



# Poverty Proofing® Case Study: Marty

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Marty, a freelance practitioner based in Sunderland, has dedicated his career to working with diverse community groups. While his projects have always aimed to be inclusive, often offering free or “pay-what-you-can” opportunities, Marty recognised that financial hardship is complex and often hidden. His engagement with a Poverty Proofing® workshop, delivered as part of the Culture Start programme in Sunderland, provided the tools and awareness he needed to make his practice more equitable and accessible.

Marty joined Poverty Proofing workshops to gain formal, practical expertise in identifying and removing financial barriers in cultural activities. The sessions on poverty awareness and programming with poverty in mind proved to be illuminating and transformative. He has since recommended the workshops to colleagues and peers across the sector, highlighting the value of the insights gained.

Before engaging, Marty’s understanding of poverty was largely anecdotal. He knew families struggled with costs but relied on practical fixes such as free entry or flexible pricing. In youth work, for example, sessions were free to attend yet attendance was inconsistent. Marty often wondered why people were not participating, until he realised hidden barriers such as transport costs, family responsibilities, or stigma were preventing engagement.

Marty’s awareness of these challenges significantly increased after the workshop.

**“I now have a much sharper focus on the hidden costs and the impact of seemingly minor things for example specific venue choices, timing of events, or the materials/equipment participants are expected to provide. I’m more mindful of the stigma and the need to communicate options discreetly and with dignity.”**

A real-life example reinforced this learning: after a session, Marty noticed two young people walking aimlessly, having no transport and facing a 2–3 mile walk home. By discreetly arranging bus fare or an Uber for future sessions, he ensured they could attend safely and with dignity. This experience highlighted the importance of planning with hidden costs in mind.

By removing financial barriers, Marty has increased participation among families who previously couldn’t afford to engage. More importantly, the stigma and stress associated with needing support have been reduced. Participants now feel equally valued, regardless of income, fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

### **To support low-income families, Marty has introduced:**

- Free provision of necessary materials and equipment (e.g., art supplies)
- Plans for a travel subsidy fund to make less-accessible projects viable
- Writing contingencies into funding bids to cover costs

Looking ahead, Marty is embedding Poverty Proofing principles into every stage of his work:

- Funding applications & project design: Introducing a mandatory Poverty Proofing Checklist for partner organisations and schools.
- Sector advocacy: Encouraging Sunderland's cultural venues to consider affordability, as many gigs now cost upwards of £35, an impossible barrier for many.
- Youth empowerment: Promoting initiatives like the Culture Start Ignite bursary, which allows young people to purchase equipment they need. This ensures they feel valued and supported, rather than relying on hand-me-downs.

Marty hopes to see Poverty Proofing principles adopted more widely in the music sector. Too often, the industry prioritises profit over people, leaving aspiring young artists unsupported. Compassion and practical support are essential to nurture rising talent, especially for those without financial means to get started.

Engagement with Poverty Proofing has provided framing to Marty's already inclusive approach. What began as an effort to make sessions "free" has evolved into a deeper, structured commitment to equity. By embedding these principles into every project, Marty aims to ensure cultural opportunities in Sunderland are accessible, dignified, and empowering for all.

Marty is proud to have organised a hugely successful charity gig on 7th December, raising vital funds for Love, Amelia, a child poverty charity. Building on that achievement, he already had an exciting line-up of events and gigs planned for the following year, each created with inclusivity and accessibility at their heart.