

Poverty and  
Human Rights Project

**BiHR**  
bringing rights to life

POVERTY  
IS A  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
ABUSE

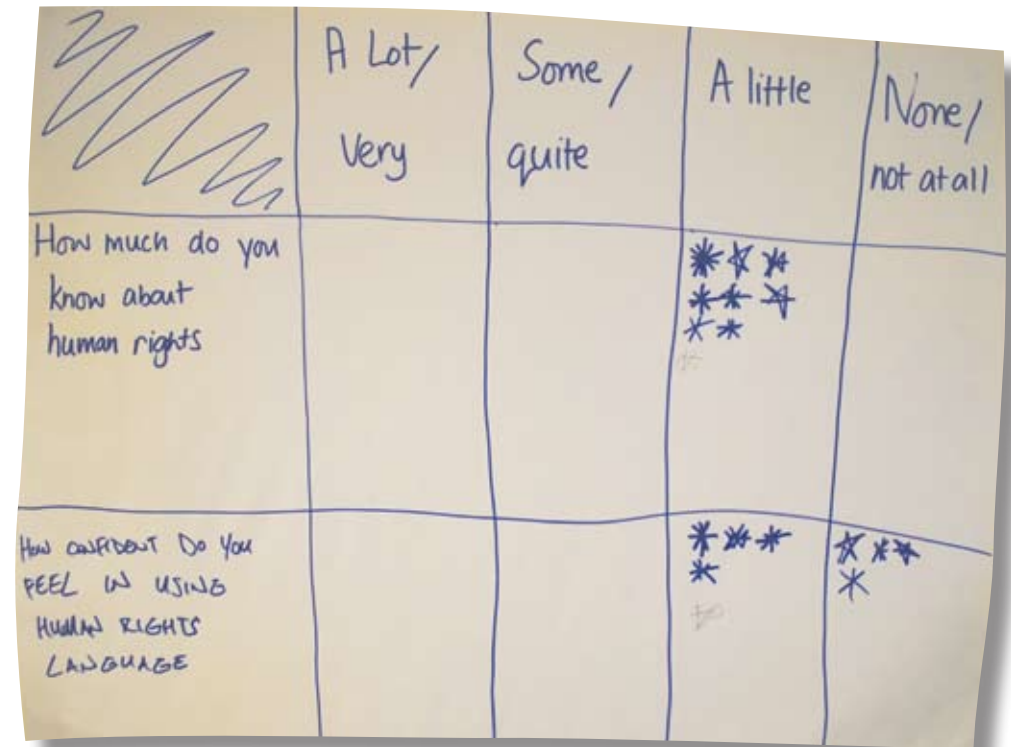




## Poverty and Human Rights Project

The British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) Poverty and Human Rights Project is supported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, City Parochial Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Oxfam.

BIHR is providing human rights capacity building to six London-based voluntary and community sector organisations that are working with and for people facing poverty or social injustice.



The six participating organisations are: Housing Justice, Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, London Refugee Voice, Pecan, Praxis and Women in Prison. The project aims to help these organisations use human rights to strengthen their voice and influence with national and local policy makers so that we can learn from and evaluate their experience. Both during and after the project, we will examine what works in order to draw out learning and tools for a wider range of groups to use.

Between January 2009 and December 2010 BIHR will help participating organisations to build awareness, skills and knowledge in:

- human rights and how to put these into practice using human rights based approaches
- developing and delivering human rights based influencing activities (awareness-raising, advocacy, campaigning, lobbying)
- identifying indicators or measures of change and progress

# Key issues

- Poverty is a human rights abuse. Human rights violations are a cause and consequence of poverty.
- People and communities experiencing poverty are often discriminated against both in terms of their ability to access public services and in how they are treated when using these services.
- People and communities experiencing poverty are more likely to face human rights abuses and are less likely to know what their rights are and how to claim them. During the recession and with increasing cuts to public spending this situation will get worse.
- The human rights of people and communities experiencing poverty - including basic levels of dignity, respect and equality - are not being considered in the development and implementation of policies and practices in all public bodies.
- A lack of joined up working and in some cases institutional discrimination within public services has serious implications for the ability of some people/communities experiencing poverty to secure some of the basic rights (housing and health care) needed to participate fully in society and to flourish as human beings.



- There is a low awareness of human rights and how they can be used to hold public bodies and the government to account amongst voluntary and community sector organisations working on poverty and other related issues.
- Human rights impose obligations on public bodies, but there is low awareness of how these obligations should be met by these bodies and what the role is for all public sector staff.
- There is a significant level of misunderstanding amongst the general public about the existence of poverty in the UK and the reasons for this. There are similar levels of misunderstanding about human rights and the protection that human rights law provides to people and communities within the UK. Some may not realise, for example, that weakening or getting rid of the Human Rights Act will impact on people living in poverty who rely heavily on public services and whose basic rights are least likely to be respected.

# Moving forward

- Human rights apply to everyone
- All public bodies have a legal duty (under the Human Rights Act 1998) to respect people's human rights in everything they do
- A human rights based approach to public services provides a clear set of standards for all, across organisations and sectors, and a framework for making complex and difficult decisions, especially those that have resource implications. It can also support the development of services and policies with fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy at their core.
- Reframing poverty issues as rights issues can help voluntary and community sector organisations and those experiencing poverty to hold public bodies and the government to account for
  - a) lack of provision of essential services
  - b) low standards in services
  - c) discrimination or other poor treatment when accessing public services.
- Adopting a human rights based approach to voluntary community sector service delivery can also challenge gate-keeping practices and the traditional charity model of 'doing unto' marginalised groups. It instead promotes the active and informed participation of those affected by the issues in realising the solutions.
- Knowing that you are entitled to a service (such as housing) or fair treatment rather than having to beg for assistance, fundamentally changes the relationship of power between a poor person and a public body or the government. It enables people experiencing poverty to interact with the state as 'rights holders,' rather than passive recipients of charity or good will.



# Participating organisations:

## Housing Justice

Housing Justice (HJ) is the national voice of Christian action in the field of homelessness and housing. HJ supports night shelters, drop-ins, soup run forums, and hundreds of other practical projects nationwide by providing advice and training for churches and other community groups who work with homeless people and asylum seekers.

## Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) seeks to raise the profile of Irish Travellers in Britain and increase their say in decision making processes and forums. The ITMB seeks to challenge discrimination and develop national policies that ensure the inclusion of Irish Travellers in all levels of society.

## London Refugee Voice

London Refugee Voice (LRV) is a membership organisation of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) in London. LRV seeks to strengthen the ability of RCOs to advocate and lobby on refugee issues, to enhance their capacity, and to support and assist RCOs in making their organisation efficient and effective.

## Pecan

Pecan helps transform the lives of disadvantaged people through various training and motivational projects in local communities. Pecan's focus is in helping unemployed people get and hold satisfying jobs. Training courses, new enterprises and projects work directly with young people, refugees and asylum seekers, ex-offenders and claimants of Incapacity Benefit, Income Support, and Job seekers Allowance to help transform individuals and communities.

## Praxis

Praxis is an organisation whose mission is "to be with displaced communities, listening and acting through our common humanity to create and nurture reconciliation, human rights and social justice." Since its inception 26 years ago, Praxis has worked with refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants, helping them on their journey from newly arrived migrants to settlement in the UK.

## Women in Prison

Women in Prison (WiP) has been supporting and campaigning for women offenders and ex-offenders since it was set up in 1983 by a former prisoner. In dealing with the root causes of women's offending and empowering women to campaign for changes to the criminal justice system based upon their experiences, WiP aims to limit, and where possible prevent, the damage and disruption done to women as a result of their contact with the criminal justice system.

# BIHR is providing support to participating organisations and other relevant organisations through:

- **Providing** initial human rights training focusing on human rights principles and legislation including UN treaties, the European Convention of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998.
- **Helping** organisations to identify: a specific issue or area of work to apply human rights to; the key rights that this issue relates to; and the public body which is responsible for protecting and promoting these rights.
- **Supporting** organisations to develop a plan of key influencing activities and outputs and helping organisations to identify simple and usable methods of evaluating and monitoring progress and change.
- **Providing** on the ground support to participating organisations/community groups about human rights and other relevant issues including skill based topics e.g. campaigning, working with the media etc.
- **Evaluating** and sharing the learning (the successes and challenges) from the project and developing a useful model and relevant tools for other organisations working on poverty and related issues.



# Priority issues identified by the six organisations working with BIHR that will be taken forward during the project:

- A local authority waking homeless people in the middle of the night, conducting welfare checks and hosing down the area where they are sleeping to prevent them from staying there (organisation: Housing Justice)
- Discrimination in provision of health and housing / accommodation services to the Irish Traveller community (organisation: Irish Traveller Movement in Britain)
- Developing a human rights coalition to address the low awareness of human rights amongst Refugee Community Organisations and the refugee sector generally. (organisation: London Refugee Voice)
- Working towards becoming a human rights based organisation: 'Human rights proofing' of organisational policies and procedures for services Pecan provides to a range of client groups (organisation: Pecan)
- Social services refusing to support undocumented migrant families, threatening to take their children into care due to the family having no recourse to public funds (organisation: Praxis)
- Lack of joined up services resulting in high numbers of women becoming homeless on release from prison (organisation: Women In Prison)



## About BIHR

BIHR is an independent human rights charity that is committed to challenging inequality and social injustice in everyday life in the UK.

We want a society that has become stronger because all human beings are equally valued, can participate fully and are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.

We believe that human rights have meaning and benefit for everyone. They are not just abstract or legal concepts and documents - they can be brought to life, and used practically to create a fairer, more tolerant society and tackle inequality and disadvantage.

We think that this can only happen if human rights are understood, applied and claimed, outside the courtroom and by a wide range of people and organisations.

So our mission is to bring human rights to life - supporting and empowering people and organisations to use human rights to improve their own lives and the lives of others.

## Supporting our work

You can support BIHR by joining up as a Friend for just £25 a year by filling out the form below. Or make a one off donation online at [www.bihar.org.uk](http://www.bihar.org.uk)

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We are very grateful to the  
Equality and Human Rights Commission,  
City Parochial Foundation,  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
and Oxfam for funding this project.

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For more information on the  
Poverty and Human Rights Project  
please contact:

Roisin Cavanagh

Tel: 0207 848 1927

Email: [rcavanagh@bihr.org.uk](mailto:rcavanagh@bihr.org.uk)

**British Institute of Human Rights**

7th Floor, Melbourne House  
46 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4LL

Tel: 020 7 848 1818

Fax: 0207 848 1814

Email: [info@bihr.org.uk](mailto:info@bihr.org.uk)

Web: [www.bihr.org.uk](http://www.bihr.org.uk)

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