

Ireland has higher rates of child poverty than the EU average. It is estimated that ¼ of children in Ireland are currently living in poverty according to Poverty Ireland 2021. Child poverty is so complex and multi-faceted and with only a short amount of time today we are going to focus on how education and housing deeply impacts children living in poverty.

The OECD has stated that children and young people from working class areas are the most impacted by the global pandemic in relation to education progression. We have two afterschool projects in Rialto Youth Project and from connecting with the local schools we already know that literacy levels among children and young people are not even close to the national average when young people are transitioning into second level. When we talk to young people about education they describe feelings as being powerless, of being left behind, of no matter what you do it's not enough. Statistics show that less than 10% of young people from working class and marginalised communities go on to third level even if they have an access programme. We believe that education is one of the keys ways out of poverty. Children are extraordinary. They show incredible resilience and desire to connect, learn, play and develop. But we see the children who are clouded in shame – a shame that doesn't belong to them or their families. A shame that should rest at the feet of the state who have perpetuated structural inequality towards working class children and their families time and time again. There are studies that have tracked children's hopes and dreams for their future and for working class children there is a time in their young childhood where the reality of their positioning in society becomes apparent to them. This invisible 'bubble' is understood by children in working class areas. From 2012-2016 we did a project with Fiona Whelan and BrokenTalkers called Natural History of Hope where 250 stories were collected from girls and young women growing up and working in Rialto and turned into a performance, I want to tell you the direct quote from their stories;

'Can you see it Hope? The bubble? We're inside it. You see everything and everyone through the bubble. And everyone sees the bubble when they look at you. They make decisions about you. They tell you, you can't. They tell you, you won't. They tell you, you'll never. They measure you with invisible rulers. You will come to love the bubble and hate it. What does your bubble feel like Hope? My bubble feels like a shell on my back. It's heavy. I hope yours is light and floaty and beautiful. And I hope it's easy to get out of.'

Many young people from working class communities are growing up through generational inequality where education attainment may have been low, there are higher rates families with high unemployment, one parent families or whose income doesn't meet the living wage today. So not only is education an issue but housing that meets their needs is a serious issue. We already know that we are in a housing crisis, but for many young people we work with being priced out of the market to buy a home isn't the issue. They aren't even getting invited to that market and private renting isn't even an option. Hidden homelessness among young people has doubled in the last 5 years, well of what we know but actually this number is much greater as we are working with at least 30 young people who are staying with extended family, not down on the floor with people they live in, couch surfing, living in

overcrowded accommodation where they pull out a mattress from under their little siblings bed at the end of the day and sleep on the floor. Dolphin House is one of the largest remaining flat complexes in Dublin who are currently in a decade of regeneration with just one phase complete where overcrowding is a massive issue so having a dining table for sharing food, or doing homework is not an option.

We need to address the long-term impacts of children experiencing poverty, we need to identify children and families at risk of persistent poverty and support their emotional, social, physical and developmental well-being. Unless we do this, we aren't just describing poor outcomes for child we are affecting their life chances.

The issue of child poverty can also be addressed by policy solutions. The soon to be formalised European Union (EU) Child Guarantee states that every child in Europe should have access to free healthcare, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition with a primary focus on marginalised children. Our question is how would this look in Ireland? Can this be guaranteed?