public spheres – creating restrictions and barriers, and the enforcement of arbitrary rules and exclusionary practices.

Parents and young people who co-designed this charter reported these barriers when accessing all types of services as well as in everyday interactions. Addressing stigma is crucial for fostering inclusivity, promoting social justice, and creating environments where all of us are treated with dignity and respect. By challenging stigma, we can create more equitable and supportive communities for everyone.

## Lived and Living Experience of Stigma

The principles outlined in this Commitment were developed together with parents and young people with lived and living experience of poverty and stigma. They encounter the extensive impacts of poverty and stigma daily and shared their experiences of stigma in varied settings, as well as of positive interactions. Following the principles of this Commitment will ensure that services engaging with individuals affected by poverty are in turn shaped by real-life experiences.

To create an environment free from stigma in service delivery we must go beyond simply avoiding discriminatory language or behaviours. **We must establish a culture where every individual is respected, valued, and empowered** regardless of race, gender, sexuality, health, or wealth.

The Change the Story Commitment is built upon the principles of **dignity, equality, and inclusivity** – and doing right by all of Scotland's families.

## Challenging Stigma

**Frontline service providers and voluntary sector organisations are often the first point of contact for those of us experiencing poverty.** The way that services are delivered significantly impacts whether we can effectively draw on them and access the support we need to escape the grip of poverty.

Removing the stigma associated with poverty is key for establishing an environment where every person can seek support without being judged or discriminated against. Embracing this Commitment enables organisations to play a pivotal role in **dismantling barriers and offering everyone the necessary support to thrive**.

The Cross-Party Group on Poverty's inquiry into poverty-related stigma (2022) found that poverty-related stigma is extensive and deep-rooted in Scotland, particularly in low-income communities. **This story needs to change.** In addition to the significant impact that stigma has on people's mental health and wellbeing, it can also create barriers to accessing support and hold back our children and young people at school.

Some of us are more at risk of poverty and endure intersecting forms of stigma and discrimination, **including black and minority ethnic individuals, women, people with disabilities, and people with experience in the criminal justice system**.

The report found that societal perceptions and treatment of those of us experiencing poverty are on the brink of becoming ingrained, not only among the broader population, but in how people perceive themselves. This finding came across in our own learning from parents and young people involved in the development of the charter, with participants reporting that the longer-term impact of stigma on self-esteem, left them feeling **disempowered, disregarded, and as though they have failed**.

**Building a Scotland where all of us can thrive**, free from stigma, requires shared responsibility, commitment, and action. We all have a part to play, and we invite all organisations working with individuals, families and communities experiencing poverty to assess their current practices and commit to continuously improving them.

This will help organisations to fully understand the scope of the issue and take proactive steps towards mitigating stigma.

Informed by the experiences of families, this Commitment is built on three core principles that emerged from the experiences of families who took part in our co-design process.

### Dignity



#### Dignity

We will prioritise compassionate and just interactions with people experiencing poverty, ensuring that everyone is treated with empathy and fairness.



#### Continuous Learning and Improvement

We will keep learning about poverty, stigma, and discrimination through education and training. Through this commitment, we will raise awareness, challenge biases, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement in our organisations.

### Equality



#### Equality

We will promote equal access to services and resources for people in poverty. We will help individuals and families to be involved in, and actively participate in, decisions about their support.



#### Collaboration

We will collaborate with individuals, families, and communities to co-design and co-deliver services where appropriate, fostering trust, transparency, and mutual respect.



#### Promoting Equality and Equity

We will promote equality and equity in access to services and resources for people living in poverty. We will advocate for policies and practices at local, regional, and national levels to address systemic inequalities and tackle the root causes of poverty-related stigma.

### Inclusivity



#### Non-judgmental Approach

We will recognise the complex challenges faced by individuals and families experiencing poverty. We will take a non-judgmental approach and acknowledge the diverse circumstances people face.



#### Respect and Dignity

We will value every person equally – and treat all individuals accessing services with respect and dignity, regardless of socioeconomic status. We will make sure that all our interactions with people living in poverty are characterised by respectful communication.



#### Listening and Understanding

We will actively listen to the experiences and perspectives of those of us living in poverty. We will seek to understand needs and aspirations without preconceived judgments and create opportunities for people to be heard.



#### Creating Supportive Environments

We will create welcoming, respectful environments where those of us experiencing poverty are valued and accepted. We will provide a supportive environment within service settings, and create safe, accessible spaces with open communication.