

We Speak, You listen April 13th 2023

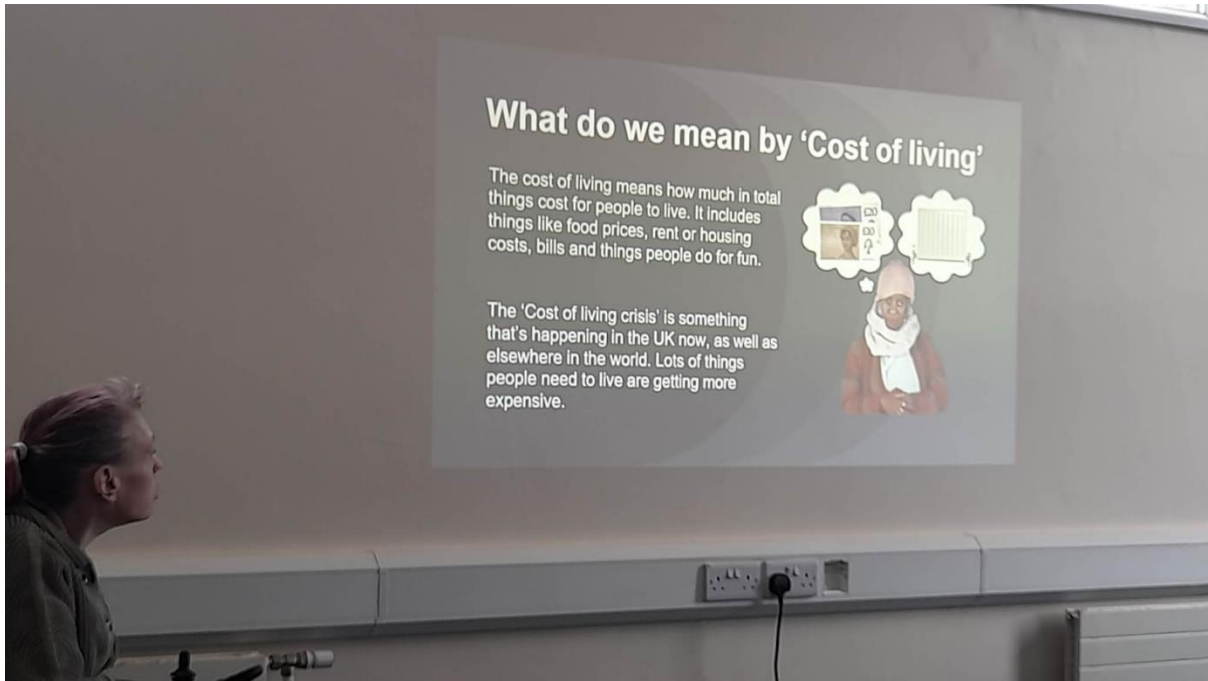
This month's We Speak, You Listen community sharing event happened on Thursday 13th April. At this event we talked about the cost of living Crisis and how that is affecting the Learning disability community.

This event happened in person at the Manor library from 10-12am. It was a smaller event, with friends from Sheffield voices, the Hive and a few other group members. These were people with learning disabilities, Autistic people, and their support staff.

We started the event by asking if anyone had good news stories to share. One member mentioned starting a new volunteer job, others talked about things they had been doing out and about in Sheffield.



We started our presentation about the cost of living. Our presenters explained what the We speak, you listen events are and that we want to take turns listening to each other's opinions at these events. We then played a game guessing what prices different food items were at the shops. We looked at prices of items like baked beans, bread, milk and chocolate in 2022 and what they cost now. There was such a big difference in price, with the most shocking one being the 49p difference for a single tin of beans.



Our presenters then further explained what 'cost of living' means. They explained that the 'Cost of living crisis' is something that's happening in the UK now, as well as elsewhere in the world. Lots of things people need to live are getting more expensive. We talked on our tables about things that worry people about the rise in costs.

Some people said that they worried how they might be able to pay all their different bills. They were worried about rising rent payments, having high bills and being able to heat their homes and have enough electricity to live. They also talked about care charges going up and their families not having enough money to cover them. One person said they were worried about what will happen to them when their family can no longer help look after them.

Another worry was food prices. As well as saying that they've seen the prices in the supermarket go up like in the game, the group said they had to be more careful with their money to make it stretch. People say that since they can't shop around as much and may not be able to cook complicated things by themselves, that they have to eat unhealthy foods because it's much cheaper overall.

One person gave a great example about how £20 used to be enough for a meal, a glass of wine and a pudding. Now they have to choose between a glass of wine or a pudding, but their £20 spending money hasn't gone up.



Some people said they were worried their care staff might leave their jobs as they are not getting paid enough to cover the rise in the cost of living. We spoke as a group about the doctors strike too, and how people understand doctors striking over not being paid enough but they worry about not getting treatment they need.

Things people go to during the day are also increasing in price. People who pay for their care through a personal budget say they worry their hours of support will be reduced, or they won't be able to afford to go to their day service as often. One person said; "It feels like Benefits going down or getting cut, while prices are going up."

Some people talked about transport issues. They said that taxis are more expensive, and if you don't have or lose your bus pass, getting around the city is very expensive. People mentioned worrying about clean air charges in the city center making it even more inaccessible to get to. People said they can't afford transport to get there and there's nowhere to park, especially not enough disabled spaces to make things accessible.

People said that there's a rise in crime and homelessness due to lack of money available and forcing people to do things they wouldn't usually or into dangerous situations. One person said they "Worry when I see people being hurt and murdered in Sheffield city center and other places I go."

People say they no longer have any spare cash for hobbies or recreation. It's almost double what it was to play pool beforehand with my friends. People feel more isolated because of this.



Places people go are closing because they can't afford bills, but the impact isn't thought about enough. A few people gave the example of Debenhams closing meaning they lost a large accessible bathroom which was big enough for wheelchairs. This has not been replaced. Other places, like the bus station, are now charging for their toilets which makes them inaccessible.

People said It feels like the income gap is widening massively. People who have a job that pays minimum wage or just above can only just afford things, and people below that are really struggling. It feels like wealthy people are getting richer. One person mentioned how they used to go to the brown street foodhall for affordable hot meals, but this has now closed down.

We then talked about money management and played a fun game of 'Ow much oply' with our tables. This is an adapted game of monopoly, giving people 'chance' cards, where sometimes they have to pay bigger bills or unexpected money comes their way, and choose cards, where people can choose to buy themselves things. The aim of the game is to get around the board without running out of money.



People enjoyed playing this game and said it was fun to see what different people chose to buy and when, how other people saved their money, and how much was left up to chance.

We also talked about different places people could go to get cheap food and free or low cost meals. We looked at a map on the VAS website of these places, as well as other community hubs, and thought about what else is around Sheffield that wasn't on that map.

Here is a link to that map:

<https://www.vas.org.uk/sheffield-living-crisis-map-of-.../>

We also gave out booklets and plain english recipes to take home around cooking on a budget.

If you would like a digital copy of these recipes, please email info@sheffieldvoices.org.uk

Our next we Speak, you listen is on the **26th of May**. We will be doing a repeat of some of this event, as well as talking about the Learning Disability partnership board strategy for sheffield. We will also mention the upcoming Partnership board elections. We hope to see you then!