

Our Journey

A Mountain to Climb

Tackling Poverty Reference Group

Supported by

Dumfries
& Galloway



*This book is a look into
the work of the Tackling
Poverty Reference Group.*

*It looks at the highs and
lows of their journey into
making a difference to the
lives of people living in
poverty in Dumfries and
Galloway'*

The Tackling Poverty Reference Group

The Tackling Poverty Reference Group was established in 2016. The Group was formed as one of the many projects of Dumfries and Galloway Council's first Anti-Poverty Strategy to give our Council and all of our partners a greater understanding of the needs of families and individuals facing all forms of poverty. The Group would also provide a vital voice of their lived experience of poverty and how future policies, projects and funding could be developed to ensure the removal of barriers for anyone in poverty.

Between them, the volunteering time the group have committed has been astronomical, clocking up thousands of hours between them. Each one of the volunteers has spent many hours in meetings, consultations, attending events, speaking to a variety of people from differing organisations and members of the public and finding out where the Dumfries and Galloway Council can make a difference to people's lives in their communities.

Over the years, the group have been involved in numerous consultations with local government, for example, the Housing Options and Homeless Strategy, the Local Housing Strategy, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), and also with our National Government - A Connected Scotland – Strategy for Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness'.

During the pandemic, the group have continued to meet online. When the group were writing this book, it brought back some really lovely memories of their time together, and the opportunities that they have had, as well as all the hard work they have done! One of their favourite moments was a trip to the Scottish Parliament to listen to the First Minister's Question Time and meet some of our local MSPs, where they completed their own question and answer session with them.

The group have also been heavily involved in the Participatory Budgeting process for several years, each year taking part in every step of the planning process, including, becoming key members of the Steering Group, helping with setting the eligibility criterion, sifting applications, assisting with the setup of events and helping to run each event. This is on top of their commitment to the Tackling Poverty Reference Group Work! I'm sure you will agree, they are an amazing bunch of people!

The Group have been supported firstly by Harry Hay, now Head of Neighbourhood Services and Wendy Jesson, Anti-Poverty Officer from Dumfries and Galloway Council and from August 2019 by Mark Molloy, Poverty and Inequalities Service Manager in addition to the Lifelong Learning Team. All of these Dumfries and Galloway Council Staff Members helped the group to build their confidence, giving them the tools to empower themselves to have a voice to

be able to speak to and challenge Elected Members, politicians, Council officers, Third Sector organisations and other decision makers, helping make a positive impact to people that live in our region.



The photo shows (from left to right):
Amanda McGregor, Jim Hiddleston, John McCreddie, Ian Russell, Jeanette Byers, Izzy Ross.
Other members (not in the picture) include Caroline Jewiss and Arezki Djebra.

Meet the Volunteers



Amanda

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

I heard about it through Kate's Kitchen. One day when I was there, the room was full of people talking about this and I thought it would be a really good thing to do, especially as I have lived on a low income for a long time and I just thought it would be a good thing to find out more about (plus I was also a bit nosy!) I also thought I could help make some sort of difference.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I enjoy meeting new people and being part of a team that are trying to find solutions to poverty. I feel like our views are really valued and we are being listened to. We were once asked to join a group that was addressing homelessness – they amended the policy and added things into it that we suggested to them – that made us feel very empowered.

What do you do in your spare time?

I like to meet up with family and friends, socialising and having a few drinks!

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

Being nominated and winning the CoSLA award. It showed that we were making some sort of difference. I love meeting new people in the group and going places.

What are your hopes for the TPRG in the Future?

That it continues to grow and help any groups in the area, doing good for many more years to come, helping with poverty in this area.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know

I met the Queen a few years ago now through Kates Kitchen, she is actually smaller than I thought she was. I do like to draw but haven't done it for few years.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

I love the scenery around Dumfries and Galloway - it is so tranquil and peaceful. whether it's just down the river or at the parks or hills...There is something for everyone.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in one word

Beautiful.

Meet the Volunteers

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

I heard about it through Cathy Crompton. My family is very large and we have always lived with little money. When I lived in Algeria we lived in very cramped accommodation; I thought it would be better living in Scotland but I found it to be just as hard. It's very hard living with so little money all the time and I wanted to try and make a difference to people's lives.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I enjoy speaking to councillors and MSPs about poverty and how it affects people. In Algeria, families all pull together and help each other – I like how we are pulling together as a group to help people in this country.

What do you do in your spare time?

I never have any spare time! At the moment I am working lots of long hours and don't have much time spare. However, I am just about to start ECDL Advanced Spreadsheets course – a huge challenge for me but I am looking forward to it. Also, if I had the time and money, I would like to travel and visit other countries.

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

Being involved in the Participatory Budgeting project, where people and groups can apply for funding to help make a difference to people's lives that are living in poverty. Having the opportunity to make a difference in other people's lives has been very rewarding for me.

What are your hopes for the TPRG in the future?

I hope that the group continues as it helps people in the community. The group helps resolve problems, finds solutions and helps to make a difference.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know.

I am fluent in four different languages; English, French, Arabic and Amazigh, which is Mother's tongue – it is also known as the Berber language.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

It's a quiet place to live, low crime, nice people, lots of free learning opportunities, and help available.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in one word.

Best!



Meet the Volunteers



Caroline

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

Susan Brown told me about the group and asked me if I wanted to go to a meeting. It sounded interesting as I have lived experience of poverty and Susan thought I would have things to say on the subject.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I really enjoy the visits! We have had some really interesting trips and met some really interesting people. In 2018 we took a trip to the Scottish Parliament – this was my first trip to Edinburgh, it was so interesting looking around the building and watching all the MSPs in the chambers!

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy a bit of walking when I can and love to bake with my daughter. I also enjoy taking part in adult learning classes – I have written a short story for a book and enjoy poetry too. I also love Harry Potter books and films.

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

Meeting the rest of the group! I now feel that I have so many new friends and this helped my confidence improve. I feel a lot happier now. We also go on different trips and visits to see different things and different people. We all went to the Scottish Parliament and met MSPs – that was such a treat, as well as meeting MSPs, it was my first time to Edinburgh.

What are your hopes for TPRG in the future?

Help more people who need help.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know?

I lived in South Wales with my Mum, Dad, Sister and Brother for a few years.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

The wildlife and the nice walks you can go on.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in one word

Wonderland

Meet the Volunteers

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

Through Lindsay Callander – I was doing an IT course and Lindsay came along one day and asked if I would like to join.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

Mixing with others and learning new things, listening to different points of view.

What do you do in your spare time?

If I have any spare time, I enjoy doing courses such as ECDL, Caring courses and just recently I have enrolled at Dumfries and Galloway College to completed the Mental Awareness course. All these courses benefit my job as a carer and also raise my confidence. I also enjoy being active, attending Zumba, walking and gardening

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

I haven't had much experience yet as I am quite a new member but I have loved organising things for the year ahead – what we were going to do to help others that are struggling financially. I can really relate to this as I'm a single mum with five children so it's not easy. I also like mixing with others and meeting new people – we have great banter!

What are your hopes for TPRG in the future?

For the group to continue and help bring the poverty rate down in Dumfries and Galloway.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know?

I'm a full time Mum to five kids and part time home carer.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

The scenery, the quietness...how our rural area has worked together during the awful Covid pandemic.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in one word

BRILLANT



Izzy

Meet the Volunteers



Jeanette

Chairperson

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

Cathy Crompton asked if I would be interested in a new group that was being formed – that was quite a few years ago now! It hit on my nursing instincts that I could maybe help people so I was interested to know more. I had also been in that situation myself so I knew how it felt.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I enjoy being able to have a voice; it's about being listened to and to make a difference to make life a little bit easier for people to access help when hard times hit and not go through what I did on more than one occasion in my life.

What do you do in your spare time?

I teach Tai Chi for health, I am the vice chair of Learners Together, I am part of the Women in History group and, believe it or not, I am currently studying for my ECDL certificate. I am always looking for new challenges and have just completed my SQA in volunteering. I also volunteer with the NHS and love weekends

away with my family.

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

My main achievement that I am really proud of is that the TPRG got to talk to the councillors so that we actually gave the public a voice. They listened to us and they did something about it, it wasn't just ignored. For instance, we said that we would like a one stop shop for getting help for everything – they are making a Hub for that very thing so that people don't have to go to different places for help with things such as housing/homelessness, health, social work, revenues and benefits. I'm so proud of being part of this group and all it does – if someone is struggling and doesn't know what to do, they have somewhere to go to get help. They feel listened to and have a voice with the council through us. Through all the work we have done, we and our Council have been recognised nationally by achieving the Gold CoSLA award.

What are your hopes for TPRG in the future?

The main thing is that the Council will continue to listen to the group and use their life experiences so things can change for the better, and to keep going forward and not be left behind because the Council think the groups usefulness is no longer needed.

Tell us something about yourself not many people know.

How truly hard a life I have had, I keep things inside myself and let no one know just how hard my life has been, but I always look to the future with hope.

What I love about Dumfries and Galloway.

Dumfries and Galloway is one of the most beautiful places in Scotland, what's not to love?

We have a forward-thinking Council who now listen to our voice and are changing the way they think. They are putting into place various different strategies and are trying several new ways to tackle poverty in this area to help to try and make life a little bit better for the people of Dumfries and Galloway.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in one word

HOME

Meet the Volunteers



Jim

Vice Chairperson

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

I was coming out of a computer class when Cathy Crompton asked me if I would be interested in joining. At the time I had some spare time on my hands as I was unemployed and living week to week with very little cash. It sounded like a really good idea.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I like to meet like-minded people who have the same objectives as I have, which is to help people in poverty. I've enjoyed meeting all the different Councillors and MSPs – if I wasn't part of this group I would never get the chance to speak to any of them!

What do you do in your spare time?

It has to be the pub! I love to meet my friends and chat about the world over a pint. I am also involved in adult learning and have just finished my SQA in volunteering and am also studying for the ECDL certificate.

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

The highlight of my time with the TPRG was winning the CoSLA award in 2018. It was recognition for all the hard work we had been doing up to then.

What is your hope for the future of the TPRG?

- 1 To attract new members to join the group
- 2 To continue to work closely with the Council, to promote the aims of the TPRG, and to continue to take part in the consultations with groups who come to the meetings to explain their roles in tackling poverty in our region.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know.

In my boy-racer days I owned a Lotus Elan, too much power and I was a danger to myself, so my wife made me sell it and get something more sensible.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

The people are great. There are also opportunities for people to learn new things. Since I started with Lifelong Learning, I have learned a variety of different things and achieved a lot of qualifications which have all opened doors for me. I have had the opportunity to meet a lot of different people and I feel that I am an important member of the community. I would never have talked to Councillors before – now they know my name!

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in a single word.

Helpful.

Meet the Volunteers

How did you first hear about the TPRG?

I got involved with the poverty group because of Lindsay Callander. I felt I wanted to give something back as I have been in the position of being in poverty before with no money when I lost my job and because my employers did not pay tax or national insurance, I struggled to get benefits. It came down to being freezing with no heating and a couple of tins in the cupboard. I struggled to control my hypo fits as I had no food to balance my insulin due to having diabetes.

Tell us one thing you like about being part of the TPRG

I enjoy helping people in the community that are struggling. I can give them information on CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) and try and give advice to get to the right people. I want to get them back out in society and mixing with new friends and people that can help. My drive for this is because I have been in their situation before and did not know where to turn.

What do you do in your spare time?

I really enjoy the garden. I grow a lot of things for people in the community. I enjoy wildlife and conservation – I have a hedgehog that visits every year!

What is your greatest achievement as part of the TPRG?

I have really enjoyed having the opportunity to be able to help people that struggle and need support to make their lives a little easier. I've been there so I know what it's about. I also enjoyed going to Parliament and being able to meet and speak to MSPs, having my voice heard.

What are your hopes for TPRG in the future?

I hope the TPRG continues and helps other people and groups in the community that need funding and maybe get some new members for the group.

Tell us something about yourself that not many people know

Not many people know that for years I have collected foreign and old coins, stamps, things Victorian - pennies, silver sixpences etc. I have been saving these since I was about 6 years old.

What do you love about Dumfries and Galloway?

I love to live in Dumfries and Galloway – there's lots of events and places for tourists to visit in our area – I like going around Threave Gardens, the estate gardens and the walkways. I'm born and bred here – it's my home and I love it.

Describe Dumfries and Galloway in a single word.

Amazing



Rusty

Kenny and Ann Tribute

During the last few years, we sadly lost two valued members of the Tackling Poverty Reference Group. Kenneth Black was known for his quiet ways but wasn't afraid of saying what he thought when the time was right! He was quick-witted and such a pleasure to have in the group. He had a particular interest in inequalities/rural poverty and would often suggest practical ways of overcoming issues.

Ann McNaught was one of the group's founding members and she was passionate about tackling poverty across the region, constantly trying to make situations easier for people living in poverty. She was fantastic and engaging with all and often a voice to be reckoned with!

Both are sadly missed but we are sure they would be proud of the ongoing work of the group.



Kenneth Black (centre) with Rusty and Lindsay.

Ann McNaught and Cllr Andy Ferguson 'putting the world to rights' at Dalbeattie Participatory Budgeting event.



Dumfries and Galloway Council Officers

Harry Hay

Head of Neighbourhood Services

I very much enjoyed the period I had strategic lead responsibility for Tackling Poverty in our region- The Tackling Poverty Reference Group (TPRG) and its members was a significant part of that. The TPRG were fantastic to work with, full of great ideas and never slow in coming forward to tell me they disagreed with proposals or plans!

For me, the Group absolutely demonstrated the importance and value of effectively involving people in service planning and delivery. Service improvements and changes that were influenced by the TPRG have continued to flourish to this day and have improved the quality of life for many of our residents and communities.

In terms of my highlight working with the TPRG... there can only be one winner! The CoSLA Excellence Gold Award in relation to Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health. The whole process was a fantastic experience and a real privilege for me to play a small part in it- from deciding to submit an application to the awards, being shortlisted, the presentation at CoSLA HQ in Edinburgh (which the TPRG were the 'stars' of!) to being at the Award's dinner along with the TPRG in St. Andrews when the announcement the group had won the Gold Award was made. This was back in 2018- while so much has changed since that time the importance of involving groups of dedicated people like the TPRG is more important than ever.



Mark Molloy

Service Manager

I have worked with the Tackling poverty Reference Group volunteers for the last 18 months. During that time every single volunteer has been an absolute pleasure to work alongside. This group of volunteers selflessly give up their time every week to try to improve things for other people within our communities and they should be credited hugely for that- they are often the 'hidden' volunteers but their impact certainly is not hidden.

This group have helped shape policy and practice across Dumfries and Galloway Council and their lived experience of Poverty and Inequalities, has helped ensure that the Council services really do take real consideration of the impact of it's work on this living in poverty. This can only be a positive thing and the group have also given insightful and considered views to services but have also been confident enough to challenge services when its needed.

I really can't thank the group enough for the dedication and commitment they have shown to improving the lives of others in Dumfries and Galloway - they are a really credit to themselves and our local communities.



Dumfries and Galloway Council Officers



Wendy Jesson

Anti-Poverty Officer

Over the many years that I have had the pleasure of working with the volunteers from the Tackling Poverty Reference Group, there have been so many highlights, huge impacts and outstanding moments that it has been incredibly hard to narrow it down to just one.

After lots of thought, the one overall highlight which delivered a huge impact and was filled with outstanding moments was our delivery to the CoSLA Board of our Presentation on tackling poverty in Dumfries & Galloway which volunteers from our Tackling Poverty Reference Group and Officers from our Council completed on the morning of the 13th September 2018 at their Headquarters in Edinburgh.

We all headed up to Edinburgh together, spending our afternoon visiting a few tourist spots, along with Princes Street before we headed back to our hotel where Harry joined us for dinner. Our volunteers really were touched by this as it meant a lot to them that Harry took the time to join us all - they very much enjoyed his company and his funny contributions to the evening too. It was such a relaxed, jovial night (the buffet went down very well too!) and was wonderful to spend time in a relaxed setting, with everyone all enjoying the experience and each others company too – many happy memories & lots of laughter from that night.

Everyone was on top form the next morning and we arrived on time at the CoSLA offices to join up with the rest of the team to successfully deliver our presentation which we now know gained us the CoSLA Excellence Gold Award in Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health. I remember that during the presentation, I had an overwhelming feeling of being so proud of all of our team that day but especially all of our volunteers, Jim, Amanda, Dami & Lloyd, who were sitting in front of the CoSLA Board with incredible confidence, discussing items ranging from their consultation contributions on our Local Housing Strategy to the individual support and difference which we had made to their lives.

I will always be thankful that we had the chance to take part in this award process and for all of the happy memories which it gave us. Most especially, I am grateful for the time and dedication which each of our volunteers and our overall team took to delivering such a perfect presentation which ultimately led to us all winning the Gold Award.

Lifelong Learning Staff

Cathy Crompton

Lifelong Learning Assistant

In 2016 I was asked to see if I could find a very special group of people. The group of people I was looking for not only were to have had lived experience of poverty but also be willing to come together as a group, share their experiences with council officers and work together to find solutions and ways to help people in need in our region. A tall order I thought, but I was so lucky! I found the perfect set of people and as time has gone along, they have grown into this amazing group! They meet regularly, volunteering so much of their time gladly, meeting with Council officers, Elected Members, organisations and others to discuss how the council can work better to address poverty in our region. I have felt so privileged to be part of the whole experience and I feel so proud of each and every one of the group's members – they have grown so much in confidence over the years and taught me a great deal too; I've loved every minute!



Susan Brown

Lifelong Learning Officer

I started supporting the TPRG members in 2019 and boy has it been a journey I would not like to have missed. The Volunteers are so generous with their time and seem to thoroughly enjoy the meetings and especially the trips/visits/award ceremonies. There have been a lot of changes along the way, volunteers and Council officers have come and gone but everyone seems to bring a different talent to the group and that's what makes the TPRG such a lovely project to work with. I feel very privileged to be part of the group and these are some of the reasons why; I had never been to the Scottish Parliament, never met our local MSPs, never thought I would be sitting next to the Chief Executive of our Council and working with Colin Freeman doing the PB events was brilliant.



Lindsay Callander

Lifelong Learning Assistant

I've been fortunate enough to be involved with the TPRG from the very beginning and its been a fantastic journey! Supporting the learners throughout the years has been a pleasure and its been amazing to see their confidence grow, skills increase and knowledge expand. As volunteers they give a huge amount of their time to help tackle poverty in the region and I am very proud of the recognition the group now have and wish them well in their next chapter.





Derek Crichton

Director Communities

I have been privileged to have met with the volunteers involved in the Tackling Poverty Reference Group during the last five years. In my view the most important role the volunteers undertake is providing the Council with their views and opinions. The volunteers' lived experience of poverty and inequality provides real insight into people's experiences of poverty in communities throughout Dumfries and Galloway.

I can recall one of the early meetings with the volunteers which was part of my Ward visit in the North West Dumfries area. I can remember quite vividly listening to some of their very practical ideas on how the Council could improve our services to people dealing with poverty and inequality. Since that Ward visit, I have also seen the way in which the volunteers have grown in confidence and, as a result, have helped to bring about positive changes to the ways in which the Council listens and takes on board feedback from groups such as the Tackling Poverty Reference Group.

More recently the volunteers took part in a national event which was discussing the impact of COVID-19 and its adverse impact on people experiencing poverty and inequality. The volunteers highlighted issues such as digital exclusion, loneliness and lack of access to services as particular topics that have become bigger barriers in the last year. This feedback is helping to shape and influence our region's recovery from COVID-19 and I am most appreciative of the open and honest way in which volunteers have expressed their views.

It would be our shared ambition that we see significant improvements in our society that will help to bring about the abolition of poverty and inequality; and I am in no doubt the Tackling Poverty Reference Group will continue to be at the forefront of this work locally and, indeed, nationally.

Who's Who

Councillor Andy Ferguson,

Chair of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Communities Committee

For me, my favourite highlight is, and one of our biggest impacts and most outstanding moments from my involvement with the TPRG was the evening of the CoSLA Awards in October 2018 which took place at the Fairmount Hotel in St. Andrews, Fife.

We made sure that a large number of our volunteers were able to join our Council officials along with myself and other Elected Members for this event and our Chief Executive, Gavin Stevenson had given a very well received presentation through the day to the CoSLA members. As the evening event drew near, all of the volunteers who were able to attend along with Wendy Jesson our Anti-Poverty Officer and other officers all joined our contingent which included Harry Hay and Derek Crichton, who were leading on our Tackling Poverty agenda at that time.

You can imagine our absolute joy at hearing the announcement that we had won CoSLA's Gold Award in Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health and the well-earned celebrations went long into the night!

My other enduring memories include working with Kenneth Black who was one of our TPRG Members who very sadly passed away in November 2019. Kenneth was always a very intent listener who took everything in and although his words were few, they carried a great levity and considered approach which we as elected members felt benefitted all of the discussions and decisions made during the time he worked with us. We were all incredibly saddened when he died and I often think of him and the difference which he made to the projects and consultations which he helped to shape.



Who's Who



Councillor John Martin

Vice Chair of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Communities Committee

As Vice Chair of the Communities Committee it was a pleasure as part of the administration that brought in an Anti Poverty Strategy in 2015 to tackle the effects of inequality and poverty. Working with our partners and our communities, in order to make a positive difference, Dumfries and Galloway Council set up the Tackling Poverty Reference Group driven by a group of service users with direct experience of living in poverty.

One of my proudest moments was when at the CoSLA Excellence Awards our Council won the gold award with the ringing endorsement as an example of best practice and delivered in ways that were innovative and creative.

The Tackling Poverty Reference Group provide a real insight into how we shape and deliver to those who rely and need them most, times in local government are difficult just now with fewer resources; the Tackling Poverty Reference Group, along with officers have created innovative and ground breaking solutions to deliver best outcomes for local people, hopefully this will continue.



Colin Freeman

Community Empowerment Manager

Starting Participatory Budgeting (PB) with the Tackling Poverty Reference Group was like going on a blind date; you didn't know anyone, you didn't know what to say and you didn't know where to start.

However, having a clear focus on helping people that needed help made the early stages of the PB journey so much easier, as the group always kept me grounded as to what we needed to do and not become too 'Council'.

Establishing a focus for the group along with roles and responsibilities for those within the group was vital. This enabled everybody to know who was doing what, when it was to be done and how we wanted things to look.

A real honesty and trust developed within the PB group, we spoke our minds, we listened to others, we respected the opinion of others and trusted each other. The PB group became a PB team very quickly. The team grew as individuals and a collective over the three years I had the pleasure of working with them, both the Tackling Poverty Ref group members and DGC officers alike.

Knowing that vital resources were reaching those that needed them the most, I feel, drove the team and being able to see the results of people caring for others and taking the time to plan, prepare and participate will stay with me for a very long time.

Who's Who

Liz Manson

Community Planning and Engagement Manager

The Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy would not have made the impact that it did without the contribution of the Reference Group members over the last five years. They made sure that the voices of people with lived experience of poverty was a key part of that Strategy and their clear messages to a whole range of people really brought the message home - their conversations with Chief Executives, chairs and leaders from a range of organisations made a big impact as decision-makers were informed about real life and what would make the biggest difference to people's lives. The volunteers in the Group have therefore helped many people in our region over the years.

In addition to the serious stuff, we certainly had some laughs and good times with each other - the CoSLA Awards night was a highlight. Being last out the bar that night demonstrated not just that we all like to party(!) but that we were very much a team who got on well together. Working with people who have the same values and same determination to help others has been a real privilege.



Participatory Budgeting

First of all, what is Participatory Budgeting? Participatory Budgeting, (PB), is a way for people to directly vote on how local money should be spent. It comes in all shapes and sizes, but basically ideas are generated about how a particular budget or pot of money should be spent, people then vote for their priorities and the projects with the most votes get funded.

PB is about bringing people together at local events, but it also happens online, helping even more people to get involved – this online platform has been vital during the last round due to the pandemic! PB gives thousands of people a say about the local issues important to them and can help encourage people to become more involved in local decision making and democracy.

Participatory Budgeting began in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 1989 and was created to better support the poorest parts of the city. It was a huge success, involving people that were typically left out of the political process. Local services, infrastructure and governance were improved, and it greatly increased citizen participation.

PB is happening all around the UK and even on a smaller scale, it has been credited with improving the self-confidence of individuals and organisations, encouraging greater local involvement through volunteering and increasing control for residents in the allocation of resources.

So, what about PB with Dumfries and Galloway Council?

PB with Dumfries and Galloway Council started in 2017 when £250,000 was allocated for projects that tackled poverty in their local area.

We remember when the Tackling Poverty Reference Group were asked to become involved in the entire process of PB, we didn't have a clue about what it was at first! We were introduced to Colin Freeman, the PB Manager, who was supported by Wendy Jesson, Anti-Poverty Officer, who we were already working with, explained things so clearly to us and it sounded very interesting. One of the first meetings we had was with Councillor Ferguson and Councillor Martin, who were Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities Committee. They further explained about the process and also told us that it had to be about what people in communities wanted – what would help tackle the effects of poverty in the region. This really helped focus our minds and set out the first round of funding eligibility criteria.

We met several times to ensure we hadn't forgotten anything and listened to Colin's advice. He also listened to us and made sure our ideas were valued – it was very much a two-way street! When the funding application went live, so many interesting applications were submitted. The group were then involved in the sifting process – making sure that all applications met the eligibility criteria.



Susan Brown and Cathy Crompton counting the votes at the end of the day and being overseen by Areski Djebra

Ann McNaught, Amanda McGregor, John McCreddie and Jim Hiddleston enjoying a well earned break at Dalbeattie PB event



Publicity for the PB event



Martin Henry and Jeanette Byers guarding the ballot box



John McCreddie and Lindsay Callander on the registration desk at Dalbeattie

This was difficult but it was also great to be involved. Again, we had really good advice from Colin and we worked together really well to ensure that the process was fair.

The first round of events was very exciting. We had them in Dalbeattie, Dumfries, Gretna and Wigtown. We arrived early each day to set up; Colin had worked hard behind the scenes to make sure that we had everything to make the day go smoothly and everyone had jobs to do, including Jeanette and Amanda issuing ballot papers to people and Jim monitoring the ballot box. Everyone helped though and we all took it in turns so we could all get a feel for the whole of each events. It was very enjoyable meeting members of the local communities, finding out about the different proposals, meeting with people and seeing the networking going on between different groups and organisations. So many people were wandering around meeting different people and saying that they didn't realise how much good work was being done in their local areas. It was a great opportunity for people to find out what was going on. The events were very enjoyable for everyone – some brilliant displays of decorated stalls, some were making pancakes, some people were dressed up, it was great fun!

We had quite a few funny moments too, and some that weren't so funny! The very first event, planned to be in Dalbeattie had to be postponed due to heavy snow! It was hosted a few weeks later and thankfully was all ok on the day! Amanda was always playing pranks on Colin and the group too!

The last two years have also been online too, with this year's being online only, due to the pandemic. Online voting has really taken off and has opened up the process to many more people. Since 2017, £900,000 (two allocations of £250,000 and two of £200,000) from our Council's Tackling Poverty Policy Development Funding has been given to PB for tackling poverty and inequalities in our region.

Each of the four projects have developed a different theme in relation to tackling poverty

Year One "Tackling Poverty through Participatory Budgeting in Local Communities".

Year Two "Making Ends Meet".

Year Three "Your, Community, Your Money, You Decide" and

Year Four "Working our Way out of Poverty – Tackling Poverty Through Participatory Budgeting".

In total, 115 different projects have been funded with 20 in Year One, 25 in Year Two, 52 in Year Three and 18 in Year Four.



Amanda McGregor,
Susan Brown and
Rusty at Dalbeattie
PB event

Amanda McGregor
and Colin Freeman
up to their usual
antics during one
of the PB events



Jim Hiddleston and Liz Roper
supervising Rev Alex Currie
casting his vote



Jeanette and
Izzy doing the
registration

Victoria Smith during a
PB event at Wigtown



Jeanette Byers chatting to one of
the groups looking for funding



Special Achievements and Awards

In 2018 Dumfries and Galloway Council was put forward for a CoSLA Award (CoSLA is The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It is the National Association of Scottish Councils and acts as an employers' association for its 32 member authorities). The Tackling Poverty Reference Group were told about this and were invited to Edinburgh to give a presentation to CoSLA Officials along with Dumfries and Galloway Council Officer. Jim and Amanda from the TPRG went with Lloyd from Summerhill Community Centre, Demi from Youth Work, Wendy Jesson, Anti-Poverty Officer, Harry Hay, Head of Community Services and Anne Marie Coulter (Summerhill). We stayed at the Britannia Hotel in Edinburgh and the day after we met with 5 senior members of CoSLA. We had to give a talk about what we each did – Amanda spoke on behalf of the TPRG, Lloyd spoke for Summerhill and Demi for Youth Work. We were all really nervous but also quite excited to be there. The officials were very polite and listened to what we had to say and had a good chat. We were also joined on the day by Stuart Hamilton and Avril Dickie from Dumfries and Galloway Council who also helped us to deliver our Presentation. Harry also helped to answer a range of the CoSLA Board's questions too so that we could cover all areas of our work. We then came home and four days after, we heard that we were being put forward for the finals at St. Andrew's. Now we were really excited! Unfortunately, we couldn't all get into the same hotel and so were spread far and wide – Jim's hotel was in Dundee! We also nearly lost some luggage in the back of a taxi – it went off before we remembered but thankfully, they returned with it all for us! In total 11 of us went – Jeanette (chair), Jim (vice-chair), Amanda (committee member), Lloyd, Demi, Anne-Marie (Summerhill Community Centre), Councillor Ferguson, Councillor Nicholson, Harry Hay, Wendy Jesson and Donna Hoodless (Dumfries and Galloway Council). Avril Dickie, Claire Aitken and other Council Officers and staff also joined us on the night who were already attending the CoSLA Event including Gavin Stevenson, Derek Crichton and Liz Manson.

After the original panic and rush for everyone to get ready for the evening and get there on time, we were greeted with a champagne reception on arrival which made us feel very welcome – we were all treated like superstars!

We were then escorted to our tables for the most beautiful meal. We had mini chieftain haggis, neeps and tatties to start, cock-a-leekie stuffed chicken breast with potatoes, roasted root vegetables and red wine jus for main, and raspberry cheesecake with cocoa nip tuille and lemon sorbet for dessert. We then had tea, coffee and tablet to finish the meal. We also had red and white wine on the table – we were so spoiled all night!

There were 5 categories in total that night and so many people were there. We were in the category for Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health and were up against Fife Council and Renfrewshire Council. We couldn't believe it when we

were awarded the Gold Award! It was presented to us by Jackie Bird. One of the Councillors bought us three bottles of champagne as a ‘well done’ – there were so many people there, the place was full of laughter and anticipation all night. The Council were awarded with a plaque that we believe now sits at Dumfries and Galloway Council HQ.

We returned to Dumfries the next day and were invited to a full Dumfries and Galloway Council Meeting to meet all Elected Members and to be congratulated by them. It was very nice to receive recognition like that from Councillors.

Other award ceremonies that we have attended included the VOscars (hosted and organised by Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway) which celebrates the fantastic role and impact that volunteers and voluntary organisations have within D&G. There are eight categories including: young volunteer, adult volunteer, board member, outstanding contribution to volunteering, children and young people, social enterprise, community group and inclusion award. We were nominated and attended the award ceremony in Castle Douglas and although we didn’t actually win our category it was a lovely evening and a good excuse to get dressed up.

Cathy Crompton, John McCreadie, Lindsay Callander, Amanda McGregor, Gordon Henry, Caroline Jewiss, Jim Hiddleston, Jeanette Byers and Ian Russell (Rusty)



CoSLA Awards in 2018

Our Trip to the Scottish Parliament



Our trip to the Scottish Parliament
(Amanda McGregor, Jeanette Byers, Jim Hiddleston, John McCreadie, Caroline Jewiss, David Colquhoun, Susan Brown, Ian Russell (Rusty) and Lindsay Callander

The group met up at North West Resource Centre for breakfast and were treated to bacon rolls and coffee before they set off for Edinburgh. For Caroline, it was her first time that she had met everyone in the group and they all gave her a warm welcome. When the minibuss arrived, we all had our photo taken beside it then began our journey to Edinburgh and the Scottish Parliament. On the journey up there was lots of chatting and fun and looking out at the beautiful scenery. Amanda and Lindsay were the funny ones at the back of the bus singing and making jokes and shouting, “are we there yet”.

When we arrived, the Scottish Parliament building was very impressive, Rusty commented “I had seen it on television but to be there was brilliant, I was really interested in all the gardens around the buildings”. Seeing the armed police and all the security on arrival was quite scary but once we got through security, we felt more relaxed. A couple of us had our bags searched but it all added to the interest of the day. Amanda said, “good job I had already taken the darts out of my handbag and left them on the bus!” Once we got through security, we all went for a coffee and a wee look in the shop. We were then ushered upstairs to the Chambers and sat in the gallery to listen to First Ministers Questions. We sat in the gallery and were asked not to take any photos or make a noise in the Chambers, Jim said, “we listened to the First Minister and as any politician, she did not give a straight answer to any questions”. Next on our agenda was lunch with our local MSPs, where we were able to inform them of our group and what

TPRG members
with MSPs



we were trying to do. They listened and offered support and said that we could contact them at their local offices and they would help in any way they could. All the MSPs said they admired the work that we are doing and what we had already accomplished.

After lunch we went out into the large hallway and had our photos taken with the MSPs, Jeannette said “I feel all our representatives in the Scottish Parliament treated us with respect and listened to all we had to say”.

There was just time for one more look round the shop before getting back on the minibus for our long journey home. We were just about to leave when we realised we were missing one person, and looked out just as Rusty was coming out of the building!! We all howled with laughter and Rusty enjoyed the moment. We had a lovely journey home chatting about our day, the people we met and the experience we had just had. It was a great day and full of interest.

Scottish Rural Parliament

On 15th November 2018, the group were invited to attend The Scottish Rural Parliament, which saw around 400 people from across rural Scotland gather in Stranraer for three days of debate, presentations, workshops, project visits and more. We had an early start but it was quite exciting too and we were looking forward to the day. When we arrived at the Ryan Centre in Stranraer, we had our first mishap – we weren't on the delegate list, Wendy fixed everything as we should have been added on by Donna! Thankfully, we were allowed to attend and the people on the front desk made us feel very welcome.

It was a very interesting day and it was nice to meet lots of other people from different organisations and communities in rural Scotland. We were given a warm welcome and told about how the Rural Parliament aims to raise the profile of life in rural communities and identifying solutions to the challenges rural communities face.

We were invited to take part in workshops that looked at rural homelessness, social care and transport. There was also discussion about the post-Brexit Policy Statement. This was when Kenneth found his voice for the first time! Kenneth was such a lovely man but oh, so very quiet! He would come to our meetings without fail but preferred to sit and just listen and not really take part in discussions. This day was the day that this changed though... we were sat in a workshop about rural transport, something that Kenneth could really relate to. He lived in a small village and had to travel to Dumfries regularly to sign on, but this was not an easy task as the journey would take him nearly all day, there and back and had to get a bus first into Kirkcudbright, then another bus through to Dumfries. He then had to wait for over an hour for his appointment, sometimes in the cold and wet, then make the journey back. It took all day as the bus times didn't match so it was lots of waiting around for him. So, back to the workshop... there was a woman sat at our table who was facilitating but she was unwilling to listen to anyone else's opinion, which is not great for a facilitator. Kenneth had some very interesting points to put across – and this was actual lived experience for him, but the woman tried to dismiss his opinions. He insisted that she wrote down what he had said, his opinion mattered, and he wanted his voice to be heard. That was the first time that he had spoken up at any of our meetings and we all felt extremely proud that he had the courage to share his opinion.

We had a lovely lunch that day – students from the local college had prepared food for all the delegates, which was delicious! During the lunch break we were also invited to look around the Marketplace, where lots of different organisations were gathered to tell us a little about what they were doing in the community. It was interesting to find out about all the different projects that were going on and to meet the various different people that were involved. We came away with several free pens, memo pads and even a tote bag! This was also the time that we were first introduced to Stephen Jack, Lifelong Learning Manager. He was very friendly and approachable and spent time with us finding out about each of us in the group as well and chatting about our day.

We were also invited to take part in a question-and-answer session with the Post-Brexit Rural Policy discussion panel. This was very interesting and one of our own MSPs, Colin Smyth MSP was on the panel. Unfortunately we didn't get a chance to ask questions as there were a lot of students from a local secondary school there that asked questions but the session was interesting all the same and also very entertaining in parts as Ruth Wishart was chairing the panel and she was very amusing, kept the pace of the discussion going and made it light-hearted as well as serious.

Stranraer Furniture Project

Stranraer Furniture Project – 23rd November 2017

We met Paul Smith at the Furniture Project, which is now called the Community Reuse Shop (Stranraer), who gave us a guided tour and a history of the project. Paul gave us a tour of the new premises including the workshops where they test all the electrical equipment and do any repairs that are necessary before being sold. He was telling us that he had a group of volunteers that helped him to run the project and that he was always looking for more volunteers. The project is also for people to volunteer so they can build on their abilities and learn new skills. In addition, people that have been long term unemployed can also gain skills and make personal progress to increase their prospects of gaining employment or volunteering. He made us an open invitation that we could go back any time and have a look around. We were also given a chance to have a look round the shop and buy anything if we wanted. They told us that they had been awarded a top regional accolade for Volunteer Involving Organisation of the Year 2015, which was organised by Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway.

Tackling Poverty Conference

**Tackling Poverty in Dumfries and Galloway Conference -
16th October 2017**

“Aye we can”

Not long after joining the TPRG I was asked to do a speech at the Tackling Poverty conference at Easterbrook Hall on the 13th of June 2017. My first thought was pure panic, then after thinking about it I decided to go ahead with the speech so that all the people attending the conference could have an insight into how through circumstances and no fault of theirs life can change drastically from being able to manage and being in poverty even although officially still in work, I gave my experiences of some really hard and trying times in my life but also included some strange and wonderful things that had happened to me.

On first entering the hall it was a bit intimidating to see so many people already there but Wendy Jesson was there to meet me which made me feel a little better seeing someone I already knew and she offered me a cup of tea and biscuit.

There were so many Council officials and members of many different agencies there it was slightly overpowering trying to take it all in.

There were stalls of all the different types of agencies who could help fight poverty and they had leaflets and all sorts of things giving information on what they did.

There were booklets to inform you of the events taking place and the times they were happening and all the people who were attending and also who were speaking. During the day there were workshops arranged that you could attend and be able to give a voice to the people for their opinion and ask questions and get answers.

As the day began I found everything so very interesting, all the different people giving speeches full of information and learning of lots of things going on in our region that I had never known before, and had no idea how so many people were working towards trying to help fight poverty in our area.

I must admit as the day went on I was getting more and more nervous about having to do my speech but was determined to go through with it.

There was a nice lunch provided for us and everybody mingled and I met some really interesting people some I had never met before and some I already knew.

Tackling Poverty Conference

Tackling Poverty in Dumfries and Galloway Conference - 16th October 2017

So on to my turn to speak I was really uptight by this time as there were TV cameras and all sorts of equipment there, however, I stood up and introduced myself and went straight into my speech, I was surprised at how strong and clear my voice was as I was shaking inside but didn't appear to show it.

Wow!! Over and done with thank goodness what a relief!

I hoped I had been able to get over to the audience the feeling of how it had been for me at the time and how it had affected me during this really hard and soul-destroying time of my life. To me all I wanted to do was get over to the audience just how bad this time of my life was and hoped my experience would make it easier for others who may need help in the future.

I have included below a few small excerpts taken from the comments at the end of the conference:

- Overall this was a good event. It was nice to see so many of our Councillors in attendance and there were some good presentations. JRF and Jeanette Byers were the stand out one's for me. Easterbrook is a good venue, easy access, good parking, good facilities, a few gremlins with the sound and a bit of crowding over the refreshments didn't really detract from the event – well done!
- Jeanette Byers – Very good and nice to see a volunteer doing a speech – well done!
- Some of the visual presentations was a little hard to read. Good mix of speakers – very passionate speeches made by Gordon and Jeanette.

These comments made my day worthwhile and overall it turned out to be a conference well worth having as its impact led to a whole lot of different agencies and the council taking steps to work together and fight to tackle poverty in our area.

Jeanette Byers.

What does the Future Hold for the Group?

We would like the Group to continue, expanding if possible and get some new members in who can maybe bring some new ideas – a fresh perspective. It would be great if we could get some younger people involved who can give a view of what life is like for a young person living in poverty. Another idea would be to have representation from each of the different ward areas and get some involvement from Ward officers. Ward officers know their areas well and would have knowledge of areas that struggle.

We would definitely like to have more involvement from our MSPs. When we visited the Scottish Parliament we spoke with our local MSPs who all said that they would like to be involved. This is something that we would definitely like to take them up on!

In 2020, face to face meetings were put on hold and since then we have been meeting virtually via Zoom. We would like to have a say in the important issues that are current in our area. Things like improvements to transport in the region and the cost of public transport. We would also like to have more digital inclusion, rather than exclusion. For example, improve the speed of broadband and the price too.

Why do we want to do this? We feel like we are a voice for the people who have no voice. We feel we have a great working relationship with the Council, both Officers and Elected Members and can challenge the Council on decision making processes. Over the last 4 years we feel we have made a real difference and we would like that to continue.

