

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - STORY

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| Name | Louise Cooke |
| Details, area of experience | CEO and Head of Operations of Sharewear Clothing Scheme |
| Interview date | December 2020 |
| Issues addressed | Clothing poverty |
| Injustice category (linked to economic injustice) | ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> race <input type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dates mentioned | 2012, 2019, 2020 |
| Locations referenced | Nottingham: Top Valley and Bestwood. |
| Campaigns, movements, protests | UK clothing poverty |
| Historical context | Austerity 2010-2020. |
| Tactics | Collecting and sharing clothes donations; shop-like atmosphere ; allowing personal choice ; bulk distribution; expansion to a new base. |
| Key words | Clothing poverty Grassroots organising Dignity Fragility Security |
| Key points | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing poverty. • Power of community grassroots organising. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking time to process your learning. ● Meet a need where the need was seen. ● Free does not mean rubbish, fit for purpose; dignity of every person. People choose what they want; does not feel like a handout. ● Being on a journey, remembering people who first came. ● Pandemic: realising life isn't as secure as she thought it was; fragility of economy, hospital, education, government system. ● Creation of fragile spaces/fertile ground which the pandemic exploited; exposing the underlying effects that exist in our society. ● People paying more attention, hence getting involved in social justice activism. ● Talking helps with reflection; take time to reflect what has been achieved. |
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| <p>Story summary</p> | <p>Louise Cooke founded Sharewear Clothing Scheme in 2012 to combat clothing poverty. She tells the story of how and why she created the scheme in Nottingham and her belief in the dignity of choosing what to wear. Sharewear is set up like a shop, with clothes on hangers, and has so far (2020) supported over 12,000 people in Nottingham and its surrounding counties.</p> <hr/> <p>In 2012 Louise worked as a volunteer in the favelas of Sao Paulo, Brazil. There she saw the reality of economic injustice and the power of grassroots community organising. She felt inspired to bring that model to Nottingham. An accident and an allergic reaction, both very serious, led her to rethink where her life was going. When her son, who was volunteering at a food bank, told her the families who could not afford charity shops were asking for clothes and there was nowhere to send them, she decided to act. She approached the Justice and Peace group at her Catholic church and the priest let her use a room. The first donations were sorted by her family in their garage, and it was a real grassroots operation. No grand ambition, just wanting to fill a local need in Top Valley and Bestwood in Nottingham.</p> <p>From the start they were committed to following the Christian belief in the dignity of the human and the sanctity of life. Clothes had to be fit for purpose, dignified, clothes you would wear yourself. People should not be made to feel they were getting a handout so they could choose their own, just as if they were shopping. Clothes are on hangers; the layout is like a shop. The word spread.</p> |
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| | <p>In 2019 Sharewear supported 7,000 people, rising to over 12,000 by the end of 2020. People were able to get into work and children returned to school, all thanks to clothes from Sharewear. People with mental health issues felt more able to go out. An outreach service now delivers in bulk to five counties surrounding Nottingham and being diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 43 held back plans to expand for a time but a base has opened in Sheffield.</p> <p>Louise talks about the pandemic making people realise how fragile their financial security is, along with our economic and political systems. A decade of austerity created “this fragile space where a pandemic can hit the economy and it decimates everything.” There are opportunities to talk to people and get them involved in social activism.</p> |
| Stand-out quotations | <p>“The poor in Latin America literally have nothing, but the little they do have through employment they share with everyone else in the community, and they set up cooperatives, and they recycle, repurpose and reuse absolutely everything. Nothing goes to waste.”</p> <p>“We set up to meet that need in the very place where the need had been seen.”</p> <p>“Our message from day one to the whole of the general public: if you wouldn’t wear it yourself or want to see a member of your family in it, we don’t want it. Because ‘free’ doesn’t equal rubbish.”</p> <p>“Everything that human person is given should uphold their dignity.”</p> <p>“There are people who don’t access food banks ... because they haven’t got the clothing to wear to go to get the help they need.”</p> <p>“The outcome of getting dignified, decent clothing is that you then feel able to go and access all those other things that are there to support you. And that’s something that never ever gets talked about.”</p> <p>“We’re all a couple of steps away from needing to use a food bank, from needing to go to Sharewear, from not being able to afford period products, from not being able to afford to put our heating on or fix the washer if it breaks ...”</p> <p>“It’s taken the pandemic for the bulk of the population to sit up and say ‘Oh, my life isn’t actually as secure as I thought it was, and neither are my children’s.’”</p> |

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| | <p>“The pandemic fell on fertile ground created by a decade of austerity.”</p> <p>“‘Laying the bricks on the path as we walk it’ - and in many ways we’re still putting bricks on the path now.”</p> |
| Main themes for learners | <p>The power of community grassroots organising and sharing.</p> <p>Meeting a clear and obvious local need and doing something about it.</p> <p>The importance of maintaining people’s dignity and agency.</p> <p>How all our lives are fragile: the impact of austerity and Covid. “Laying the bricks on the path as we walked it”.</p> |

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