

MEETING THE YOUNG SOCIAL INNOVATORS CHALLENGE

MAKING OUR COUNTRY POVERTY FREE



Combat Poverty Agency, a Gold Partner of Young Social Innovators

Combat Poverty is very pleased to support Young Social Innovators (YSI) and will present an award within the challenge, *Making Our Country Poverty Free*.

The challenge is to get young people to focus on projects linked to poverty in Ireland that are innovative, action-based and clearly communicated.

We believe in the power of young people to achieve social change, particularly in contributing to the eradication of poverty, through their voices, actions and fresh outlooks on ways to solve issues.

Photo: 2006 Recipients. Students from Our Lady's Presentation College, Drogheda, receiving their award from Brian Duncan, Chairman of the Combat Poverty Agency. The winning project related to the issue of homelessness in Drogheda.

Why focus on Irish Poverty Issues?

Ireland is one of the richest and most economically successful countries in the EU. Yet almost one in five people here still live below the income poverty threshold of €185 per week. About 7% of people in Ireland are forced to go without basic necessities such as new clothes, heating or adequate food because they cannot afford to pay for them.

Poverty is about more than having no money however. It includes the loss of personal freedom and self-respect, of physical and mental health. It makes involvement in the community difficult, and makes people feel powerless. Some groups in society are more vulnerable to poverty than others.

By engaging with the subject of poverty and social exclusion students will:

- *Have the opportunity to learn about and engage with an important social issue*
- *Develop transferable skills to other subjects and areas of life including analysis, communication, research and action*
- *Contribute to the elimination of poverty and social exclusion in a small but discernible way*
- *Develop their skills as active citizens*
- *Foster attitudes of respect, understanding and empathy towards people experiencing poverty, and/or social exclusion.*

“I often used to listen to the stereotypes put on people who were poverty stricken but now I can defend the issues and think of ways in which I can help.”

“I am less ignorant, more aware and now I really want to make a difference.”

How you can meet the challenge of making our country poverty free

Example of Poverty Projects	Details	Examples
Vulnerable Groups	Lone parents, children, people with illnesses or disabilities, older people, people who are unemployed, asylum seekers, carers.	Barriers preventing lone parents from accessing training or jobs.
Geographic issues	Urban vs rural poverty, impact of where you grow up on life prospects.	How where you live affects your chances of going to university.
Policy Focus	Specific policies and policy areas: e.g. national anti-poverty strategy, budget, political manifestos.	Analysis of existing policies to tackle poverty; Profile of local politicians and policy makers (gender, age, education etc) from an anti-poverty perspective.
Structural issues	Employment, education/ training, health, transport.	The impact of poverty on your health. How better local transport services could reduce poverty in your area.
Services / Resources focus	Focus on how resources determine what services people have access to. For example, quality healthcare, leisure facilities etc.	How out of school activities differ between different income groups Why the poor die younger.

Important Considerations

In undertaking a project, keep in mind the following points:

Start with looking at our own attitudes.

“I now think and feel for other people and their lives”

Develop solutions that are **empowering** that is, giving people more **control** of their situation so they have more **choices**. This means trying to find new ways to tackle poverty, other than raising money for charity.

For example,

- *A project concerned with young lone parents might involve helping lone parents to set up support groups.*
- *A project concerned with Child Poverty might involve children starting a petition for local services or facilities.*

People affected by poverty are active subjects and not victims. Many are involved in bringing about change for themselves.

Consult, listen to and involve the people directly affected. They can give you the best insights into the issue, including causes and solutions.



What your project might consider

Understanding poverty in Ireland means being aware of why people are in poverty. Poverty is not a matter of bad luck affecting random individuals. It is something that has specific causes and affects groups of people. By effectively tackling the causes, groups of people can be lifted out of poverty.

For example, lone parents are at particular risk of poverty. One of the reasons for this is because affordable childcare is limited and therefore they may not be able to take up education or training or a job. Measures that increase the provision of affordable childcare for lone parents could take not just one person, but a group of lone parents out of poverty.

Students should demonstrate an understanding that decisions taken by Government and Government officials on how to allocate and prioritise resources in society have a key impact on how much poverty there is in Ireland. For example, decisions that are taken about social welfare rates, spending on services such as hospitals and schools, transportation services, tax rates and many other issues can all have an effect on poverty levels.

Some core concepts which students should consider include:

- ❑ *How poverty is measured in terms of absolute and relative poverty, and how the latter is linked with social exclusion.*
- ❑ *How certain groups in society are more at risk of poverty than others and that poverty is not randomly scattered throughout the population.*
- ❑ *How poverty can be passed on from one generation to another and what can be done to break the cycle.*
- ❑ *How poverty may be linked to where you live for reasons such as discrimination, lack of transport or poor facilities and services.*
- ❑ *The distinction between causes and effects of poverty, and where they overlap. For example, wrong clothes = effect: not enough money = cause; can lead to bullying = effect which may result in leaving school early = effect; can't get well paid job = both a cause and effect as this results in lack of money and other forms of poverty and social exclusion.*
- ❑ *Poverty as a denial of human rights (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001)*

How might you start

These are exercises for teachers to use to support students to identify topics with an Irish poverty focus¹.

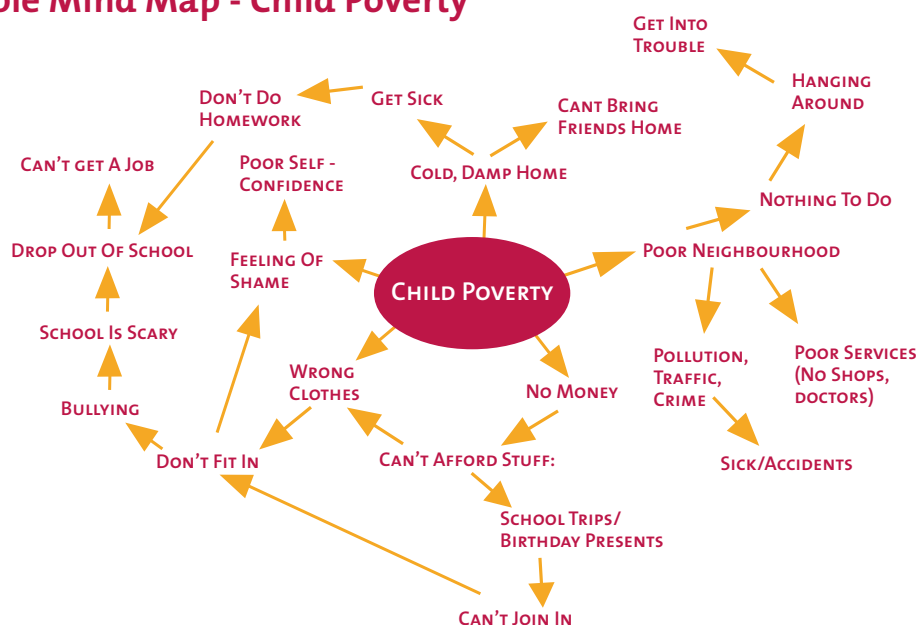
Brainstorming/Mind Mapping

Brainstorming is a useful technique to generate ideas for YSI Projects. To encourage students to focus on an Irish poverty issue, the teacher could suggest that students think of Poverty in Ireland and then speak in twos for a couple of minutes to share what comes into their minds. A quick feedback could then be written up on the class board. From this certain themes may emerge which could be refined further. This is sometimes called mind mapping. This can be used to further refine ideas associated with a particular aspect of poverty. It is useful in making links between different aspects of an issue.

The example below takes the central theme of Child Poverty and highlights some of the causes, effects and longer term impacts of poverty on children.

Students could take their brainstorm and do a mind map with guidance from the teacher or s/he could show them the child poverty one and ask them to discuss it in groups and see if they would add or take out any words. This technique can also be used to further develop other issues which have a poverty aspect e.g. older people and health, disability and access to employment. It is important that the poverty aspect is developed if the project is to meet the challenge of making our country poverty free. There is support available to teachers and students to make these links. See the back of this handout.

Sample Mind Map - Child Poverty



Using Photos

Using photos is another useful way to generate ideas for a YSI project with a poverty focus. The resource *Counted Out* includes a set of photographs which can be photocopied and used. Ways of using them are also included. If this is not available images from newspapers and magazines can be used or students could be asked to bring in photographs on the theme of poverty and wealth in Ireland. One simple way of using these is as follows:

Put photos/images around the room and divide the class into a number of small groups. Ask each group to choose one image that represents poverty in Ireland and one which represents wealth. Each group then makes a brief presentation on the chosen images and why they chose them. This can lead to a discussion on poverty and wealth and the connections between them. It can also help students think through and further define the focus for their YSI project.

Case Studies

The Combating Poverty Award² was set up to encourage students to look at poverty in Ireland in their YSI project.

The following briefly outlines projects undertaken by students as part of their participation in Young Social Innovators. These were our award winners.

Making Older People's Voices Heard

Winners of 2003 Combating Poverty Award: Undertaken by students of Saint Louis High School, Rathmines Dublin 6

This project is an example of one in which students started with a broad theme i.e. a concern with the isolation of older people in their community. Through their research and with the support of their teacher they discovered the poverty aspects to the topic.

The following is drawn directly from an article written by two of the students³:

After many hours of brainstorming... we decided that we felt most passionately about the topic of older people. We also felt that this was most relevant to us because of the large number of older people living in our community.

We aimed to research why the older people in our community felt as if they were excluded from the community... As such, one of our main aims was to educate both ourselves and the older people that age should not be a barrier to friendships.

² In previous years, students that submitted projects on poverty in Ireland were considered for a special award called the Combating Poverty in Ireland Award.

³ Ita Dagger and Shauna Mahony.

What we did

During the year we created a link with St. Mary's Community Centre, which is a day facility for older people. We already had links with Rathmines Information and Community Services Centre. These links proved invaluable during our research as it gave us first hand information from older people.

As a method of research we invited our local Community Garda to speak to us. He gave us some shocking facts about how older people are prisoners in their own homes due to fear and poverty.

What we found out

During the course of our research we discovered that a disturbing number of older people are living in poverty - also that they had no information about the help that is available, such as meals on wheels and social and community groups.

We discovered that the majority of older people don't have security alarms as they feel that they can't afford to pay for complex alarm systems.

The question we asked was why was this so.

The innovative action

One of our main ideas was to design a new cover for the pension book with details and information on whom older people could contact if they needed anything, for example, local health numbers, local police stations, plumbers and people to talk to if they got lonely.

We took (our) questions to the Oireachtas and asked Teachtaí Dálai⁴ why older people were still living in such poverty although Ireland's economy is moving on at such a rapid rate. We feel that we made a difference and the older people in the community thanked us for highlighting the poverty suffered in silence by older people.

⁴ As a result of winning the Combating Poverty Award the students were invited by the Combat Poverty Agency to make a presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Social and Family Affairs.

Poverty and Educational Disadvantage

Winners of 2005 Combating Poverty Award:

Undertaken by students of Loreto School, Saint Stephens Green, Dublin 2

This is an example of a project with an explicit poverty focus from the beginning.

What the students did

- ❑ *Researched the issue on the internet and other relevant resources*
- ❑ *Invited in a guest speaker*
- ❑ *Visited a 'disadvantaged school' and met the principal*
- ❑ *Linked to organisations such as Barnardos, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the INTO, Combat Poverty Agency*
- ❑ *Devised a life sized game for young students between 10 and 12 relating to students choices about staying in school*

What students found out about the links to poverty

- ❑ *They found out about the National Anti-Poverty Strategy which is a Government Strategy to tackle and eliminate poverty.*
- ❑ *They highlighted the difficulties for parents experiencing poverty and on low income in supporting their children in education.*
- ❑ *They discovered that that some of these parents may have had a negative experience of education themselves.*
- ❑ *They also learned that the academic nature of our education system does not suit everyone.*
- ❑ *Ultimately they recognised that whilst supports are needed for children and their parent(s) to encourage them to stay in school the education system itself needs to be addressed.*

Innovative Action

Development of the board game. Involvement in this project also had knock on effects for students' engagement with Irish poverty issues. They agreed to support the work of Combat Poverty in engaging students with Irish poverty issues at the 2006 YSI Showcase. They played a very valuable role in attracting other students to the Combat Poverty Exhibition Stand. They administered a quiz on poverty in Ireland, created interest amongst students in this topic and informed them about the issues.

Can Roses Grow from Concrete?

Overall winners of 2006 YSI award:

Undertaken by students of St. Vincent's CBS, Glasnevin, Dublin 11.

This is an example of a project carried out by students living in an area affected by poverty and disadvantage.

Starting out

We, as a class, brainstormed on issues of concern to us... we then prioritised the issues that we as a class felt strongly about as... many/most of the people of our class would come from these so-called disadvantaged areas and we would like to change peoples' perceptions that they have on these areas (Project Report, P1)

This brainstorm was preceded by a classroom exercise using photographs in which many social issues were depicted. This exercise helped contribute many ideas and issues to the brainstorming session.

The students decided to investigate the link between the area in which a person is raised and the chances this has on him or her succeeding in later life.

What the students did

- Identified three key themes and researched these; education, employment and prison*
- Reviewed relevant resources including the Internet*
- Invited a guest speaker from the Combat Poverty Agency*
- Interviewed the Education Officer of the Local Area Partnership*
- Contacted a TCD research centre*
- Conducted a survey in a number of schools regarding views on the links between educational participation and where one lives*

What they found out

In their area they identified that an above average number of people have left school early, are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to be in professional jobs and more likely to be in low paid unskilled work. They also discovered that nearly half of the prisoners in Mountjoy are from five disadvantaged areas in Dublin although they pointed out that this does not mean that all people from disadvantaged areas are likely to commit crimes.

They think all of the above is connected to a cycle of poverty where different elements are interlinked.

In relation to educational participation they pointed out problems in the system e.g.

- High participation costs for students in school
- Inadequate supports for students
- School curricula not taking different cultural backgrounds and different learning styles into account

They concluded that not everyone in society has equal opportunities and that the area one grows up in can play a pivotal role in the path you take in life. However they also concluded that:

“...if people are given the right resources to succeed they will. We believe that roses can grow from concrete.”

Innovative action

They organised a very successful forum in their school to which they invited local politicians and representatives of key local and national organisations. They organised this in a workshop format and allocated tasks and questions to be addressed by those attending. They received media coverage for the forum which helped highlight their issue of concern.

Resources available from Combat Poverty

- Left Outside? - Poverty Analysis Pack*
- Poverty Awareness - Guidelines for School-Community Partnerships*
- Counted Out: Challenging Poverty and Social Exclusion* This is a resource for teachers introducing and exploring poverty and social exclusion as a social issue

Combat Poverty has a number of user-friendly fact sheets on poverty and related issues. In addition fact sheets written for and by students are available entitled:

- What is Poverty?
- People & Poverty
- Why are people poor?
- Responses to Poverty

Two websites that should prove useful are www.combatpoverty.ie and www.cspe.ie. The latter deals with Children's Rights, Equality and Poverty.

About Combat Poverty

The Combat Poverty Agency is a state agency which works to achieve a poverty-free Ireland. Combat Poverty is actively involved in the development of curricula and learning materials on poverty, citizenship and social change. Combat Poverty believes that exploring the issues of poverty and social exclusion can contribute to the development of social solidarity and active citizenship.

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