

Poverty Truth Maiden Speech

A maiden speech is the first speech made in the Chamber by a new member of the House of Commons. As many new MPs took their seats in Parliament for the first time following the 2024 election, we heard speeches setting out their priorities, what led them to become an MP, and their hopes for the coming parliamentary term.

Following three Poverty Truth and Carnegie UK residential in 2024, participants came together to craft their own Poverty Truth Maiden Speech, which included the things they would say to decision-makers, if they knew they were going to be heard. The speech below is written in their own words.

We stand before you as individuals who have lived the harsh realities of poverty. Today, we ask you to listen, not just with your ears but with your hearts. Our stories are real, our struggles undeniable, and our voices must be heard.

For years, we have been misrepresented—by the media, by governments—as a drain on the country. We've faced limited support from services while we struggle to exist in circumstances beyond our control. We are not the problem, but the system treats us as such.

We feel ignored and dismissed. This stigma increases the anxiety and stress in our lives, feeding into mental health issues for which there is no antidote. It's time to stop adding to the burden and start dismantling the stigma.

Poverty is not a choice. Let us be clear: it's out of our control. And yet, society seems to think we can simply choose a different path.

Walking in our shoes, you might understand hard work in a new way. Because walking in our shoes is hard work, and we can't always choose the shoes we wear. It's time to recognise that living in poverty is not laziness or failure. It's fighting every day for survival.

There has been a detachment between decision-makers and the real-life consequences of the decisions that they make.

We need to listen to what people say, including those in poverty. People need to know what services are available and how to access them. We need the right people, in the right places, with the right experience to take away the stigma. Accountability is essential. It's not enough to listen—we must show people they have been heard.

Walking in our shoes would teach you that we are experts in listening, but now it is our time to be heard. Let us have the opportunity to replant and reshape perceptions—physically, not just in the mind.



When politicians talk about “hard-working families” as the basis of society, they are othering everyone else. It feels like an attempt to devalue those of us who are not currently working. If you want to encourage more people into paid employment, try using the carrot, not the stick. Labels like “hard-working families” alienate people.

We place pressure on inadequate services and underfunded systems, and in return, we are made to feel as though we are less than. This creates a greater divide—a gap of “us” and “them.” We must close this divide. We need to improve the lives of all people, across generations—older people, children, everyone.

We need to put the right people in the right place to take away the stigma. And we need accountability. Show us that you have listened. We pledge to remove the reductive rhetoric around poverty and to ensure that MPs engage in the lived experience of those living below minimum wage, below subsistence levels. Only then will we truly measure the diverse forms of output in our community—forms that still leave people unable to make ends meet. We pledge to raise awareness of the pathways into poverty and the pitfalls that trap people there.

We look forward to a world where we all prosper—where we exchange knowledge, share our country’s resources, and live in a more caring world. It’s time for collective action, for a future where we stand together to uplift every individual.

We are tired of being ignored and dismissed. The stigma, the anxiety, the stress—they build up and wreak havoc on our mental health, and we are left without solutions, without help. We need action, not more indifference.

We hear about tax cuts for people buying million-pound homes, and we hear about support for “hard-working families.” But we ask: How hard does someone earning minimum wage have to work to afford a million-pound home? Are we looking for a return to the days of the Victorian workhouse?

We want to address the urgent need to tackle poverty and inequality in our society. Every voice must be heard, especially the most vulnerable among us. We believe in building a fairer and more just society—one where opportunity, dignity, and support are accessible to all.

Thank you. Let’s move from words to action, and let’s start by listening, really listening.

