

All Together for Dignity



2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

Wherever men and women are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated.

To come together to ensure that these rights are respected is our solemn duty.

Father Joseph Wresinski
Founder of ATD Fourth World



ATD Fourth World - Ireland and the Dominican Justice Office have the very great pleasure of sharing with you, our reader, a selection of wonderful stories of hope and courage in our publication, All Together For Dignity.

These personal testimonies reflect the experiences and reflections of ordinary people – mothers, fathers, young people, children - who struggle against poverty and injustice in their daily lives, often from the margins of our society.

They speak of our most profound needs as human beings, namely: to feel protected and respected in our own living environment; to have the security of belonging and acceptance in a family and in a community; to know there is a place that we can call home; to be supported in giving the best love and care we possibly can for our children; and to have the opportunity to participate in supportive education and in meaningful work.

These are, in fact, inalienable human rights that all are entitled to yet, sadly, so many in our world today are denied. These stories of others are our stories too, since they illuminate a canvas of common values and ideals about what it means to be truly human.

On your behalf, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the many generous contributors to our publication for sharing with us their insight, their giftedness and their wisdom.

Mark Hogan,
Board of Management
ATD Fourth World - Ireland



Fran

My son Jason is 15.
He started a new school in September, but in December he got suspended.
Five months later, he is still out of school.

I understand that my son's behaviour was disruptive but the school didn't try very hard!

In the area where we live, there are drugs everywhere. It is difficult to keep young people out of drugs. They can get big money but the consequences are hard. We need to watch them 24/7.

My son is part of a local club but he can only go there once a week. He loves animals, and we have chickens, pigeons and rabbits in our backyard.

If teenagers show an interest in something, parents should give them encouragement because it goes a long way.

I think that it should be the same at school. I stopped school at the age of 12. I want my children to have a better education than I did.



Gavin

This year I'm a full-time volunteer with Sli-Eile, a Jesuit Organisation.

I approached Peter McVerry, who works with young people who are homeless, and asked if I could work with him. He said "if you want to listen and learn, then come on up".

I've been listening and learning. I'm learning that the most important thing is to simply be there, without judgement.

It's about being there, experiencing the boredom, seeing the reality of people's lives – the drugs, the poverty.

The best thing you can do is to let them know that someone cares.

Natasha

Life has always been a challenge for me. Things were tough at home when I was growing up and so I was in care for a while. My mammy is off the drink now and we have a great relationship.

I loved my last social worker. She was great with me but she also supported my family.

When social workers meet you for the first time, they read the notes from the file out loud, all the bad things that have happened in your life. Hearing these facts being read to you, you don't feel like a person. With my last social worker, it was different.

She wasn't trying to get the facts right, she wanted to get to know me.

I want to be a social worker. I want to work with kids who went through the same things as me, with those who had a tough life.

Elaine

I studied at the NCCCAP Community Training Centre and did my work experience with CASPr, an after-school project that works with children aged 6 to 12.

I love working with young people from my own community. I had a great life as a kid but I saw other kids getting into trouble.

I have always wanted to help them.

We can make a difference in our own community. Even helping one kid brings a sense of fulfillment!

I know that I am also inspiring other young people because they see me going back to college and looking after my child at the same time.

It gives them a push to go ahead with their studies.



Darren

A friend brought me to The Plough Youth Club in Ballymun when I was seven. It was a cold night; there was nothing to do in the street.

Today I am 18 and still part of it! It is a place where you can meet new people, a place where you can come for a time of freedom and peace.

In Ballymun, there's a lot of drugs and alcohol. I decided to come to the club to stay away from that. It was willpower and motivation that kept me away from it.

Here, around me, kids are on drugs and alcohol from the age of ten and up. I try to help them the way I got helped. I interact with them.

I get children who are isolated involved in new activities.

Some people are afraid to say no when offered to take drugs or do things that are wrong.

They think they will be cool if they accept. They have a choice between being cool for ten minutes with them, or being different by walking away.

Denise

I am from the flats in St Michael's estate and I always noticed children who were left out.

Today, I am a youth worker and I don't see myself doing anything else.

There's lots of absenteeism in the school I am working with.

Kids tell me that they are not coming in because 'things are going on at home'.

I try to help them and get them the support they need.

I give them responsibilities knowing that they will grow through them.

It's like a cycle. I see some children who will take over from me some day.

They will give back to their community.



Ann-Marie

I am 22 and I have a child who is three.

I am part of the Traveller community and I am the only one in my family to have the Leaving Certificate.

In my school, if you were not good you were left at the back of the class, especially if you were a Traveller.

Teachers had no expectations of us.

One day, I asked my teacher why she treated my friends so badly. They used to come every day to school, which was a sign that they wanted to learn!

I want to say to young people: 'You need to stand up for yourself and expect to be taught at school'.

I want to say to teachers: 'You need to see the potential in everybody, not only in people who are at the front of the class'.

Aoife

I have always lived in Ballyfermot. I come from a background of domestic violence. The staff from the school I went to helped me get through that.

They didn't always know what was going on but they were there for me when I needed them.

The support that I got when I was a kid helped me get through school. Thanks to that support, I am where I am today.

I've always wanted to help my community, like my ma who works in a resource centre in a poor neighbourhood.

There's a lot of suicide around where I live. Young people go around looking happy on the outside, but they're not happy.

Before, there wasn't anything for them, now there are services. But I still see injustice all the time.

Ann-Marie

In my area, there aren't enough opportunities to work, and I know lots of young adults who are unemployed.

I am currently doing another FÁS course in a field where I think they still need people.

If they don't, I will take up another course, and another course, so when business will pick up, I will be ready.

If things are difficult for me, they are even more difficult for those who left school not knowing properly how to read and write. They are embarrassed and ashamed in front of an application form.

I wish they could get more support and encouragement, I think that what they need are one-to-one sessions with people who make them feel at ease.



Glen

My three children and my partner live in O'Devaney Gardens in a flat unfit for any human.

The rooms are damp with plaster falling off the walls. Last winter, all of the bedrooms were freezing.

I worry all the time about my daughters. It's not safe to go out and play where they live.

In 2006, they were promised to be re-housed within 18 months if they accepted this flat but that was empty promises.

My partner has to live and care for our children in terrible conditions. Her health is affected by all the worry.

Rachel

I go shopping for some elderly neighbours who live in my block of flats.

They need help because there's no lift and because the stairs are just too much for them.

Linda

For 11 years, I went from hostels to B&B's with my children. In some of the hostels we lived in, we were not allowed to stay in during day-time.

I tried to keep my children in the same school, taking the bus with them early in the morning. I wanted to give them a chance to settle with their friends and be part of the after-school club.

Being homeless was like being handcuffed. My daughter hated having to be back inside the hostel at 7pm and going to bed so early.

Now that I have a house, I feel like something has lifted off me. I don't have to worry about where to go with the kids. There is no more pushing around everywhere.

Thanks to a group called STAR, I made friends and went back to reading and writing.

Now I can help my children with their homework.



Liam

Friendship is the word that comes to my mind when I think of my childhood. I remember fighting and shaking hands afterwards!

Growing up, I worked in the community, doing different things. Finding a job was easier at the time!

Today, things have changed. I am living in a place where I witness lots of violence, drugs and anger.

I have very good memories of my youth but what about the young people I see around me?

Ann

My name is Ann and I am a Traveller. I have been homeless for three years. Today I am thinking of my two youngest children who have been taken away from me. If you lose your children, you lose your heart and half of your body.

How can I go and see them when I live in the street?

When you live in the streets of the city, you go down and down. This is supposed to be the richest country in Europe and look at the way we live: from the bush where we sleep to the path, from the path to the bush. Things won't change unless we stand up together and speak up.

Jimmy

I left school when I was 16. I started drinking and doing drugs. I also did gambling. At 18, I had a mental health disorder.

I went to Youth Reach and passed my Junior Cert. With them, I started writing poems about what I went through. I made a first CD, and recently a whole album!

It is good to write your feelings down, it clears the head. If you bottle them up, you can break down.

I think that young people should have someone to look up to. For me, it is my step mum and my sister.

I help in a group called Acorn. I do fundraising so we can go on trips with people with mental health problems. We also have meetings.

It is important to have a place where we can talk about mental health and give each other support.



Noel

I have been part of a youth club called NYP2 since I was a kid. Now I am studying to become a youth worker.

I also work at the Cavan Center. It's a place that welcomes disadvantaged young people. We also welcome families during the school holidays.

It is important for these families to have a break from the city.

Derek

There's too much violence, too many people hating each other. I'm a coach and I play football on the Square with boys from different communities.

For me, it is a great way of mixing with others!

Bobby

I recently finished a FÁS course to become a floor installer. It lasted 14 weeks, 5 days a week, 7 hours a day. During these 14 weeks, I got in the habit of getting up early, which was good.

After the course, I was supposed to get work experience but there is no work out there. There's not enough business.

Even so, we need to show that we are looking for work. We know that if we just sit around and wait for things to change, nothing will happen!

Lots of young people try to make a better life for themselves. They try so hard but it doesn't only depend on them!

I am now 25 and back on the dole.

Jill

If someone asked me the question: why do I want to get a job so much? I would say: I'd like to get a job because I need the money to pay the bills and because I'd like to go on holiday. But, for me, the importance of getting a job is not first about money. It's about the coordination of the mind.

At home, you go away with your thoughts and get depressed.

It's important to stay focused, and get out of the house.



Amy

I am 16 years old. I used to be part of an after-school club in my estate, run by the Dublin Christian Mission.

Last year I went with them to Belarus, to an institution for orphan children.

We were there for a week and we did a lot of activities. The kids were our age and didn't go to school. They didn't get to go outside very often, but they did when we were there, because it was a special occasion.

When they'll leave that place, maybe they'll go to prison because they have no family.



Brenda

I grew up in Ballymun and left school before my Leaving Certificate like many of my friends.

One year ago, I started a Certificate Course in Addiction Studies. Having grown up with drugs all around me, I would like to help those affected by them in my community.

In my studies, I have the support of an organisation called J.U.S.T. My dad encouraged me to go.

Frank, the coordinator, helped me go back to reading and writing. He is always there to encourage me, always calling before an exam. That's what you need when you go back to study after a long time.

I think that education is a key to improve life.

Before the budget cuts, a lot was already needed for education, for children to stay off the streets and off drugs.

They need places to make them aware of the pitfalls in life. We need to keep talking about these injustices. It is important for things to change!

Kate

Two years ago someone came to my school to talk to us about volunteering with the VSI Teenage Programme. Volunteering has helped me grow, it made me realise that I had a lot to offer.

It's really powerful to meet new people and build relationships with them.

There's a group of us from the Teenage Programme that meets regularly. Some people are Irish and others have come to Ireland alone from other countries. Until the age of 18 they're in the care of the State but after that they have to go to residential centers and they're very isolated.

Our meetings are the only continuous activity in their lives and the friendship in the group is important to them. We meet to talk about different issues that are on the news or that we're interested in.

Sometimes people in the group have experienced some of the things that we're talking about, and this gives us a personal perspective.

Teresa

I have known homelessness, and my parents too, but we have always been a close family and that is what helped us through.

I raised my daughter till she was six years old. Then, because I didn't have a proper place to live in and because I was drinking, social services took my baby away. After a while, they even stopped my access visits.

I fought in order to see my daughter on her Communion Day.

Communion Day isn't like a birthday, it only happens once in a child's life!

It was a social worker working with homeless people who helped me to get to see my daughter again, on a weekly basis.

I love my children! They are a part of me and no one will ever be able to take that away from me.

Gloria

After my husband left, four of my children went into foster care.

I thought I was able to take care of them but others didn't think so.

I used to visit them every week but, after a while, social services limited my access to monthly visits.

I had the feeling that they wanted to break the bond between them and me.

I felt hurt because social services were treating me like a child, like if I was nobody, nothing.

But I met people who boosted my confidence.

They spoke on my behalf in Court when social services tried to take my youngest child away and thanks be to God, I persuaded them to let her stay with me.





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