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FRAMING toolkit

#TalkingAboutPoverty

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“At JRF, we want to inspire action and change to **solve UK poverty**, but we know there’s a lot of work to do if more people are to understand it and call more loudly for solutions.

To help with this challenge, we’re changing the story we tell about poverty, using framing. This toolkit explains what framing is, why we’re using it, and how you can put it into action yourself.”

[What is framing?]

Framing means making deliberate choices about how you communicate. It's about understanding how people think and feel, and telling stories that change hearts and minds.

JRF is working with the **FrameWorks Institute** to understand the public's opinions of poverty in the UK and use this insight – from research with 20,000 people – to talk about poverty in a different way.

[Why are we using it?]

We need to tell a new story about poverty so that we can build public and political will to solve it.

We're up against some common beliefs among the British public, and if we trigger these beliefs, our messages can backfire:

- Post-poverty: people don't believe poverty exists today, in this country.
- Self-makingness: people blame individuals for being in poverty, and believe they should try harder and work more. They don't see the wider context.
- The game is rigged: people think there will always be poverty and nothing will ever change.

The combined effect of these beliefs is that poverty gets dismissed out of hand, or is seen as inevitable and impossible to change.

[How can we use framing?]

Show why poverty matters

Make a moral (but not a preaching or judgmental) case for tackling poverty, and appeal to people's values of compassion and justice. Convey our shared moral responsibility, like this:

“In our society, we believe in showing compassion towards others, and helping and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, many live in poverty. We share a moral responsibility to ensure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living.”

Context – what do facts and stories mean?

Statistics and heart-breaking stories may appear to speak for themselves, but we need to help people make sense of these stats and stories by showing them the bigger picture, like this:

“It is not right that a fifth of our population live in poverty and that more and more people are relying on foodbanks. We need to redesign the way our economy works to free people from the grip of poverty.”



Tone down the politics

People often switch off when they hear ‘politics as usual’ so avoid words that trigger this response. It’s better to appeal to the values that people have across political perspectives and to unite people behind the changes that can solve poverty:

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It is simply not right that we live in a society where so many are locked in poverty. We must all get behind the changes that can solve poverty.

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Poverty is a problem that can be solved

Poverty can seem like a huge, unsolvable problem. Similarly, the economy is seen as big and complicated. But poverty is not inevitable. It helps to show people that systems like the economy have been designed – so they can be redesigned, as this doodle shows.

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The economy we have today was designed – it is the result of a set of decisions that were made about our society’s priorities and resources. Just as it was designed, we can redesign it so that it works for everyone.

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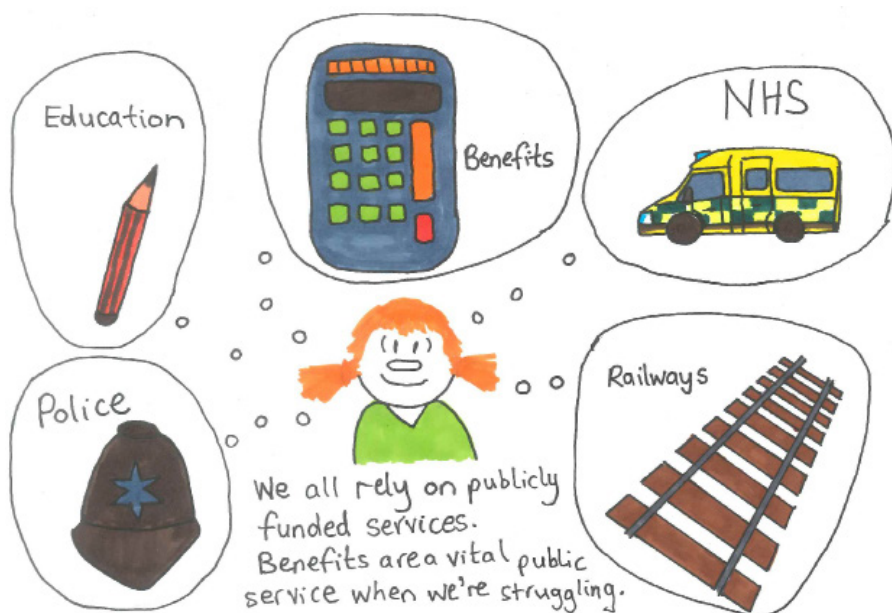


The economy we have today was designed – and it can be redesigned to work for everyone.

Benefits are part of the solution, not the problem itself

Unfortunately, when we talk about benefits, people start thinking about who is deserving or undeserving. They think benefits are a problem – not part of the solution to solving poverty. We need to remind people that benefits are part of a wider system of public services that we all rely on:

“All of us rely on publicly funded services and support systems like education, roads, railways and the NHS. And our public services are especially important to people who are struggling, such as our welfare system. We need to strengthen these supports to solve poverty and make sure everyone has a decent life.”



Use metaphors

The research shows that the following metaphors help people to understand poverty and related issues:

Restricts and restrains: this metaphor highlights that poverty reduces people's options – this limits their path in life:

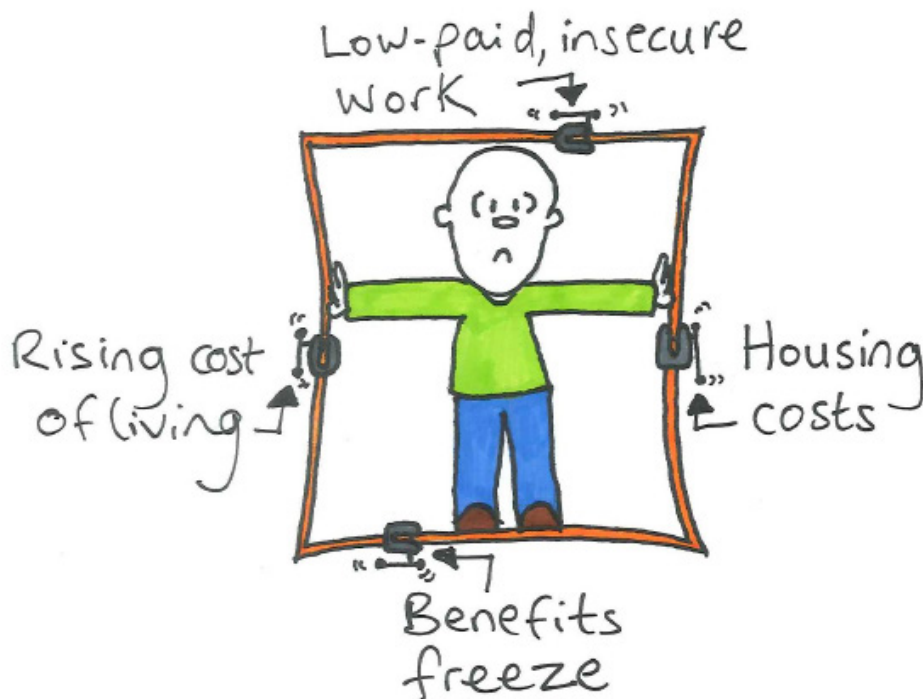
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Poverty restricts people's options, leaving them in impossible situations like choosing either to heat their home or pay their rent. With rising living costs and unstable work, our economy is holding people down and stopping many from choosing their own path.

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You can also talk about how the economy '**locks people in poverty**':

Our economy is locking people in poverty. Low-paid, unstable jobs mean more and more families can't put food on the table. The way our economy is working is leading to rising living costs and many are locked in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about a different future. It is hard to break free from the restrictions our economy places on people.



Currents: this metaphor helps to explain how poverty works.
For example:

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Our economy creates powerful currents that can pull people into poverty, like low wages or increasing living costs.

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Loosening poverty's grip: we can talk about how benefits loosen poverty's grip, unlock poverty's constraints, or release people from the restrictions the economy places on them.

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We can solve poverty by loosening its grip on people. Benefits help release people from the restrictions our economy places on them, such as low pay and high housing costs.

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There's more information and guidance in our [summary publication](#).

[What works, and what doesn't]

The research shows that certain words and ideas work better than others when talking about poverty. We need to keep using these words and ideas to tell our stories.

What works?	Watch out for
Leading with shared values of compassion and justice.	Leading with the economic benefits of reducing poverty.
Choosing messengers who embody these values.	Words that trigger the 'politics as usual' response.
Showing how the economy restricts people's options and can lead to poverty.	Focusing on describing the problem and its prevalence and missing out the explanation of how it works.
Leading with poverty.	Opening with benefits as the issue.
Highlighting how we all rely on public services day-to-day: especially people who are struggling.	Unintentionally leading people to condemn public services at a general level.
Showing the real causes and systemic solutions when telling a person's story.	Heartfelt individual stories that don't show the wider context, why this is happening and how it can be fixed, or stories that narrowly frame the causes and solutions to poverty at an individual level.
Enabling people to see that changes to systems are possible by talking about re-designing our economy.	Talking about the economy or system without explaining how it works and can be redesigned.
Using shared values and metaphors to frame facts and statistics.	Naked numbers: facts that don't help people to know what the numbers are saying and understand the context.
Connecting illustrations of poverty with this narrative and poverty's wider causes and solutions.	Presenting poverty's impacts as standalone issues.

[More words and phrases we can use]

Different frames and metaphors work for different people, situations and stories. Within the recommended frames and metaphors, we've expanded our list of words and phrases to give us more flexibility and variety.

Compassion and justice



Not right/it's wrong/it's not ok

It's a burning injustice

Unjust

How can we treat people like this?

We live in a society where

This is simply not acceptable

Shouldn't write people off

We won't stand by and let this happen

As a society, we have seen

Levels of poverty in our communities

This is wrong and we must put it right

We care enough to seek justice

Goes against what we stand for

It's not ok in a country like ours

We are not a country that

We believe in doing the right thing

It cannot be right

Righting the wrong of

Heartbreaking

Shared values/humanity

As a society we care about each other and look after each other

As a society we have a strong sense of decency and compassion

When the Prime Minister talked about burning injustice this is what she meant

In a country like ours everyone should be able to

This is not the kind of society we want to be

Moral duty/obligation it's our duty to look out for each other.

We're responding to UK poverty with kindness and compassion. Politicians must do the same and put things right

In our society we believe that everyone should have a dignified life (from Poverty Alliance)

Man-made problem

only use to describe the economic conditions that cause poverty, rather than to describe poverty itself

Appalled/shocking

Need to reiterate point that the solution needs to be big enough to cope with this.

These next few suggestions are more strident and should be used only in rare occasions where a more forceful argument is needed.



Disgraceful

Scar on the nation's conscience

Outrage

It's totally unacceptable

Progress has been thrown into reverse

Do we not care? How can we not care?

It's outrageous/disgusting/a disgrace

We won't stand for this

Sort it out

Enough is enough

Shame on us



For business audiences



Decent pay and conditions

Pride in workforce

As successful business leaders,
we want our staff to have a decent
living standard and prosper in life



Metaphors - restricts and restrains



Trap door

In the grip of poverty

Break free/key to unlock poverty

Ensnared

Held down/back

Held to ransom

Low pay and high costs are locking
people in poverty and constraining
their options. Our politicians can
choose to put this right

Our analysis shows that this will
further constrain people already
struggling to get by



Metaphors - currents



Falling/slipping into...

Head above water

Staying afloat in the deep end

Whirlpool

Sapping strength

Deep water

Calming the waters

Going under

Drowning

Suffocating

Life belt/Lifeline

Benefit system as an anchor

Drowning

Weather the storm

Stem the tide

This policy will act as a life raft for families struggling to stay afloat

Vortex

Waves - hit one after another

Forces

Sinking

Treading water

Submerged

Up the creek - no paddle

Buoy

Headwinds

Helping people come up for air

Easing pressure



Need more information
about how to use framing?

Contact

TalkingAboutPoverty@jrf.org.uk

Or visit:

www.jrf.org.uk/our-work/talking-about-poverty