

# POVERTY

- ⊕ Families who didn't have a lot of money were particularly badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic there were around 100,000 children in Northern Ireland living in poverty, and most of these had at least one parent/carer working.
- ⊕ The Government took actions to try to stop people losing their jobs including enabling people to be 'furloughed' and receive 80% of their salary; by providing financial help for self-employed and by topping-up Universal Credit by £20 per week. But many young people aged 16 to 25 who were working lost their jobs during the pandemic, and others found it very difficult to get a job.
- ⊕ Government took action to try to prevent people being made homeless during the pandemic and to make sure that people could access food. Payments were also made to low-income families for children who would usually have benefitted from a free school meal including when schools were closed.
- ⊕ However, many families still struggled to make ends meet. The financial support provided by Government is due to end in September 2021, and NICCY is worried that many of these families will find things much more difficult then.

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*"I believe that the government needs to care for vulnerable children and young people in our society not just while schools are closed, but in the future post pandemic recovery. This includes addressing child abuse, child poverty and negative impact that has on a child's education, as well as continuity of free school meals."*  
(Young person, Young Life and Times Survey)

## WHAT GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- ⊕ When rebuilding the economy, they must focus on those who have been hardest hit, including unemployed young people and families with little money.
- ⊕ Keep the £20 additional weekly payment for low income families on a permanent basis. The Government also needs to fix the benefits system so that it is an effective 'safety net', providing enough for people to live on so that no children are living in poverty.
- ⊕ Until the benefits system is fixed, the Government should provide additional money to families in poverty.
- ⊕ The NI Executive should take action to lift all children out of poverty in their new Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- ⊕ Ensure all children in poverty can receive Free School Meals, and their families should continue to receive money to cover these over school holidays.

