

Poverty and education

More than 4.3 million children are growing up in poverty in the UK and an additional 700,000 are living in poverty compared to 2010. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says there is no single best measure of poverty but as a guide can be defined as: - Not having enough income for a person's basic needs e.g. having enough money to heat a home, pay rent or buy essentials for their children.

A household income of less than 60% of the UK average salary of £28,000 in 2024 (Office for National Statistics).

In the context of rising rates of poverty and a cost-of-living crisis it is making it increasingly difficult for many families to manage on a day-to-day basis. Research shows poverty can impact parenting capacity in material ways such as struggling to provide adequate housing and an inability to provide the basics like food and clothing. It can also affect parents in psychological ways such as experiencing additional stress and fragile mental health.

Poverty harms children's health, social and emotional wellbeing, and education. Children may go to bed hungry or sleep on a mattress on the floor because there is no money for a bedframe. It can mean them missing out on everyday fun and activities because family outings are too expensive and being excluded from going out with friends due to a lack of money.

Children growing up in poverty on average do less well in education. Gaps open very early before they even start formal education at school. This has an impact on levels of longer-term educational attainment and job opportunities in later life.

Of the 57,622 children living below the poverty line in Lancashire $\frac{3}{4}$ of them have a working parent. Around one in every four children in Lancashire is now living in poverty.

The Government has introduced a Child Poverty Unit and taskforce group both are working on developing a Child Poverty Strategy which is due to be published in Spring 2025.

Below is a short scenario that can be used to encourage practitioners to think about the impact poverty on educational outcomes for children.

Have a read of Chip's story and consider these questions:

1. Do you ask families if they may need some help when children arrive late, without having had breakfast or are tired or unkempt?
2. Can you name any local agencies that may be able to help this family?
3. Is there anything you could do to help this family?
4. How may Chip present when he is at school?
5. Do you know the purpose of a Family Hub?
6. Where is your nearest Family Hub?

Chip's Story

Chip got home from playing out with his friends, in the alleyway. He ran up the narrow stairs trying to not get caught out by the loose fitting and worn carpet that made the dark and dingy stairwell up to their flat so treacherous. His mum needed him to get back and eat his tea in time for her to get out to her evening cleaning job at the shopping centre.

It was beans on toast again. He moaned and told his mum that he was fed up with beans and that he would still be hungry afterwards. His mum showed him the few coins in her purse that would have to last until the end of the week. They couldn't even use some of the stack of electric meter coins because his Mum needed to wash the uniform he had covered in mud at school today.

The food bank wasn't an option for them as they'd been last week, and his mum said it was embarrassing to keep going back.

Chip looked worriedly at his mum: she hadn't eaten with them for a couple of days now, and she was busy trying to persuade the temperamental washing machine to work. It wouldn't spin, and they wouldn't be able to pay to have it fixed – so, for now, they would have to make sure they kept their clothes as clean as possible. While she was at work, Chip and his siblings wrung out the sopping clothes and hung them around the flat to dry.

In the night, the boys lay in their bed together trying to keep warm, ignoring the empty feeling that was gnawing away at their stomachs. Their room was even damper because of the clothes they had hung over the heater. The room was covered in black mould that caused the wallpaper to hang off the corners and the boys were never able to shake the cold and rattly chest that plagued them.

When their mum got back from work, she looked at the damp clothes hung around and the meter money being swallowed up. She sat exhausted on the sofa, with her head in her hands, crying silently. It took the children an hour and a half to cheer her up and take her anti-depressant medication. It was past midnight before Chip went back to bed.

Chip woke at 8.30am and jumped quickly out of bed, too late for any breakfast but knowing there was nothing in the house to eat anyway. Chip knew that by the time he had got dressed and found his bag, he was going to be too late to have any breakfast at school, either. His stomach was growling and his head was aching from lack of food and sleep. His school trousers were nowhere near dry, so he had to pull on the tracksuit bottoms he had worn while playing outside. He knew that with the school's new zero-tolerance policy, this would mean that he would miss the first sitting of lunch while he sat in detention.

He stuffed the homework – completed in the only red felt-tip pen he'd been able to find the night before – into his bag. Again, he knew that it would not be good enough.

As he raced through the empty school playground to the school reception, he felt ashamed as he realized that he had forgotten to brush his hair or teeth. He'd been distracted by warming some watered-down milk for his baby sister so that she wouldn't wake their Mum up.

As he looked up at the school receptionist behind their hatch, he sensed her judgement as she noted his dishevelled appearance and time of arrival. "Twenty minutes late again, Chip," she said. "You know this is not good enough."

A helping hand for extra support

[Household Support Fund extended from today to help families in need - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Citizens Advice](#)

[Lancashire Family Hubs Network - Lancashire County Council](#)

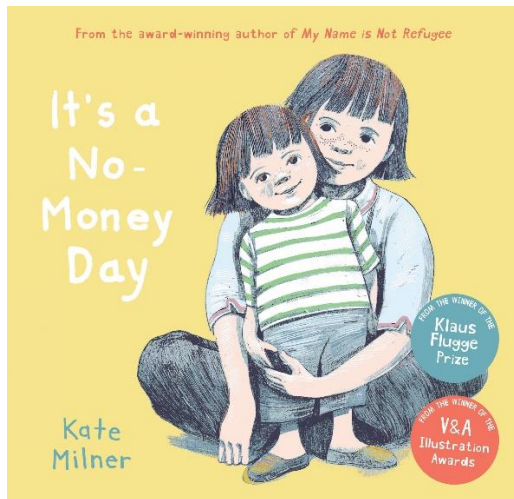
[Home Start Central Lancashire | Helping families in the local community \(homestartcentrallancs.org.uk\)](https://www.homestartcentrallancs.org.uk)

[foodbanks-in-lancashire.pdf](#)

[Home - TippyToes Baby Bank](#)

[Baby Bank in Lancashire | Food & Clothing Donations | Snowdrop Doula Burnley](#)

Book Mum works really hard, but today there is no money left and no food in the cupboards. Forced to visit the local foodbank, Mum feels ashamed that they have to rely on the kindness of others. Maybe one day things will be different but for now together they brighten up even the darkest of days.



Practitioner activity

Develop a 'Where to go for support' resource (or whatever you want to call it) that can be shared with families at induction and that is regularly updated. Something similar to what you find in your hotel room when you go on holiday that highlights all the recommended services locally. Be creative and engaging in sharing the information.

In the resource you can find out what support is available perhaps within a 4 mile radius of your setting. By sharing this at induction you are already providing early help support.

Things to consider including:

- Who is available in your setting for parents/carers to talk to if they have a worry or may need support
- Local bus timetable/reputable taxi companies
- Nearest GP/ hospital and dental clinics
- Local schools
- Community venues
- Library

- Home Start
- Local Family Hub / Children and Family Wellbeing Service
- Baby clinic and Health Visitor support
- Charity and faith groups
- Community warm hubs/ foodbanks
- Playgroups
- Parks and leisure centres
- Citizen's Advice
- Inclusion/SEND support
- EAL support

Useful links for practitioners

[wwwcf-part-1-and-2-final.pdf](#)

[Lancashire Safeguarding Partnership - Lancashire Safeguarding Partnership](#)