

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
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Exhibition explores the *different* realities of living in low-income neighbourhoods

A new exhibition, hosted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), uses imagery and film to explore how the perceptions and experiences of households living in different low-income neighbourhoods across Britain compare and contrast.

Communities under pressure, which is being exhibited at NLA – the centre for London's built environment – is the culmination of a three-year research programme into the relationship between poverty and place by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research. The team, led by Professor Ian Cole and including photographer and film-maker Andrew Robinson, worked with individuals to document their personal experiences of living on low incomes, in different deprived neighbourhoods. The result is a rich, personal interpretation of locality that explores how people manage against a challenging background.

The exhibition features short films, photographs and visual narratives produced by Andrew, alongside photographs taken by residents themselves. Also on display are diary accounts and life histories drawn from other parts of the research. The effect is a moving and provocative portrayal of what life has been like facing the current recession in 'ordinary' disadvantaged neighbourhoods, some of which are still subject to the after effects of previous economic downturns. The places featured are:

- Almwyh in Anglesey, Wales
- Hillside in Knowsley, Merseyside
- Oxfgangs in Edinburgh, Scotland
- Wensley Fold in Blackburn, Lancashire
- West Kensington in London
- West Marsh in Grimsby, Humberside

Alison Jarvis, Programme Manager at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said: "By using photography and film, as well as more traditional written outputs, the exhibition effectively captures people's own thoughts and feelings. The creative approach complemented the other important work of the team and was able to capture the voices of young people, so often missing from regeneration debates."

Photographer and film-maker Andrew, added: "The challenges faced by many of the people living in these communities may not be visually apparent. It's quite possible to walk through many of these neighbourhoods without realising the day-to-day struggle faced by some residents, but their stories reveal the challenge of getting by in difficult

circumstances The range of audio-visual approaches employed on the project attempted to capture residents' experiences in their own words and images and, at the same time, explore the potential of such techniques for collecting research material."

Running from 16 June 2011 for four weeks, the exhibition reinforces messages from the research:

- Place matters to people, and policies need to take into account the specific characteristics of different neighbourhoods, people's attitudes and attachment to them, and the way neighbourhoods change over time.
- Lower-income neighbourhoods may be rich in informal social, cultural and economic resources; these qualities are supported by a stable local housing market. Over-ambitious plans for redevelopment can backfire by undermining a sense of community.
- There was no evidence of 'brokenness' or of different social norms; participants in the research showed strong affiliation to traditional values of hard work, self-reliance, responsibility and independence.
- Financial pressures could be relentless on households struggling to 'get by' and they often took pride in their ability to 'stay the course' in dealing with these challenges.
- There was little confidence that the economic tide would start to turn in some of these areas. In a context of previous waves of 'de-industrialisation', people often told stories of 'loss' and 'decline' when talking about neighbourhood change.
- Neighbourhood-based facilities and services are not just important to residents because of their convenience; they are crucial signifiers of overall community well-being. Current austerity plans could undermine this.

The exhibition will go on tour around the UK from September, including visits to the neighbourhoods involved in the study. For more information on locations and dates visit www.jrf.org.uk

Ends

Notes to editors

1. *Communities under Pressure* is on display at NLA from 16 June – 14 July. NLA is open to the public free of charge Monday – Friday (9am – 6pm) and Saturday (10am – 5pm).

NLA was founded in 2005 as the centre for London's built environment – an independent information resource and a forum for discussion and debate for professionals, public and politicians. Since that time it has established itself as a major focus for discussion about architecture, planning, development and construction in the capital with a year-round programme of events, publications and exhibitions, and a core mission – bringing people and ideas to shape a better city
www.newlondonarchitecture.org

2. The policy implications report, *Low-income neighbourhoods in Britain – the gap between policy ideas and residents' realities* by Ian Cole, Elaine Batty and Stephen Green from Sheffield Hallam University, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is available as a free download from www.jrf.org.uk
3. The overarching research report, *Living through challenges in deprived neighbourhoods: change, continuity, contrast*, other working papers by members of the research team, and access to the extensive audio-visual material are available from www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr