

Transcript

Kathleen’s experience of poverty

**I live in real poverty and it’s not what you think**

I can’t afford to. They are four words I live my life by.

My food budget is 40 pounds a week. That’s 40 pounds for me, my husband and our three children combined. That is five days’ worth of packed lunch for three kids and an adult, it’s dinner for five every night and all of our meals at the weekend.

There’s a massive gap between how poverty is seen by people who don’t experience it and what it really means for those of us that do.

You might think people like me should watch Jamie Oliver’s program ‘money saving meals’. Well, that’s the same program where he suggested a 20-pound shoulder of lamb to feed a family over a weekend and that’s not the reality of poverty.

The reality of poverty also isn’t what you see on TV. Isn’t me spending all my benefits on fags and booze while I watch telly all day in my dirty house. It’s me sitting in the cold, hiding my shadow from the men at the front door as they bang their fists on the glass because I can’t pay my water bill. It’s calling my mum in tears because someone has sent out a bailiff. And it’s counting pennies from a jar to see if there’s enough to be able to buy bread. Scouring the supermarkets before they close in the hope that seeing the yellow labels that might mean a meal I can afford.

And it’s staring at empty cupboards hungry and ashamed because I must have done something wrong. I must deserve it except, I don’t.

Until the recession hit at the same time, I had a heart attack at 29, life was good. I went from a nice house, two good jobs, spoiled children to redundancy, a heart attack, a mastectomy, a bankrupt landlord, homelessness and they all hit at the same time. Now my husband’s got an admin job. I’m author. We still work hard but his wages, although they are above the minimum wage, don’t even cover out rent. So next time you talk about poverty, make sure you know what being poor in this country really means.