

CHRIS KILKENNY'S WEEKLY STATEMENT 21 MAY 2002 - brief thoughts, thanks and advice on the back of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission's release of the Poverty and Coronavirus Interim Report

Hi Guys, my name's Chris Kilkenny, and I'm an Edinburgh Poverty Commissioner and I thought I'd make a wee statement this morning.

First of all, I'd like to probably apologise, as you all know I'm doing this from home. I'm actually sat outside so there's no interference noise by children jumping about doing forward flips. But the reason I wanted to make a wee statement this morning on the phone is firstly, because my laptop's broken and I couldn't write it out, so, I thought I'd make a wee video, video report on how I feel this went.

Firstly, I'd like to applaud all the Commissioners, the Councillors and most of all the citizens of Edinburgh for taking part in this report. These are real times of absolute turmoil and to be able to create a report in a time like this is nothing short of a miracle, and to get people from the community involved is nothing short of a miracle. It's absolutely right and morally important that this piece of work was able to take place and I'm proud to call myself an Edinburgh Poverty Commissioner. The reason it was important that this piece of work took place is so that we can give vital advice to the local authority on how they can best help people who are really living on the breadline, who are really at risk. Now, when we first started the Edinburgh Poverty Commission there was a lot of people living in poverty. Now, I very much suspect that the current circumstances have inflated massively. We've got many different issues, that have just spiralled out of control over the last few months. The work by the staff, the work by the Commissioners, the work by everyone involved in this report has been absolutely second to none. The work by the volunteers who have been willing to speak to us should be absolutely applauded. But the work is not over, and the reason I say this is because I worry for my fellow people, I worry for my friends, I worry for my family, I worry for my neighbours, I worry for everyone involved in society over the next few months. I worry for myself I worry for my son on a daily basis.

There is extreme anxiety in the streets of not just Edinburgh but of the United Kingdom. However, I'm not here just to speak to you about the doom and gloom of what's been happening over the last few months. Because I have hope that we will overcome this. That we can overcome this if we take the right attitude and the right steps towards the recommendations that have been made by the Poverty Commission and by different independent reports. We will overcome this, absolutely horrific event, and it will be something that unfortunately will live on in history for a long time and that's something that we need to address. I urge you all to keep faith, to love each other, to love your neighbours, to help people where you can, if you can, to ask for help if you need it, to seek out help if you need it. If you see something that's not working right, I ask you to get in touch with us and tell us. Support each other in whichever way you can, and I know that's difficult just now because you can't leave your house to see other people, to see your parents, to see your family and it's a massive sacrifice, but we will defeat this. And in the meantime, we will adapt and evolve just as we have. My biggest hope from all this is that we emerge from this crisis more empathetic to the people who have been living like this for many, many years before the crisis. For people who have been struggling for food, for people who have been going to food banks, for people who have struggled with fuel poverty, this is the way that they live. For people who have struggled to find employment, for people who live day to day with the worry and anxiety of how they are going to feed their kids. That needs to evolve that needs to change. We talk about this new normal, and if there's going to be a new normal. I think that now the people have experienced what it is like to live in such dire situations, that people will rise up and people will be more empathetic towards their

fellow human beings and towards their fellow citizens and their neighbours and their friends. And we will find a way to make Edinburgh, one of the most unequal cities, an equal city.

My heart goes out to all those who have lost their lives during this virus and all the families that have had to suffer. My heart goes out to all the people who are suffering daily just now wondering when they are going to have their next meal, wondering how they are going to pay their electricity or gas or wondering how they are going to keep their kids entertained while they've been off school for such a long time. I'm one of those people trying to keep my young boy entertained, six years old, absolutely running amok.

And of course, I have to say thank you to the amazing NHS Staff who have not stopped, who have kept going, who have saved lives, who have lost lives.

I'm going to finish off my message tonight with a heartfelt, heartfelt message to those who may be suffering in this lockdown. The retailers, the bin men, the low paid workers who have been branded as low skill workers. These are the people that are keeping our economy running. These are the people that are keeping our country running. And I feel like, in the media, we are constantly being tarnished as low skilled workers. These people are not low skilled workers these people are running the country as far as I'm concerned. And well done to you. I felt I needed to write this message because it's weighing on my mind. You are all heroes. There's so many people in Edinburgh, there's so many people across the city, so many people across the country that have started social enterprises, that have been innovative and found ways to utilise spaces that aren't being used to deliver food aid, to deliver support to feed families. And I wish I could say it was enough, but we do need to do more. The work that has been done is great and fantastic and I can't applaud the people that are doing it even more. I recently started a social enterprise to bring young people and old people together because I've seen a gap. There's a lot of old people in isolation who maybe aren't seeing very many people. And I thought to myself it would be really nice if some of these kids who aren't at school might be able to make contact with these elderly people via letter or via a pack. So, I had this idea to make these packs and we called it the 'In It Together Initiative' and it grew arms and legs and we distributed hundreds of bags with PPE, with goodies and with cards made by young people from right across Scotland. And the response was amazing because I put in envelopes and stamps so that if they would like to get back to us, they could. And here's just some of the replies that we got. I mean these are all replies saying that this was an absolutely amazing project. Most of these letters saying that they hadn't seen anyone. That we've got some letters here saying, I'll read a couple. For example, *"Hello, a wee note to say thank you so much for the lovely bag of kindness. Also please thank Cameron aged 6 for the beautiful card that is now in my window. Thank you"*.

The aim of these packs was that the lockdown has hit everyone hard, and I realise from my own feelings that it's a lonely and isolating time, so I came up with the idea. The idea was to let you know we are all in this together. The cards the artworks and the notes were all made by young people from across of Scotland far and wide. Put a call out on social media and people answered. I had organisations and I had schools making PPE on 3D printers face shields for the elderly. And I think the best part of it was they were able to see that people did remember them. So, remember your neighbours. I'll read out a couple more cards before I finish. *"Your kind gesture was amazingly appreciated, and I had tears from seeing someone that day." "Thank you for your much goodies and remembering myself. It was a very kind gesture and we so much very appreciated seeing the people deliver them to our door."*

These are some of the artworks that were sent back by some of the people, that were made by young people from right across Scotland and some of you may recognise these. And they were sent back because they would like them to go to a gallery. And that's my next, that's my next question for

you guys. I done this off my own back. There was no major funding, I never crowd funded. I'm not, I'm not a registered charity, as it is, I'm not a social enterprise. I just literally one day decided that I wanted to do something for the elderly, and I would like to do something else. I would like to continue this work that we've done because clearly it made a massive difference.

There's a letter here which I think sums it up pretty well. *"Thank you for the unexpected parcel you delivered. I was in tears most of the day. My faith in my fellow man had taken a hit. I know in my heart the good outweighs the bad. I wish you and all who helped all the very best and please, please stay safe. You have no idea how much this meant to me."* Now, if this one letter says anything, then I think that this little pile that I done should carry on, until such a time that people can see their families. So, I'm not really here to ask for your great amount of money, or a great amount of help and time because we've got everything kind of set up. But if you would like to donate to a just giving page, I will put one up on my twitter, which is @kilkennychris and hopefully we can keep this going for the rest of the lockdown.

Stay safe guys. Keep in touch with your families, whether it be on the phone. Listen to the rules and most of all love yourself and don't be too hard on yourselves.

Thanks very much.