

How to Talk About Preventing Poverty

A briefing paper on the narrative and stories that build support for poverty prevention



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CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

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The [Child Poverty Action Group \(CPAG\)](#) is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand so all children can thrive. CPAG produces evidence about the causes and effects of poverty, looks carefully at how government policies affect children, publishes reports, makes submissions, and conducts research projects to achieve its goals.

[The Workshop](#) is a not-for-profit narrative research and strategy organisation based in Aotearoa New Zealand. At The Workshop, we undertake research into public mindsets and narratives about complex economic, environmental, and social issues. Public mindset shift is key to building support for initiatives that will make the biggest difference to repairing, building, and maintaining connected, caring, inclusive communities and thriving ecosystems. Our methods involve identifying and testing narratives that deepen public thinking and shift shared mindsets on complex issues. We provide evidence-based narrative and framing support to people researching, advocating for, and implementing better systems. With the support of our funders, we make our research publicly available.

About this paper

— This paper contains recommendations on how to talk about poverty for the purposes of deepening people’s understanding about causes of and solutions to poverty in Aotearoa.

This paper, and the advice in it, is for anyone advocating for a more just economic system — one that works to lift the restrictions that sweep people into poverty.

The advice in this paper is drawn from research we located in a brief literature review on the topic and The Workshop’s own prior research (listed below), which it updates. It was prepared by Dr Jess Berentson-Shaw in 2023.

- [Talking about Poverty and Welfare Reform in Aotearoa: A Short Guide](#)
- [Talking about Poverty and Welfare Reform: A Guide to Strategies that work in Aotearoa New Zealand](#)
- [Telling a New Story About “Child Poverty” in New Zealand](#)

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The opportunity: intensify the narratives about causes of poverty

Many advocates — and people who experience poverty — have worked hard for decades on changes to the policies and practices that shape the lives of many families in poverty. Across our welfare, care and protection, disability, employment, health, tax, and education, advocates have sought to redesign systems to unlock people from poverty. Taking care of each other, of our children, is simply the right thing to do in a society that values care for each other, contribution, and connection with each other. Setting all families up to thrive from the start is wise because, when all children and families thrive, all of us win.

Much has been achieved by the tireless and committed work of many people, and there is much more to be done — because we have not overcome child and family poverty. We still face the impacts of poorly thought through and harmful economic, education, health, disability, and welfare policies. There is too much short-term thinking by people in politics, and decisions are still being driven by narratives that rest on racism, individual blame, and outdated ideas about the inevitability of poverty.

Now is a good time to reflect on the power and science of narratives in our work. While there are compelling narratives and stories being used about poverty, especially by those who live it, they lack the intensity we need to shift people's mindsets — partly because they lack intensity because the untrue narratives are so strong but also because the communication and rhetorical strategies employed by many of us do not intensify them. Instead, we often find ourselves repeating harmful narratives (always in order to name them as harmful), simply describing poverty and its prevalence, or talking about the symptoms. And so people in Aotearoa do not yet have a clear and compelling understanding of the true causes of poverty, the humanity of the people in poverty, and the harm poverty does to our shared futures.

The types of narratives we can intensify are those that help people who care about poverty — and many do — to understand that poverty is created through unfair and unjust structures and systems that people have created and maintained. That there are constraints (and exploitation) designed into our economic system particularly that prevent people from being able to meet their very real aspirations. It is these systems that sweep people, like a fast current, into poverty. By providing better explanations about the structural causes of poverty, we can help people better rationalise about the solutions, such as an expansion of benefits, instead of activating politically determined responses.

There is also a need to intensify the shared humanity aspect of people in poverty. People in poverty are our neighbours, our workmates, our classmates. People who keep our country going, who teach our children, and care for our parents, who respond in a crisis, and who are building connections across our communities. People who are constrained by economic and other policies. They have grit and determination, and it should not be being used to overcome the burdens the system places on them. That is unjust.

Finally, people in public don't rationalise sufficiently about the collective impact of ongoing poverty. Communications don't currently work to help people understand that, when people are locked into poverty, through restricting economic systems and policies, it doesn't just impact 'those others over there'. Such systems harm Māori, Pacific, disabled people first and worst — but then it impacts us all. We are all subject to poorly designed systems. And subsequently, when we unlock our people, our children, our families from poverty, we thrive together.

One message or a handful of messages with similar themes can reach some folks, but when those messages are repeated not only in op-eds, but in places of worship, mosques, visual art, small and big screens, social media, comments sections, in conversations at the grocery store, they become so ubiquitous that they transform from little "t" to big "T" truths ... that's narrative. When narrative change happens. (Izen, 2022)

The job at hand is to name and explain those compelling and true narratives — to work with each other to implement them with the intensity and consistency we need instead of negating the untrue but sticky narratives. When we tell these clear stories at such volume and in many places, the narrative sticks and mindsets shift.

This briefing outlines how we can use effective frames, stories, and explanations to intensify the helpful narratives and mindsets about unjust and restricting economic systems, the humanity and strength of people locked in poverty, and the deep connections that bind us and our shared future. Narratives can assist us to shift our shared mindsets to a deeper, more complex understanding of the causes of poverty and the solutions we all need.

In short, the narrative advice recommended in this paper seeks to support you to do six redirections of people's thinking.

1. Direct people *away from* existing thinking and rationalising about poverty as being a matter of poor choices, an insufficiency as people or communities, or a failure to take advantage of opportunities.
2. Direct people *away from* drawing on racist mindsets about why people are poor.
3. Direct people *away from* thinking poverty is a problem that is too big or embedded to do anything about.
4. Direct people *towards* thinking how the systems we have designed, especially economic ones, restrict people's opportunities and sweep many people into poverty and how they can be used to design our way out.

5. Direct people *towards* thinking about the strength, grit, and humanity of people in poverty, people who are like us, who are part of our communities, who need recognition of their strengths and better options.
6. Direct people *towards* thinking about the shared and collective nature of the harms of poverty and the shared benefits of overcoming it.

How to talk about poverty in a nutshell....

Embrace these big ideas across your stories and messages — the helpful narratives

- ✓ We can redesign our economic and other systems to overcome the causes of poverty — a better systems narrative.
- ✓ People in poverty have grit, determination, and aspirations — a strength-based narrative.
- ✓ Together we thrive — overcoming poverty is how we create a positive shared future for all of us — a better together narrative.

Avoid these big ideas — the unhelpful narratives

- ✗ Poverty is caused by individual failings — individual drive.
 - » Looks or sounds like any effort-based, personal choice, or individual decision-framing consumerist language.
 - » Any charitable rhetoric that implores people to look at those poor children over there without also referencing the harm to us all.
 - » Describing people in poverty as somehow fundamentally different and apart from everyone else and failing to make clear that people locked in poverty are part of our communities, people we rely on to run our society, people like us.
- ✗ Poverty is a culture or way of life for some people and groups — *cultures of poverty, a them versus us with strong racist themes narrative*.
 - » Looks or sounds like benefits as the main problem for people.
 - » Any focus on a subset of people/families as the problem instead of the system — ‘broken families’, ‘10% of people use 50% of the support resources’.
- ✗ Poverty is naturally occurring — *economic naturalism and fatalism narrative*.
 - » Looks or sounds like a singular focus on describing the problem of poverty and treatment of the symptoms without reference to structural causes.
 - » Looks or sounds like economic naturalism — ‘it’s too big, too hard’, ‘people don’t care’, ‘people in government are useless/won’t act/haven’t acted’.

Use an effective story structure to implement the helpful narratives

Have in mind the big idea/narrative you want to reflect — public good, collective action. Then put together a story using the following structure to reflect the narrative or big idea (see the main body of the paper for more detail).

1. Vision and values — invite people in to the issue through the prosocial things that matter to them.
2. Barrier — name what is getting in the way of prioritising the values or vision and who is responsible.
3. Simple explanation — explain the problem using tested simplifying models.
4. Specific solutions — provide clear solutions — for example, tax on unearned income (wealth) —and include an action for people to take.

Implementing Narrative 1. We can redesign our economic and other systems to overcome the causes of poverty - better more just systems narrative

We recommend these approaches to bring the better more just systems narrative to the surface

- ✓ Focus on showing the causes of poverty — the unjust nature of the economic system.
- ✓ Broaden the lens of intervention.
- ✓ Use data and research to highlight how the unjust economic system works against people
- ✓ Name who benefits as well as who is harmed.
- ✓ Combine a better systems narrative with a strength-based or better together narrative to counter racist mindsets.

Use these elements and tactics to tell stories about better, more just systems

- ✓ Use concrete visions of better economic systems.
- ✓ Use compassion and justice values.
- ✓ Use pragmatism and responsibility values.
- ✓ Avoid the word 'fairness' and fear values.
- ✓ Use the 'restricts' and 'restrains' metaphors to explain problems in the system.
- ✓ Use the 'loosen' and 'unlocking' metaphors to explain solutions.

- ✓ Use the 'current' metaphor.
- ✓ Use the 'redesign and reprogramming the economy' metaphor.
- ✓ Use the 'computer programming' metaphor to explain structural racism.
- ✓ Use easy to access explanatory chains that end in solutions.
- ✓ Use compelling and surprising messengers to carry the systems story.

Implementing Narrative 2. People in poverty are strong, self determining humans who are core to our communities thriving – a strength based narrative

We recommend these approaches to bring the strength-based narrative to the surface

- ✓ Create diverse, compassionate, three-dimensional portraits of people in poverty that can counter the harmful narratives.
- ✓ Focus on the voice of those living in poverty.
- ✓ Highlight the diversity of people who are made poor.
- ✓ Highlight that poverty steals people's dreams.
- ✓ Always combine with a better systems narrative to counter 'deserving hard-working poor' thinking.

Use these elements and tactics to tell stories about the strength of people in poverty

- ✓ Use an appropriate vision of strong people in poverty thriving in better systems.
- ✓ Use the value of self-determination.
- ✓ Use the 'overloaded' and 'overburdened' metaphors.

Implementing Narrative 3. Overcoming poverty is how we create a positive shared future for all of us as restricting systems affect us all - *Together we thrive narratives*

We recommend these approaches to bring the Together we Thrive narrative to the surface

- ✓ Focus on building understanding of the shared harms and benefits of preventing poverty.
- ✓ Seek to counter racist division present in conversations about poverty.
- ✓ Highlight the way poverty steals from our collective aspirations, creativity, and problem-solving power.
- ✓ Broaden and deepen explanations about our shared public good.

- ✓ Avoid appeals to charity for those in poverty — highlight the importance of acting in solidarity for those in poverty.
- ✓ Use data and evidence to highlight policies that work for significant poverty as well as those struggling near the margins (big tent policies).
- ✓ Carefully explain how some groups have benefited via the exploitation of others.
- ✓ Combine a strength and humanity of people narrative with together we thrive narrative.

Use these elements and tactics to tell stories about how we thrive together

- ✓ Use solidarity values.
- ✓ Use collective responsibility values.
- ✓ Use explanatory metaphors to explain shared public good/benefits for all.
- ✓ Use the ‘public good’ and ‘infrastructure of care, connection, and contribution’ metaphors.
- ✓ Use the ‘public structures’ explanatory metaphor.
- ✓ Use messengers from more privileged groups to talk about unjust benefits they have.
- ✓ Check the frames and ideas in the images you use.

Combining your big ideas in different stories: examples

Example story 1. Big idea: A better system with people with grit and determination

Explains economic causes of poverty and benefits as a solution

For many of us, overcoming child poverty is the right and compassionate thing to do. Right now, our economic system is restricting many families who want to do well for their kids.

We have employment policies that keep wages low and allow too many people to be exploited, and we have housing and taxation policies that create ever-rising costs for many people.

People across our communities — our teachers, healthcare workers, supermarket workers, caregivers, friends, neighbours — are being swept into poverty by this system. As these constraints are placed on them, many parents continue doing their best — using all their energy and problem-solving skills to help their children.

People in government can do better, recognising families' strengths and desire to do well by loosening the economic constraints on them. People in government must use benefits to lift people out of poverty while reprogramming other parts of our economic system so all families can thrive.

Example story 2: Big idea: Humanity and together we thrive

Explains how systems that cause poverty affect us all and the benefits to all of working together to overcome

Regardless of who we are or what part of Aotearoa we come from, we want communities where our work raising children and caring for people is seen as important, where the wellbeing of those children is seen as critical and where we thrive as people raising kids and caring for others.

Right now, our parents, brothers, neighbours — people who teach our children, care for our elderly, and create our communities — are being swept into poverty and the stress and misery that comes with that because our economic system is not designed to ensure everyone is cared for and their contribution is recognised.

The people most frequently swept into poverty by these systems are disabled people, Māori and Pacific families, and children. However, the policy settings that sweep people into poverty ultimately restrict and constrain most of us — because we all suffer from expensive unstable housing, high childcare and food costs, and being exploited at work.

Overcoming poverty by redesigning important policies is how we create a future in which we thrive together. All of us need people in government to focus on rebuilding infrastructures of care, connection, and contribution. More low-cost affordable housing, a generous and compassionate benefit system that recognises the strength of all people, better wages, an education system that centres the needs of all children and teachers — these things mean we can thrive together.

WHAT NOT TO DO: Avoid a fear-led story with no explanations

Poverty is continuing to climb in this country, with little real meaningful changes to many children's lives. People in government simply don't care enough about the commitments they made to children in poverty. These children are suffering in our hospitals every winter, excluded from our education system. Ultimately, they will never reach their full potential, and that costs all of us. Many New Zealanders are leaving poor children out in the cold.

Key terms



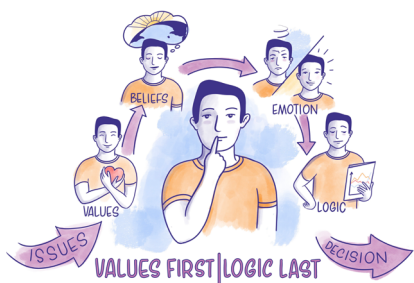
Shared mindsets

Shared mindsets are shared ways of reasoning about and understanding how and why issues come about and what should be done about them. We can bring to the surface helpful ways for people to reason about an issue to influence what they think about it (their opinion on a policy, for instance). Different narratives can help people move between different reasonings or mindsets.



Narratives and stories

Narratives are a pattern of meaning that are like a golden thread weaving together our stories. The pattern of meaning often reflects shared deep mindsets. Narratives often have core values — our key human motivations — nested within them. Narratives both emerge from a set of stories and provide templates for specific stories. Stories are tales about particular events and people. Stories can both contribute to creating narratives and draw from narratives.



Values

Values are our deepest human motivations — our ‘why’ of life. We all hold a broad range of values. At a subconscious level, values act as a filter for the information that we receive. They provide a frame to ask ‘how do I interpret this information in the context of what I value?’

Framing matters — it shapes the policies and practices that shape our lives

How we talk and communicate, the way we frame important issues like poverty, is a powerful tool that can shape the policies and practices that people in government and other institutions in our society implement. For example, in a study in the US, researchers tracked how poverty and poor people were framed across time in the US and plotted it against the relative generosity of government policy with regard to poverty across the same period. They found that ‘controlling for relevant factors such as the growth of the economy and the depth of poverty, the tone of media coverage was a significant predictor of government spending on the poor’ (Rose & Baumgartner, 2013).

When we learn how poverty is being framed and what effect it is having on people who make the decisions, we can take control of our own framing and build more powerful movements for a more just and compassionate economic system — one that does not accept poverty as inevitable or acceptable.

Insight: Decision makers and the public

Narrative shift work is based on research showing that change happens in part when decision makers believe there is a significant group of the public that supports the actions being advocated for. Narrative and mindset shift work is designed to be used by groups of people and organisations to work together to shift shared public mindsets and activate people to show decision makers they support the initiatives or changes — making decision makers more likely to act.



Part 1. Unhelpful narratives and frames about poverty and the mindsets they surface

Researchers in the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand have identified a group of broad narratives that activate unhelpful ways of rationalising about poverty. These narratives and mindsets prevent people from gaining a deeper understanding about the real causes of poverty and stop them from considering effective solutions (Berentson-Shaw, 2019; Miller et al., 2021; O’Neil et al., 2018; Shorters, 2019). The two narratives that appear most frequently in political and public rhetoric are individual drive and culture of poverty narratives.

1. The individual drive narrative

The individual drive narrative is the most commonly identified and heard. In this narrative, poverty is caused by a lack of willpower, lack of sufficient drive, bad choices, or, in some cases, moral failing and insufficiency. Its narrative suggests that, with enough hard work, anyone will do well — personal responsibility features highly in this narrative. FrameWorks researchers note that by ‘attributing poverty to lack of effort or “bad” values, the individual drive narrative opens the door for racist ideas and stereotypes’ (Miller et al., 2021, p. 7).

In general the individualism narrative denies the structural and systemic or designed inequity at the heart of our economic systems, including structural racism for example. There are different variants or subtypes of the individual drive narrative.

The meritocracy variant

Explaining poverty happens because everyone has equal opportunities. It’s a level playing field but some people don’t choose to take advantage of these equal opportunities but those who do well have. It’s a narrative that especially ignores the role of power and systems of oppression like colonisation, structural racism, and gender discrimination. It makes systemic change hard to see. Stories and references to self-made people are using the meritocracy narrative. John Key would be an example of a meritocracy story, pulling himself up, using the opportunities he had to make millions and become the Prime Minister.

When we use terms like ‘levelling the playing field’, we are inadvertently referring to the idea that, if we do give everyone the same thing, then any remaining poverty is the result of individual failings.

The bootstraps variant

Explains that everyone can get out of poverty with sufficient effort. Poverty is just a challenge that people need to overcome. The difference between bootstraps and meritocracy is the bootstraps acknowledges there isn't equal opportunity, but that is ok because those who fail are simply not good enough/strong enough people. **This is where racist tropes can often start appearing.**

The bootstraps variant makes poverty about good and bad poor people. It weaponises indifference that society might feel towards people in poverty by rationalising they simply are too weak or not good enough — it dehumanises and 'others'.

The consumerism variant

More broadly, this looks like people being able to buy their way out of poverty in their role as consumers in society. It can look like choosing to budget better, growing your own vegetables, being 'canny'. Often this gets tied in with romanticised versions of poverty — we were poor but we made our own fun and we were happy.

2. Culture of poverty — most often black and brown people's culture

In this narrative, poverty is seen as an embedded way of life for some groups of people and is most often connected with racist tropes. Poverty might not be because individuals are 'weak' in this narrative — rather, their culture is. In other words, particular groups are poor because of a preferred way of life with attitudes, norms, and behaviours that drive people into poverty. It is a highly racialised and often gendered narrative, often used against young brown and black women. In New Zealand, it is a narrative based in the racist system of colonisation. It perpetuates offensive ideology about the supremacy of whiteness and white cultures, and it others and dehumanises Māori, Pacific and Black communities. It obscures structures and systems and the impact of economic and systems constraints on people's wellbeing and functioning, including intergenerationally.

The stories that employ and evoke this narrative talk about choosing unemployment, 'broken' families, and social welfare dependency as the norm for black and brown people, weaving implicit and explicit references to purported cultural deficits or defects throughout. It's likely that the 'welfare as the problem' rhetoric draws heavily on this culture of poverty narrative — the argument is that it creates a 'culture' of dependency and laziness.

The portrayal of people in prison and people in receipt of public support as Māori and Pacific is an example of a story that furthers this culture of poverty narrative. Stories that focus on young Pacific women on the benefit who don't name the fathers of their children also do so.

Data-driven approaches to identifying a 'type' or characteristics of a family or group more likely to be in receipt of welfare and public services also bring to the surface culture of poverty narratives.

3. The system is rigged

In this narrative, people believe groups of elites consciously control and manipulate society to gain power and resources. This leads to fatalistic thinking about overcoming poverty and activates a total withdrawal from thinking about the problem or acting as citizens. It is most often seen in attempts to disenfranchise groups of people from democratic institutions and behaviours such as voting. If people in poverty believe the system is rigged against them, then engaging with that system is viewed as pointless.

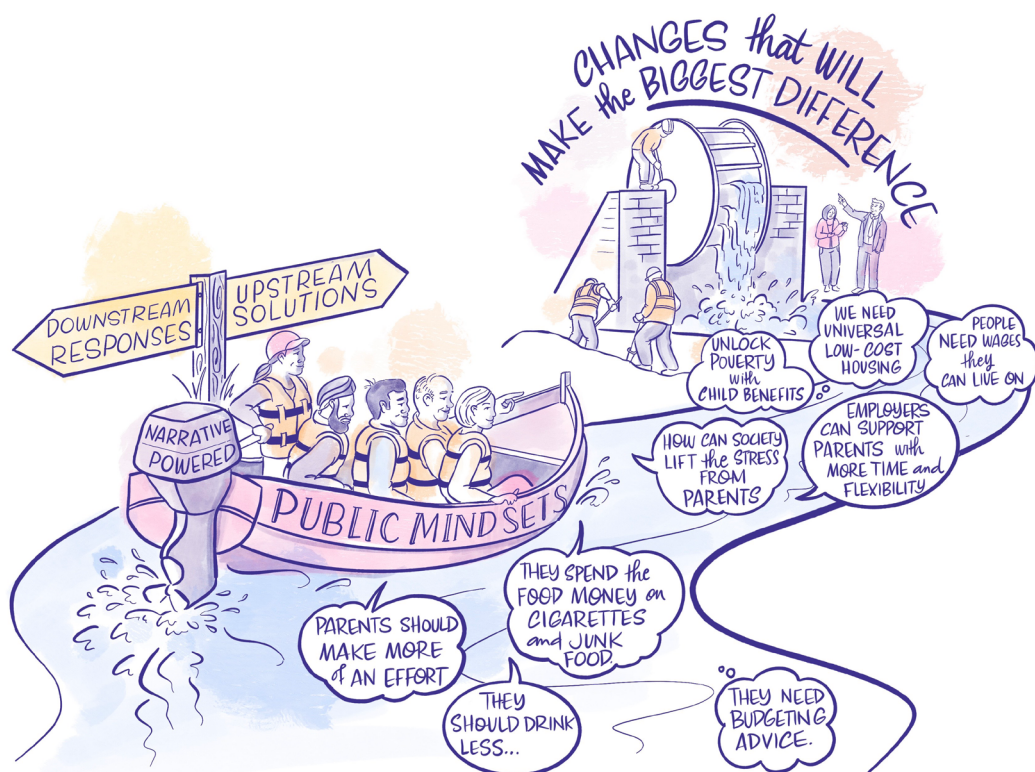
4. Economic naturalism

People view the economy as shaped by mysterious market forces beyond individual or societal control. Again, this leads to fatalistic thinking about the ability of people in government particularly to overcome poverty through influencing the economy (they, too, are simply victims of bad weather events) and obscures the fact that our policy systems and rules are created and can be recreated.

5. Non-negotiable needs

People feel poverty means a lack of the basics: food, shelter, and clothing. Everything else is seen as a non necessary want. As FrameWorks notes:

All other things are understood as ‘wants’ or luxuries. This can help garner support for a limited welfare system that meets basic needs and helps with the costs of housing. But it undermines support for a more robust welfare state and leads the public to focus on tightening up the benefits system. (O’Neil et al., 2018, p. 6)



Insight: Negating the harmful narrative and mindsets

While we have a strong emotional response driving us to name the unhelpful narratives being used, especially in politics, or where it means people are being dehumanised and subjected to racist and harmful rhetoric, it's important to try and avoid doing this as part of a change strategy. When we draw attention to a harmful narrative, we can inadvertently reinforce it. Instead, at every opportunity, replace it with a better, truer narrative and story. By intentionally bringing to mind the beliefs it is trying to rebut, myth busting inadvertently ends up strengthening them.

TELL your STORY.



Where do the unhelpful narratives arise in our own work as advocates?

Habituated ways of responding to harmful narratives means we sometimes unintentionally draw on unhelpful narratives. We've observed some examples of this from advocates and researchers.

- ✗ Pointing to poor people as different from or separate from 'us here', we can inadvertently reference the individual drive or culture of poverty narratives and mindsets.
- ✗ Use of terms like 'broken families' or highlighting the use of public services by only a small proportion of the community — for example, highlighting the number of people who receive more in public funds than they pay in tax or take up most of government services inadvertently references the culture of poverty narrative.
- ✗ A focus on describing the prevalence of poverty through use of data and statistics, without reference to causes and structural solutions surfaces economic fatalism or the idea that poverty will always be with us and it is simply a matter of dealing with the symptoms of an inevitable and natural disease.
- ✗ A focus on describing symptoms of poverty instead of the causes also means we leave the individual drive and culture of poverty narrative intact without giving a new one because failing to give a new causal story of poverty leaves the individual blame intact.
- ✗ Talking in fatalistic ways about government inaction — for example, that people in government don't care, won't act, or have not acted.

Part 2. Helpful narratives about poverty and the mindsets they surface

We suggest that these three helpful narratives that already exist can be used to redirect people's thinking when they are exposed to unhelpful narratives.

- ✓ We can redesign our economic and other systems to overcome the causes of poverty — a better systems narrative.
- ✓ People in poverty are strong, self determining humans who are core to our communities thriving — a strength-based narrative.
- ✓ Together we thrive — overcoming poverty is how we create a positive shared future for all of us — a better together narrative.

2.1 Amplifying and expanding the better systems narrative: 'We can redesign our economic systems to overcome the causes of poverty'

Across the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand, a narrative exists that poverty is caused by systems problems — problems that reduce the opportunities offered to people — such as education failures, housing problems, and unfair employment practices. These narratives bring to mind the external economic factors and systems that drive poverty.

Recommendations for using the better systems narrative

Focus on showing the cause of poverty — the unjust nature of the economic system

To become a more powerful idea across our culture, one that creates a sense of hope and agency, FrameWorks researchers (Miller et al., 2021) suggest we turn the unfair systems mindset into a fuller explanation of how people have made choices and decisions in designing our economic system in a way that places significant constraints on many people — one that also focuses on how it is possible to redesign the system through specific changes.

As the Public Interest Research Centre argues, a better systems narrative is about helping us move away from describing poverty as a naturally occurring disease that people in government simply understand and manage the symptoms of and move towards explaining the cause of the disease (PIRC, 2015).

Broaden the lens of intervention

It is critical for advocates to work to broaden the lens of intervention. It's important to help people understand that we don't just need deeper or better anti-poverty investments. We need different ones — policies that refuse to accept poverty, that truly empower people and unlock them from poverty. It means that, in our stories, we demand that people in government and business focus on the real causes of poverty — unjust laws, tax rules, housing policies, and labour practices that exploit and oppress people, for example. It is a strategy that portrays the system, not the individuals, as weak or insufficient (Grimm, 2020).

Use data and research to highlight how the unjust economic system works

Collect data and research specifically to illustrate the economic racial and gendered injustices created by specific policies and practices (GOOD Corps, 2019). For example, when poverty statistics come out, talk about the structures and systems that cause poverty, not just whether **the symptoms** are adequately being dealt with. Stories that focus on specific systems issues and discriminatory practices in employment, education, housing, or money lending are important — for example, payday loan companies, additional costs for pre-paid power, the red trucks.

Research and policy organisations may want to plan the research they do to focus on uncovering specific injustices and inequities in economic policies and then partner with advocacy organisations to create compelling stories and explanations about the system.

Some ideas about how data can be collected and used to tell a better systems stories

- Use trend data about the experiences of poverty and the systems problems — use of food banks, low wages, homelessness and housing insecurity, and housing costs — in preference to prevalence data describing the rates of poverty (which leaves gaps in understanding causes).
- Measure labour exploitation — people who are underpaid relative to the value of what they produce.
- Measure government generosity (or lack of it) instead of poverty itself. A measure of relative government generosity and care for children and families in poverty might look like the level of income support for families in real terms over time compared to wages or cost of living. Such measures can reframe the problem of poverty to a system problem. Rose and Baumgartner (2013) created such a measure for their research.

A better systems narrative also needs stories of success — where economic injustices have been overcome through collective action and different decisions by people in policy.

Name who benefits as well as who is harmed

Where the data shows that the economic rules and policies benefit some groups — notably for example industries — highlight this as part of the story. People need to see not just that high early education costs harm many parents but that they benefit those who dominate in the industry for example. Help people understand where policies set up to improve inclusion and equity are designed and utilised in a way that actually exploits people in order to make private profits from what should be a public good.

Where tax systems work well for the very wealthy at the expense of others, this needs to be made explicit.

Combine a better systems narrative with a strength-based or ‘together we thrive’ to counter racist mindsets

It is important to find ways of embedding individuals within better systems stories. Both the agents who can make change and the strength and humanity of people narrative is a good way to do so. Using the strength and humanity of people ensures that the better systems narrative works to counter the individual drive or culture of poverty narratives and thinking. Without the humanity and strength of people in poverty, the unfair economic system directs people to think about ‘the deserving poor’ only. Because of the racism embedded in the individual drive and culture of poverty narratives, that will often look like concern for white, working class ‘the squeezed middle’, at the expense of Māori and Pacific communities unless it is specifically countered.

Use an effective story structure to contain your big narrative ideas

Narratives are threaded throughout our stories, and there is a particular story structure that can help you ensure your big idea or narrative is threaded through your stories

Effective stories start with a vision and values, which creates an invitation for people to first reflect on why what you are talking about is something that matters to them. People need to see there is a barrier, often with a clear agent holding the barrier in place. You can then follow up with simple explanations that show how policy makers and decision makers are not doing the things that matter to them and what the impacts are. A good story then leads people to a natural end that contains a solution that they are able to take action to support.

1. Vision and values — invite people in to the issue through the prosocial things that matter to them.
2. Barrier — name what is getting in the way of prioritising the values or vision and who is responsible.
3. Simple explanation — explain the problem using tested simplifying models.
4. Specific solutions — provide clear solutions — for example, tax on unearned income (wealth) — and include an action for people to take.

Use these elements of a story to put the recommendations into practice

Use concrete visions of better economic systems

In poverty and anti-poverty work, it can be particularly hard to paint a clear concrete vision of structural changes. However, with practice and by talking to people in poverty, advocates, and those who research different systems, policies, and practices, it is possible to draw a picture literally and metaphorically of what a society looks like with more just economic policies and practice — a society where our infrastructure supports care in all facets of our lives, formally recognises the many different types of contributions that people make, and at every opportunity builds connections between people and institutions instead of eroding them.

Move beyond just talking about children thriving and instead paint a rich picture — for example, a generous welfare state and what that would look like for a sole parent who has aspirations to do well for her children.

What this sounds like:

We can have a society where every parent who has a child, no matter what the circumstances, is appreciated for doing work that matters and is supported to do it. They live in a warm stable home in a connected community where food is cheap and healthy. They have the resources they need to ensure that their child can reach their goals. They have time and energy to spend and experience joy in their parenting. They can access good, meaningful work that supports their parenting if they want, with a salary they can thrive on.

Insight: Using prosocial values

When people prioritise altruistic, self-transcendent, intrinsic, relational, and prosocial values — for example, helpfulness, responsibility, wisdom, pragmatism, care for the environment, creativity, and self-direction — they are more likely to support prosocial and pro-environmental policies, practices, and changes. In part, this is because they see how the actions proposed align with their deepest motivations.

When dominant narratives are constantly reminding people of their self-interest or individualistic values, it can be hard to prioritise prosocial values. Our narratives and stories need to remind people of their prosocial values. Research shows that, when our narratives and stories ‘prime’ such values, people become better at rationalising information about prosocial and pro-environmental issues and are more likely to act in support of prosocial and pro-environment policies and practices.



Use these values to support the better systems narrative

Use compassion and justice values

Compassion and justice values help to overcome or bypass fatalism and economic naturalism thinking in particular about poverty. Compassion and justice values spark people to think about what we want for our society, what we can do to address the issue and that we can do something.

What this sounds like:

As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We share a responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and opportunities no matter who they are or where they come from. (FrameWorks Institute, 2018, p. 3)

Many of us want an economy that works for all of us — one that is just and compassionate. Right now, we have tax rules, housing policies, labour laws, and trade agreements that are deeply unjust and are sweeping many people in this country into poverty. We can do better.

These values frames performed well when tested in an Aotearoa setting also (Berentson-Shaw et al., 2019).

Use pragmatism and responsibility values

When talking about redesigning the economic system, we can frame the conversation in values of pragmatism, responsibility, and wisdom for some audiences — for example, decision makers. Remind people they care about being responsible and making wise decisions for the long term, taking practical steps to prevent problems in the future that affect the wellbeing of community, people, environment, and country.

What this sounds like:

It's important to make responsible and wise decisions so children today get what they need to thrive as adults. This means setting budgets and allocating resources to those initiatives and programmes that prevent poverty.

Avoid the word 'fairness' and fear values

- Fairness — fairness as a value and frame can engage shared mindsets related to meritocracy — everyone gets the same, and poor people simply choose not to use their opportunities.
- Security/avoiding catastrophe — engaging fear in others — for example “Poverty could happen to you too’ —this can highlight security values that can work against thinking about the collective good while people focus on protecting themselves.

Use better explanations to support the better systems narrative

When people are frequently exposed to shallow and unhelpful ideas about how poverty happens, they need to have access to deeper explanations that counter their understandings. These explanations need to be simple, easy to process, and ‘cognitively available’ so people can grasp them in a fast-paced information environment.

Explanatory metaphors and exploratory chains are two ways to simplify complex issues

Use metaphors to simplify complex issues

Use metaphors that help people visualise physically how the system works on people to cause poverty and limit their options, opportunities, and choices. They help direct thinking away from individual or cultural ‘failures’. For example the unjust economic system is restricting people, constraining them, locking them in, limiting.

It is important to be concrete and specific about which parts of the economic system — for example, labour policies and laws, housing, and welfare — are constraining and limiting people.

What this sounds like:

Our economy is locking people in poverty. Low-paid, unstable jobs mean more and more families can’t put food on the table. With costs of living on the rise, many are kept in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about a different future. It is hard to break free from the restrictions our economy places on people.

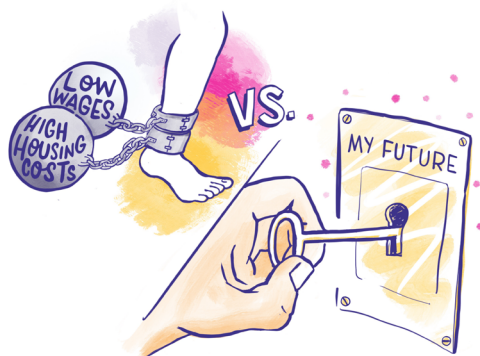
Originally developed by FrameWorks, retesting this in New Zealand shows it to be effective here also (Berentson-Shaw et al., 2019).

Use the ‘loosen’ and ‘unlocking’ metaphors to explain solutions

After helping people visualise the problems the systems cause, you can use metaphors like loosening constraints or unlocking people from poverty to support systems and structural solutions

What this sounds like:

Benefits can loosen the constraints the economy has on people and their wellbeing — low-paid work, high housing cost, cost of living.



Use the ‘current’ metaphor

‘Current’ and other words that are conceptually similar such as channels, the tide, swept up, pulled along, pulled under, stay afloat, and stream help people to understand how powerful and forceful the economic system is in destabilising people and pulling them into poverty, as shown by FrameWorks testing in 2018.

What this sounds like:

Our economy creates powerful currents that can pull people into poverty, like low wages or increasing living costs. And sometimes things happen that threaten to pull us under, like losing a job, coping with a disability, or leaving our home to get out of an abusive relationship. (FrameWorks, 2018, p. 5)

Use the ‘redesign and reprogramming the economy’ metaphor

To counter strong fatalism mindsets that accompany economic naturalism narratives, it’s important for people to understand it is possible for people to change our economic system. This metaphor helps build a sense of hope, agency, and clarity about how to act.

What this sounds like:

Our economy is like a computer program that’s been designed. The impact it has on our lives is a result of the choices that are made in the design process. We need to redesign the system so the economy works for everyone. (O’ Neil et al., 2018, p. 20)

Use the ‘computer programming metaphor to explain structural racism

Racism has been built into our economic systems, which is both unjust and causes a great deal of harm and poverty. It is important in Aotearoa that we help people understand structural racism without it defaulting to unproductive conversations about whether people are personally racist or not, which can be a barrier to them acting. This metaphor performed well in unpublished testing The Workshop did in 2022 to explain structural racism to people open to understanding.

What this sounds like:

Like the way people design a computer program to run on instructions we can’t see, sometimes our public education and health systems are run on racist instructions that we don’t always see, and that is why these systems hurt Māori. Overcoming this systemic racism requires that people who work on these systems recognise people’s strengths and work alongside iwi, hapū and communities to reprogram our public systems to ensure that Māori thrive and we all thrive.

Use easy to access explanatory chains that end in solutions

1. Economy and structures of the system as the initial problem.
2. Poverty as the impact.
3. Fixing the system as the solution to poverty.

What this sounds like:

Our current economic system has been designed in a way that constrains many people, locking them into poverty. An expanded and compassionate benefit system, along with fixing our housing policy, will unlock people from poverty.

This is opposed to using a common approach and leading with the problems that we have with the benefits system which sounds like ‘our benefit system is insufficient, government has not fixed our welfare system’.

Use compelling and surprising messengers to carry the systems story

In FrameWorks testing in the UK (2018), values-aligned messengers were effective in carrying the justice and compassion narrative — in this case, Anglican bishops made a compelling messenger for the moral case.

Likewise, conservative politicians using anti-poverty messages (as opposed to anti-poor people messages) shifted people’s thinking as surprising messengers for the anti-poverty stories.

Case study: Better systems and humanity Story

A *New York Times* article by sociologist Mathew Desmond is an excellent example of a long-form story that draws on the unjust economic system narrative. The details focus on labour laws and policies that exploit large numbers of American workers and lock them into poverty.

The primary reason for our stalled progress on poverty reduction has to do with the fact that we have not confronted the unrelenting exploitation of the poor in the labor, housing and financial markets ... Today multiple forms of exploitation have turned anti-poverty programs into something **like dialysis**, a treatment designed to make poverty less lethal, not to make it disappear.

 [Read the full article here.](#)

2.2. Amplifying the strength and humanity of people in poverty narrative: ‘People in poverty have grit, determination, and aspirations’

People in poverty are human beings who work in our schools and supermarkets, care for our elderly and unwell, innovate, solve problems, and work around a system that burdens them. The second big idea or narrative that we need to amplify is that of the strength and power of people in poverty. When combined with a systems narrative, it creates a compelling case for change.

Recommendations for using the strength-based narratives

Create diverse, compassionate, three-dimensional portraits of people in poverty that can counter the harmful narratives

What this sounds like:

People experiencing poverty are real people who confront enormous challenges with grit, creativity, love, and humour. They are elders and children, veterans and the disabled ... they are our family, friends, and neighbours. Faced with difficult choices and operating under unfair constraints, they do remarkable, inspiring things. (Miller et al., 2021, p. 22)

If you have built the case for people in poverty being strong, clever, ingenious people with goals and aspirations they are trying to meet, when you propose systems solutions that empower people in poverty, it can counter the cultures of poverty and individual insufficiency mindsets that belittle, dehumanise, and limit people’s understanding of people in poverty.

Focus on the voice of those living in poverty

The work of strength-based portraits of people in poverty must ensure it focuses on the voice of people living it. It means you seek to uplift and amplify the voices and strengths of those directly impacted by poverty — including Māori, Pacific, disabled people, sole parents, and children.

Highlight the diversity of people who are made poor

The strength-based narrative is also a powerful counter to cultures of poverty and racist mindsets. If it is primarily Māori and Pacific people who are being framed as ‘in poverty’, which embeds the racist culture of poverty mindsets, it is important to provide a counter to this narrative. Stories of strong, capable, problem solvers from within Māori and Pacific communities need to be highlighted alongside and with stories from Pākehā and other ethnic communities. We discuss framing ethnic and class solidarity and the we can thrive together narrative below.

Highlight that poverty steals people's dreams

Part of countering the narratives about those in poverty as being 'lesser' is to highlight the dreams and aspirations people have that poverty steals from them. It is part of well-rounded portraits of people in poverty and naming how the system crushes them.

Always combine with a better systems narrative to counter 'deserving hard-working poor' thinking

It's important that the uplifting of these voices and any strength-based narratives are always framed within structural problems and solutions to avoid the bootstraps narrative in which the exceptional hero or worthy poor are seen to pull themselves up.

Use these elements of a story to put the recommendations into practice

Use an appropriate vision of strong people in poverty thriving in better systems

What this sounds like:

A good society recognises the strengths of all people. We can have a society where the grit, determination, and problem-solving powers of families in poverty are solving our collective problems and people are thriving while doing so.

Use the value of self-determination

People in poverty are strong and have aspirations. However the lack of access to material resources, connections, and the cognitive stress experiences of living in poverty, places a significant constraint on people's ability to choose and reach their goals. They have limited options available to them and reduced energy to expend on aspirations. It is important for people in public to be reminded that self-determination matters to them and it matters to people in poverty. As a values frame it acts as a counter to the individual drive and culture of poverty mindsets and narratives. It expands people to think about how systemic support can enable people to live an autonomous life.

Using the value of self-determination sounds like:

For many of us, life has the most meaning when we can choose our goals, and have the opportunity to reach those goals. However, for many people in poverty being exploited in low wage economy, having multiple insecure jobs, facing ever rising costs, and a welfare system that is designed to be insufficient, means they simply don't have the freedom to achieve their aspirations.

Use better explanations to support the strength-based narrative

Use the ‘overloaded’ and ‘overburdened’ metaphors

These metaphors, when combined with self-determination values, can help people both see the humanity in people in poverty and understand the limitations being placed upon them. These metaphors help direct people away from individual drive and culture of poverty narratives, especially when people are inclined to focus on the behaviours of parents and families in poverty.

What this sounds like:

Just as a vehicle can only bear so much weight before it stops moving forward, challenging life circumstances can overburden parents, making it hard for them to provide the best kinds of care and support. (Sweetland, 2021, p. 24)

Example story 1. Big idea: A better system with people with grit and determination

Explains economic causes of poverty and benefits as a solution

For many of us, overcoming child poverty is the right and compassionate thing to do. Right now our economic system is restricting many families who want to do well for their kids.

We have employment policies that keep wages low and allow too many people to be exploited, and we have housing and taxation policies that create ever-rising costs for many people.

People across our communities — our teachers, healthcare workers, supermarket workers, caregivers, friends, neighbours — are being swept into poverty by this system. As these constraints are placed on them, many parents continue doing their best — using all their energy and problem-solving skills to help their children.

People in government can do better, recognising families’ strengths and desire to do well by loosening the economic constraints on them. People in government must use benefits to lift people out of poverty while reprogramming other parts of our economic system so all families can thrive.

Case study: Family 100 Tool

To achieve a compelling and understandable systems narrative, we recommend combining it with a narrative about the strength and humanity of people experiencing persistent disadvantage. That looks primarily like stories of people working hard and problem solving to navigate the system and the barriers and constraints placed on them in that process — for example, [The Family 100 tool](#).

2.3 Amplifying a better together narrative: ‘together we thrive — overcoming poverty is how we create a positive shared future for all of us’

The together we thrive narrative is present in stories across social justice, union, gender, and anti-racism movements.

At its core, it is a narrative that spotlights the racism and classism at the heart of our economic system and calls for a united response. It’s about joining together across differences and standing up against systemic injustices. All of us — Pākehā, Māori, Pacific — are hurt by systems that only help a very few. By coming together and not letting them divide us, we can achieve a better future.

It is the least dominant narrative found in relation to poverty communications, and intensifying it to counter pernicious thinking about people in poverty is critical. It broadens the group of people invested in preventing poverty as it is something that affects all of us, not simply ‘those poor people over there’.

Recommendations for using the Together we Thrive narrative

Focus on building understanding of the shared harms and benefits of preventing poverty

The main goal of the together we thrive narrative is to help direct people towards the shared and intertwined nature of our communities and how economic systems and injustice in them is something that hurts people we are connected to and how it impacts all of us. PIRC talks about the importance of building the ‘big we’.

Together we thrive narratives need to be intensified in relation to poverty. They sometimes lack specificity and deeper explanations about the harms that unjust economic systems cause to most people in society in different ways. For example, exploitative labour policies and practices hurt those on the lowest incomes first and then go on to create insecure and disempowering employment systems for everyone.

Case study: The sum of us. What racism costs all of us and how we can prosper together by Heather McGhee — book and [podcast](#)

This book and podcast investigate how economic policies were designed and used to exploit and exclude people from Black communities in America and then went on to harm white communities, all primarily for the benefit of a small group of wealthy people and industries.

Seek to counter racist division present in conversations about poverty

In the United States, the race-class narrative developed by Haney López, Heather McGhee, and Anat Shenker-Osorio (Demos, 2018) is a better together narrative that works specifically to counter racist rhetoric that divides people and prevents effective collective action — for example, where racist ‘dog whistling’ is used to pit white people in poverty against black people and prevent them working together for better policies. In Aotearoa, we observe these types of divisive strategies being deployed when references to the ‘squeezed’ or ‘hard-working’ middle class are made alongside beneficiaries as ‘bludgers and bottom feeders’. It is fine to name the needs of people on the edge of poverty (see the next point), just not to put the needs of one against the other, which brings to the surface zero sum gaming thinking.

Highlight the way poverty steals from our collective aspirations, creativity, and problem-solving power

To activate a sense of justice and solidarity, name the collective harms when people and children who are amazing problem solvers, creators, and leaders have their dreams crushed by poverty — think of all the power and wellbeing we lose as a society to work on collective problems and innovate. It is the next step up from naming the way poverty steals an individual in poverty’s dreams.

Broaden and deepen explanations about our shared public good

The together we thrive narrative is also present in stories about universal public services. In this case, there is a focus on the outcome — the shared benefits of public services and goods are discussed. It can be known as a public good frame. While the importance of our shared public good such as better education, health systems, and transport is frequently mentioned, the public thinking about them is relatively shallow. A broader and deeper set of explanations of what public good is and how we can create more of it is needed — for example, how new infrastructures of care can help parents on low incomes particularly but also those across all income groups have their contributions to caring for people better recognised and supported.

Avoid appeals to charity for those in poverty — highlight the importance of acting in solidarity for those in poverty

A charity lens — good people helping those who are ‘less fortunate’ — tends to other and dehumanise people in poverty. It reinforces ideas of individual drive and cultures of poverty — that people in poverty are somehow fundamentally different from those people not in poverty — furthering division and the idea that only some people are impacted by poverty. It also creates a very narrow band of acceptable interventions — ones that don’t require significant changes to structures and systems that better-off people are benefiting from (for example, pensions and housing policies).

Rather, we need to name the importance of acting in solidarity with people in poverty because it is the just and right thing to do, and that means supporting policies that may not leave well-off people untouched but are needed — for example, wealth taxes, land taxes, and building expansive public housing as no one should benefit from someone else’s misery.

Use data and evidence to highlight policies that work for significant poverty as well as those struggling near the margins (big tent policies)

People tend to think of either very targeted funding or universal funding. Using data to highlight policies that improve life for those in dire poverty as well as people who can easily tip into poverty can counter zero sum game thinking between working and non-working poor. It means highlighting that all poverty is unacceptable and no one should be struggling and nor should we be pitted against one another while the very well-off and people in industries are doing very well.

Carefully explain how some groups have benefited via the exploitation of others

It is important to explain that, as Mathew Desmond puts it, ‘Unwinding ourselves from our neighbours’ deprivation and refusing to live as enemies of the poor will require us to pay a price. It’s the price of our restored humanity and renewed country.’ Explain how particular policies divide and exclude and benefit some over others — like housing policies have benefited some at the cost to those on low incomes or labour laws have benefited business owners while exploiting workers. Doing this as a member of the benefit group is the most effective way to do so.

Combine a strength and humanity of people narrative with together we thrive narrative

The combination of these ideas is a powerful way to refocus on community and connection. We are a community of people, whether in poverty or not, and it is only together we thrive.

Case study: We can thrive together

The Opportunity Agenda report [We can thrive together: Visioning economic justice for all](#) is an example of drawing the race-class narrative, solidarity values, and imagery of shared future benefits when economic injustice is overcome.

Use these elements of a story to put the recommendations into practice

Vision to support a better together narrative

We need more visions that can bring to the surface people's desire to have connected communities. Showing a future in which people appreciate and work across differences on shared goals that benefit many people is compelling. Most people in society want to feel connected to others and have those connections supported and enabled.

What this sounds like:

In coming together across our differences, finding our similarities, we can achieve great things and thrive together — like overcoming those things that cause poverty. We can have communities and a society where the caring work we do — for children, parents, neighbours — is fully recognised and supported. Where, no matter where we live, or what our background, we know we can find good meaningful work, where we are respected and paid well for it. In this future, all children thrive together.

Use these values to support the together we thrive narrative

Use solidarity values

We need to activate the care of people not in poverty, not through a mindset of charity, but through the mindset of shared and intertwined futures. Naming that we should not and cannot continue to benefit from the exploitation of people with less — for example, through our housing policies that increase our own housing returns while making it impossible for many people to have decent low-cost stable homes.

What this sounds like:

No matter where we come from, most of us work hard for our families. But today, people in our governments have hurt everyone by maintaining tax rules that benefit people who are already wealthy, while reducing our benefit system in real terms every year. Then they turn around and point the finger at poor families, Māori and Pacific people. We need to join together with people from all walks of life to fight for our future, just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, in our past. By joining together, we can make sure our leaders work for all of us. (Adaptation from Demos, 2018)


Use collective responsibility values

Collective responsibility values can be applied when discussing children's issues. They frame the sense of responsibility all of us have to ensure children are cared for in society. It's important to include a system explanation to avoid activating ideas of 'bad parents' who need parenting lessons (PIRC, 2018).

What this sounds like:

Across different communities, many of us believe that children are our collective responsibility. How we care for them and their families is an important signal of a compassionate and just society. Taking collective responsibility means we ensure the economic rules and laws we have support and enable children and their families instead of constraining them.

Case study: Family support — poverty prevention that benefits everyone

 [This digital toolkit](#) from Fund our Future contains images, memes, and videos and focuses on the together we thrive narrative to fund support for families

Use explanatory metaphors to explain shared public good/ benefits for all

Use the ‘public good’ and ‘infrastructure of care, connection, and contribution’ metaphors

Stories that reflect this narrative will discuss budgets and taxes as how we create the infrastructure of care, contribution, and connection. Budgets and taxes are how we prioritise the things that really matter to most of us and get us all what we need — outcomes that are bigger than us. There are agreed things that matter to most of us from a public good perspective. This narrative should be used to direct people towards how we address their concerns about poverty, inequality, and disconnection in society (Rooney & Spencer, 2022).

What this sounds like:

We need the budgets people in government set and the resources they allocate to go towards building the infrastructure of care, contribution, and connection — wages for care workers, for time with babies, for communities to have places to connect, to our green space, clear air to breathe.

Use the ‘public structures’ explanatory metaphor

Use a public structures metaphor to help explain the breadth of work that government does for the collective ‘us’ that improves everybody’s lives (Aubrun et al., 2005). In focus groups, participants said this metaphor made them think about the things that they don’t see and the broad spectrum of government work. Participants pictured both physical structures and abstract systems like events, housing, and transport as public structures.

What this sounds like

Lots of things in our city make our lives better. These are our public structures, which people at the council are responsible for building and maintaining. They can be things we see all the time, like our streets, public pools, or parks and playgrounds. Or things we don't see, like food safety inspections in cafés and restaurants and support for our community groups. Even the processes people at the council use to operate and improve our city are public structures.

It takes time to build the public structures we need. It also takes careful planning to ensure we have the public structures we need for the future. Together with people at the local council, our citizens help shape the public structures that will shape the lives of future citizens.

Use messengers from more privileged groups to talk about unjust benefits they have


If you want to name particular groups who benefit from the existing system, do so as a member of that more privileged group — 'people like me have benefited from housing policies, and this has hurt young people' as opposed to finger pointing at a more privileged group — 'Boomers have taken our homes'.

Check the frames and ideas in the images you use

Consider the images you use to depict poverty:

- Who is in the picture who is not — the agents of change responsible?
- What action are they taking?
- What does it explain — a systems problem or individuals only?
- Are people in poverty depicted as strong or weak/victimised?
- Are you depicting particular ethnicities alone and reinforcing racist thinking?
- Are your images including collective, collaborative, and solidarity ideas?

Case study: Five doodles to explain poverty

 [A short framing guide](#) with examples and images from the United Kingdom on poverty.

Example story 2: Big idea: Humanity and together we thrive

Explains how systems that cause poverty affect us all and the benefits to all of working together to overcome

Regardless of who we are or what part of Aotearoa we come from, we want communities where our work raising children and caring for people is seen as important, where the wellbeing of those children matters, and where we thrive as people raising kids and caring for others.

Right now, our parents, brothers, neighbours — people who teach our children, care for our elderly, and create our communities — are being swept into poverty and the stress and misery that comes with that because our economic system is not designed to ensure everyone is cared for and their contribution is recognised.

The people most frequently swept into poverty by these systems are disabled people, Māori and Pacific families, and children. However, the policy settings that sweep people into poverty ultimately restrict and constrain most of us — because we all suffer from expensive unstable housing, high food costs, and being exploited at work.

Overcoming poverty by redesigning important policies is how we create a future in which we thrive together. All of us need people in government to focus on rebuilding infrastructures of care, connection, and contribution. More low-cost affordable housing, a generous and compassionate benefit system that recognises the strength of all people, better wages, an education system that centres on the needs of all children and teachers — these things mean we can thrive together.

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