

## **Work and Worklessness in deprived neighborhoods- policy assumptions and personal experiences.**

This is a report conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF] and draws on detailed interviews from residents in deprived wards.

Government policy has to date concentrated on **supply-side measures**, assuming that worklessness is related to lack of skills, attitude or motivation, but residents contend that it is because of the lack of suitable jobs which has got worse during the recession. JRF suggests an extension of the Future Jobs Fund, a **new demand-led approach** particularly in areas of low opportunities.

Employment policy claims that work supports a number of social and economic benefits to people such as self-esteem, independence as well as valued social interaction. But many people in deprived areas are trapped in **'poor work'**, which is characterized by poverty level low pay, long hours and pervasive job insecurity. These issues act as a disincentive to leave the relative security of benefits. There are significant examples of in work poverty and the conclusion that for some LTCs 'work does not pay!'

JRF recommend that the **Government needs to focus on the quality of available jobs in terms of pay, conditions and sustainability with responsibilities place on employers to deliver 'good work'**. The research points a finger at employers repeatedly stating that as unemployed people have responsibilities so do employers and that currently they are the 'black hole' in ensuring that 'No one is written off'

A **tension between work and parenting** also came across – the lack of flexibility within jobs to fulfill parenting responsibilities and a reluctance to use formal childcare for both moral and financial reasons, preferring to use close family as carers.

People want the chance to improve their skill and take up training opportunities but poverty and parenting responsibilities restrict this. Also in areas of limited opportunities skills development is not automatically the passport to better jobs.

### **Current Government Policy use 3 approaches to tackle worklessness,**

- 'Making work Pay'
- Mandating activities- Government believes that a cultural propensity to avoid work is part of the explanation for high levels of worklessness in a locality.
- Tackling concentrated areas of worklessness- there is a poverty of aspirations.

**The Conservatives in general share this view**, Welfare policy therefore seems to be marked more by continuity than radical change, **but will also focus on 3 other key areas**,

1. Reverse the disastrous rise in family breakdown and promote marriage
2. Control inward migration. They claim 80% of new jobs since 1997 have gone to migrants
3. Tougher conditionality regime- tougher sanctions on those refusing to accept reasonable work.

The recession has disproportionately affected disadvantaged groups - YP, lowest qualified and those living in deprived areas, despite early thoughts that this was a 'white-collar' recession.

#### **JRF recommendations from the report,**

- Focus on demand-led solutions such as Future Jobs Fund, creating sustainable jobs
- Focus on quality of jobs; avoid 'poor work'.
- Engage employers in a more active role and place responsibilities on them to offer a 'good' package of work.
- Need open debate on balance and tension between parenting responsibilities and work.
- Re-examine childcare rules