



Since our first meeting of the year on the 8th January, County Durham Poverty Truth Commission has hit the ground running preparing for our launch on the 11th March.

There is so much to think about – seating plans, pa equipment, parking, agenda, catering, paper plates versus china plates.....the list goes on and Cathryn and I are currently eating, sleeping and breathing Poverty Truth Commission!! It will, however, all be worth it when we watch the Commissioners embrace the opportunity to share their truths of poverty. They are currently working very hard to get these ready for the audience.

On our first session back after Christmas, we were joined by Alison, one of County Durham's creatives. She gave us some great ideas around the agenda and inspired our Commissioners to come up with fabulous ways to decorate the venue and immerse the audience in their experiences of poverty. Alison helped the Commissioners write a poem using words representing the sounds, smells, sights and tastes of poverty. Some of the analogies the group came up with were very unusual, however, as the poem will be shared at the launch, my lips are sealed and I'm not going to give anything else away!

The youngest member of the Commission is also our in-house artist. Using ideas from the group, she has spent time designing our stunning invitations with flowers symbolising the characteristics our Commissioners feel they draw upon to manage difficult times such as survival instinct, bravery, strength and determination, along with other flowers symbolising hope, new beginnings and freedom. We are all in agreement that March is the perfect time to launch as it is the start of spring where growth begins, the days become brighter, and the nights grow shorter.

The invitations went live at the end of January, and we are all anxious and excited as we await the response.

With an endless supply of flipchart paper and colourful pens, the commissioners have been completing timelines of their lives to help them organise their thoughts and map out their stories. Everybody has had a different approach to this, some chatted in small groups, some went off to a quiet space to work alone and others needed a little more 1:1 support. Two of the more confident members were keen to share their timelines with the group. This was an emotional process for all of us as we heard their truths of the care system, abusive relationships, abandonment, drug use, hopelessness... Although the stories were traumatic, both ended on a positive note with the individuals now being active members of their communities, working on building their confidence and self-worth and finally seeing a future. As ever, the group were very supportive of each other, giving rounds of applause, displays of empathy and words of positivity and hope.

As the weeks, days and hours tick down to Tuesday 11th March, the County Durham Poverty Truth Commission will continue to work hard to ensure that we bring you an emotive, thought-provoking launch which may challenge your views but will definitely stay with you for a long time to come!