

PARLIAMENT'S CHILD POVERTY GROUP LISTENS TO REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE

IT was standing room only in committee room 8 at the House of Commons last week when 17-year-old Kayleigh from Leicester told the minister responsible for poverty, Maria Miller, MP, how being poor has affected her and her family.

Featured in BBC One's hard-hitting documentary *Poor Kids*, Kayleigh told the minister and members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty that 'growing up in a poor household is a secret you try to keep from everyone. I thought that if people knew I was poor, they would look down on me or laugh at me.

'I can remember having new clothes only once – and that was a school uniform. Everything else had to be second-hand. My little brother used to get bullied because he had to wear my old blouses to school – not because he wanted to but because there was no money to buy him shirts. It really hurt to see him crying because someone called him names. Wearing someone else's thrown-out clothes really eats your self-confidence. In the end you think you are just worthless.

'Sometimes there was not enough money – my dad lost child benefit when I was 16 even though I was in full-time education – and we went hungry.

'I know times are hard,' she concluded, 'and the Government has to make savings, but please don't take money away from the poorest children.'

The director of *Poor Kids*, Brian Woods, and representatives of a number of charities and community groups also made submissions to the committee.

Salvation Army captain Jonny Smith, speaking from his eight-year experience of leading a church in Southwark, South London, said that he knew of families where if a child needed money for a school trip, the family would have to choose between funding the trip or going without electricity.

'Such decisions,' he said, 'are subtle and fall off the Government's radar. But they are a reality. Children from poorer families feel a lot of peer pressure to join in all the activities of their classmates – and parents want the best for their kids – but where money is very tight, a £20 trip means a family going without the necessities.'

Thanking the contributors for their insights, committee chair Kate Green, MP, said that proposals for welfare reforms were being finalised.

Speaking to *The War Cry*, Kayleigh said: 'What I described in *Poor Kids* is the life I've known since I was six or seven. There was no script. I just told it as it was. My life has changed since the programme. I've moved in with my step-mum because my dad had a heart attack and is not able to care for me.

I've watched the programme seven

times and seen how other children live. Nobody should have to live in such poverty, especially in a supposedly advanced country. It is shameful.'

Asked what she would like to see as a result of *Poor Kids* and her meeting with politicians, Kayleigh replied: 'I'd like the Government to make sure that everyone gets the benefits they are entitled to, without people feeling that they are tainted. And to make sure that everybody gets enough money for the basics, such as food, fuel and clothing.'

Brian Woods from True Vision TV told *The War Cry* what led him to focus his programme on child poverty.

'At the beginning of the Labour Government we made a film called *Through the Eyes of a Child*. It made sense for us to revisit the subject at the beginning of the coalition Government to see

whether ten years of investment by new Labour have made a difference.

'Child poverty is still a problem. There are more than 1.5 million children living in what Save the Children calls "serious poverty". We need to help those kids.

'Having made that earlier film, I wasn't that shocked by what we found in *Poor Kids*. I was simply saddened that despite the £150 billion invested in tax credits little had changed. It was sad to see that

although more than one million children have been lifted out of poverty in the past ten years, for those still in poverty not much has changed. Life is still a hell of a grind.'



Kayleigh, watched by 'Poor Kids' director Brian Woods, addresses MPs

NIGEL BOVEY

'Poor Kids' Kayleigh gives MPs low-down on poverty



Kayleigh and Kate Green, MP

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