

# The Roles We Play

## Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty



ATD Fourth World



Thomas, Analyst - The Roles We Play

# The Roles We Play

## Introducing the project...



ATD Fourth World

Dear friends,

We would like to introduce **The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty**; a full-colour publication, exhibition and multi-media project from ATD Fourth World and artist and photographer Eva Sajovic.

**"The work aims to highlight the efforts and validate the achievements of people who experience poverty and social exclusion in the UK and to challenge the negative attitudes often held towards such people."** Dann Kenningham, project coordinator

The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty is a collection of photographic portraits and self-written biographies exploring the roles played by those living in poverty within their families, communities and society at large.

When we started this project, the individuals and families at ATD Fourth World wanted The Roles We Play to offer a new and refreshing perspective on the lives of those facing poverty in the UK. We wanted the project to help to build new perceptions of others around us, strengthen community cohesion and encourage positive interaction between social groups.



Kathy, Human Rights Activist - The Roles We Play

The reception the project has received has been overwhelming, as more and more people use The Roles We Play as a platform to challenge the stereotypes and negative attitudes held towards the poorest in our society. In the words of one project participant:

**"I am not invisible anymore."** Kathy, Human Rights Activist - The Roles We Play

Those who have visited the exhibition have said:

**"Great initiative, amazing exhibition. Made me understand some aspects of poverty I haven't thought of before."**

It's has been a busy few months for The Roles We Play project and its participants. We've put together this newsletter to let you know exactly what we've been up to...



Amanda, Kids Club Worker - The Roles We Play

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# The Roles We Play

## The story so far...



ATD Fourth World

"ATD Fourth World has always emphasised the importance of respect for people living in poverty, not just resources; and how seriously people living in poverty take their responsibilities, and the impact of poverty on their ability to fulfil these; and poverty as a denial of human rights - all of which are crucial contributions to efforts to change the context which I described earlier. It has now added to these another key contribution - highlighting the roles that people living in poverty play in their own words and with their own images. And that is why, as I said earlier, I am very proud to have been involved in a small way with **The Roles We Play**." Fran Bennett, Senior Research Fellow, Oxford Institute of Social Policy, Department of Social Policy and Intervention.

October 17

**198 Contemporary Arts and Learning** was the official launch of **The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty**. On October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the book was presented alongside an accompanying four-week exhibition, at, 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning, a gallery in Herne Hill, London. The exhibition was a major undertaking, not only requiring a complete new set of professional gallery prints, but also considerable creative collaboration with Eva Sajovic and 198 to devise a unique curation for the two-room gallery space. Promotion for the event was also extensive; we contacted a wide audience, including media outlets, community groups, other social justice NGOs, the artistic community, student groups and members of the public. We received promotion articles in the CAS Journal, the Herne Hill Forum, the Brixton Blog and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's newsletter, as well as a feature blog post in University of Essex lecturer Fiona Elsted's blog.

The launch event was a success, with a considerable turn-out and a mixture of individuals from academic, artistic, activist and practitioner backgrounds, as well as members of the public. The launch featured presentations by project participants Seamus, Defender of Human Rights; Tammy, Proud Mother and Thomas, Analyst, as well as **The Roles We Play** photographer Eva Sajovic and Robert Walker, Professor of Social Policy, University of Oxford.



Tammy, Proud Mother, delivering her speech on 17 October

We also received a very favourable review in the November issue of the Brixton Bugle as well as an overwhelmingly positive reception from the public, which included comments such as,

**"Highlights a very real and present problem."**

**"Very good and thought-provoking."**

**"Incredibly valuable project, well done."**

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During the exhibition we ran a roundtable on the collaborative process ATD Fourth World used to create The Roles We Play. Many participants spoke, as did The Roles We Play photographer Eva Sajovic and guests such as Professor Robert Walker and Fran Bennett from Oxford University. One guest, Effie Jordan from the World Development Movement, told us that the event had been an inspiration and that following it she had been motivated to talk with a lady on the bus about her evening. She told us:

“...when I mentioned where I'd been and explained a bit about ATD Fourth World, the conversation turned. This lady suddenly felt safe to talk about what was really concerning her – poverty. She was in the throes of having to lose her house because she couldn't afford to pay for her living costs; she really didn't want to move from her local community but felt she had no choice. Although it was dark, late, cold and raining we stood chatting after we got off the tram for about 20 minutes. She was able to share things she hadn't felt safe to say to either her work colleagues, family or neighbours and I was able to put her in touch with someone who was able to offer her some advice. Had the conversation about ATD Fourth World not started I'm sure this lady would have still been carrying this unshared burden around with her.”

Comments from project participants about the launch and accompanying events:

“Public space so there was dialogue between the local community and us.”

“People stopped and talked to us after recognising our photos.”

“Possible to share our experiences.”

“People from different walks of life.”



Thomas, Analyst, delivering his speech at the roundtable



Thomas, Analyst - The Roles We Play



# The Roles We Play

## The story so far...



ATD Fourth World

That was 2014 and 2015 is shaping up to be even busier. We've taken the project to community spaces, public meetings, and conferences to share the stories of the roles that people living in poverty play in their communities. With the support of the public we are furthering our goal of challenging stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the poorest in our society.

### January

**The White Lion** event marked the start of The Roles We Play: Roles on the Road project that will take place over the next two years. The event was open mic-style held in the White Lion pub in Streatham. The night brought together artists, poets, musicians and activists from all over London and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants and reached an even wider audience over social media.

There were a variety of performances from all the project participants present. They were all confident and excelled in their performances. We had poetry from Georgina, the Poet. A speech and a traditional Irish folk song from Seamus, Defender of Human Rights. A play about ageism from Patricia, the helper and a poem about racism from Angela, Ambassador. During the open mic we also had a speech from Diane and a song from Derek.

The event was also attended by a wide variety of social groups and performers many of whom had a previous connection to ATD. These included Streatham Library, Peckham Library Deanna Roger, a spoken word artist, Jimmy Beckley from Paxton Green Time Bank, The World Development Movement and Certitude, a mental health charity that runs an out-of-hours peer support service in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.

**"Great initiative, amazing exhibition. Made me understand some aspects of poverty I haven't thought of before."** Performer



Patricia, the helper performing her play about ageism



Jimmy Beckley from Paxton Green Time Bank

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# The Roles We Play

## The story so far...



ATD Fourth World

February

**Brixton Library** was a month-long exhibition. At the end of the month a creative workshop was organised with the aim of engaging with library users who had noticed the exhibition and were interested in learning more about the Roles We Play.

The workshop was facilitated by The Roles We Play photographer Eva Sajovic. Participants were asked to share the roles they played in their respective communities, what drew them to the exhibition, and how they felt the exhibition contributed to challenging negative perceptions of the poor. After the discussion, participants were asked to create photograms depicting their perspectives of poverty and discrimination.

Participants were then asked to present their photogram and what it represented. The Roles We Play at Brixton library was a success, this encouraged us to source more venues at libraries around the country.

**The People's Bureau** was the next stop for The Roles We Play: Roles on the Road tour. Held every month at the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, ran by the photographer and artist behind The Roles We Play, Eva Sajovic, project participants from The Roles We Play took part in a skill sharing workshop.

The People's Bureau offers a created space where members of the community come together to exchange their skills and know-how with each other through a range of capacity-building workshops. While promoting community cohesion, The People's Bureau raises awareness of the value that people bring to their community while declaring ownership of a neighbourhood increasingly under threat from rising rents and gentrification. There were a number of workshops including an Irish soda bread making class offered by project participant Seamus, Defender of Human Rights.



Brixton Library



Seamus, Defender of Human Rights at The People's Bureau

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## The story so far...



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February cont...

The workshop was a great success. Seamus took great pride in teaching participants how to make soda bread and was delighted when some participants came up to him after to ask for the recipe. It was obvious that this event was a big confidence-booster for him and for other members of the community who come to share their skills.

**“I come here because it’s fun, I feel good here”**  
Seamus, Defender of Human Rights

For this reason, the People’s Bureau is an important event for the Roles We Play, as it underpins the book’s ethos by recognizing people’s contributions to society other than paid-work.

**Through the People’s Lens** was a high profile event at the Royal Geographical Society organised by the Overseas Development Institute in partnership with PhotoVoice. The event was a fitting venue for The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty; as it highlighted how people in poverty make their stories and voices heard through photography and growing access to technology. The panel also raised debate on the ethics of photography and the importance of participatory photography.

During the reception the Roles We Play was received with much enthusiasm from several of the guests. Passers-by engaged with project participants Angela, Ambassador, Seamus, Defender of Human Rights and Patricia, Helper. All three were very happy to share their stories and talk about the inspiration for the book. The reception offered a chance to network with people from various backgrounds who shared an interest for participatory photography and poverty eradication.

**“The Roles We Play is about challenging discrimination and raising awareness of the poor by giving poverty a face and a voice in order to understand poverty from a human perspective, from people that have been there and know the reality first hand...”** Jason, ATD Fourth World Volunteer



ATD Volunteers Naomi and Jason were accompanied by ATD friend Sara Garcia as well as project participants.



Anne-Marie, Friend - The Roles We Play

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## The story so far...



ATD Fourth World

March

**The College of Social Work Annual Conference** was a high profile event bringing together top experts and policy makers in social work. The day-long conference featured a mix of informative lectures and workshops from social work departments all over the UK. Project participant Moreane, Anti-Poverty Campaigner spoke to several social workers about The Roles We Play, and rounded many up to participate in our Social Worker Training workshop.

The conference was a great opportunity for The Roles We Play to promote its message, as most of the professionals present at the event work alongside people like those featured in the book, yet often fail to meet their needs due to an inflexible system that promotes investigatory practices over therapeutic ones. The rigidity of the social work system often incites mistrust and misunderstanding between practitioners and service users resulting in an adversarial relationship that undermines the whole process.

**"We need to have a merciless understanding about the people that are using our services. "**

Social worker who participated in Social Worker Training workshop

This is why the conference was an ideal event for The Roles We Play to promote its message and outlook on social work. This message was reinforced during our Social Worker Training workshop, which aimed to tackle the disconnect between practitioners and service users. The workshop was attended by 20 participants, with a social work background most of whom engaged directly with Moraine, Anti-Poverty Campaigner and other project participants.

**The Jubilee Library, Brighton** hosted a week-long exhibition of The Roles We Play. The event was the first large-scale exhibition outside of London. In a city known for its open-mindedness and activism. The event set out to reach new communities and succeeded in its goal.

**"Brighton is known as a place that welcomes all people and is open and inclusive, but I still feel that many people, especially people in poverty are excluded and looked down on. This project is important to change that."**

Project participant



Patricia, Helper at Brighton Library

**Beacons Conference on Millennium Development Goals** in Worcester was attended by Project participant Tammy, Proud Mother.



# The Roles We Play

## The story so far...



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March cont...

The exhibition attracted a lot of visitors, project participants Georgina, Poet; Patricia, Helper; Amanda, Kids' Club Worker and Angela, Ambassador had some good discussions around the theme of prejudice and discrimination, meeting many like-minded individuals and organisations, one of which was 'The Foyer,' a youth centre and hostel that works with and supports young people in difficulty.

The exhibition and open invitation to discuss the project helped the project to reach local people experiencing poverty. One man who was currently living on the streets reacted to the project by saying: "Before I hit rock bottom I used to do things... I volunteered in a homeless shelter at night while working in a pizza place in the daytime, it was hard and exhausting, but we need to support each other.. no one else will."

Holding a week-long exhibition in Brighton was time well spent. Project participants not only engaged with the local community but also learnt more about the local situation for people experiencing poverty.

May

**Ashmolean Museum** in Oxford, gave us the opportunity to be 'Social Animals' The event drew 4,500 people many of whom passed by The Roles We Play exhibition, stopped to talk to the project participants and made donations for books. This was a high profile event and displayed the potential of/ for the project to reach large audiences. The feedback from the event was extremely positive, which was due to the hard work of the participants. Eva Sajovic, the photographer of The Roles We Play was also present and facilitated a 'definitions' workshop which worked well to engage with the audience and get them thinking of the wider themes behind the book. It was a successful event, the exhibition looked good in such a prestigious venue and it was a pleasure to see the project participants so engaged in communicating the project with the public.

**"It was great that the people were real, not people in poverty doing their bit on a stage or whatever but instead having ordinary conversations with people."** Passer-by



Patricia, Helper, - The Roles We Play



The Roles We Play exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum

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## The story so far...



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May cont...

**The Dole Animators** was for a peer-learning workshop with Carla McCormack from Poverty Alliance in Scotland to discuss representations and realities of living in poverty and on out-of-work benefits in Britain today. The session was a great opportunity for three groups who have all – in different ways – been working to challenge the stigma of poverty and benefits to get together and share reflections. It was great for the Dole Animators and project participants to share their experiences of making The Roles We Play film and being part of the photography project.

“It was great to meet another group who are also getting their views out there albeit in a different way. It is always useful to meet other groups - reinforces we are not alone and it also gives confidence to continue to try to change our fearless leaders rhetoric. It would have been good if we could have had a bit more time to chat to each other but obviously this wasn't possible. One of the things I took out of it was that everybody was doing something - not just sitting around waiting for the benefits cheque to drop through the letter-box although I have yet to meet a 'lazy' person who receive benefits! There does seem to be a common theme - chance and circumstance play a huge part in our lives - lifestyle choices are nowhere to be seen. I thought the book 'The Roles We Play' was very inspiring and I especially liked the messages the people in the book were saying. All seemed very positive and up-beat but also matter of fact about each situation.” Sue, Dole Animators

What was notable was how both groups attached particular importance to their sense of ownership over their own projects; that the film and the photography project belongs to them and is the result of their own choices and decisions. It was also fascinating to hear

about the Stick Your Labels campaign, up in Scotland, where Poverty Alliance is working hard to challenge stigma and poverty. Everyone who attended the event agreed that it was a great afternoon. We hope to meet with all involved again soon so watch this space.

“It was important for me to take part in this event as even though I am very busy with work, etc, now I still wholehearted support The Roles We Play exhibition and the fact that it makes me feel as if I am fighting back again against the negative stereotyping that the political parties love to use. It was a new and worthwhile experience and I look forward to maybe do it again.” James, Jack of All Trades - The Roles We Play



James, Jack of All Trades - The Roles We Play



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## The story so far...



ATD Fourth World

May cont...

“These events are important because we care about all people, particularly those that are excluded from society. We hope to give a more balanced view of people's contributions to society other than that of mainstream media.”

Alison, Truth Seeker - The Roles We Play

“It was an interesting event, which served as a way to explore foundations of solidarity and creation of alliances with other groups who share our vision. I'd definitely do it again. It was an opportunity to meet new folk, share ideas and thoughts.” Paul, Thinker - The Roles We Play

“The afternoon felt as though it served some very useful purposes. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it gave those present from the Dole Animators and ATD 4th World a sense of solidarity when sometimes the media can make it feel as though you are a lone voice in the wilderness. Secondly, the presentation from ATD gave everyone present the opportunity to reflect on how certain sectors of the population are represented in the media and moreover how different sectors have very different levels of control they have over their representation. That was especially salient in terms of benefit claimants. Finally, the presentation from Poverty Alliance was a really useful lesson in how - through their Stick Your Labels project - they have been able to change the discourse used by politicians in Scotland when speaking about benefit claimants, and how that should reflect their very valuable contribution and work in society.”

Richard, Dole Animators facilitator



Paul, Thinker, The Roles We Play



Peer-learning with the Dole Animators and Poverty Alliance

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ATD Fourth World

May cont...

**The European branch of the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) 4th conference** in Madeira, was our honorary event. Timothy Ashplant, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Life-Writing Research, Kings College presented the project to academics, professional writers, and poets and artists who explore new creative ways of representing lives.

The IABA exists to promote the discussion of issues, and exchange of ideas, between authors writing biographies and autobiographies, and those scholars who study and analyse life writing. One of the key themes at this year's conference was Life Writing "from below": that is, by people who have not had the financial, educational or cultural resources that make it easy for their life story to be written, heard and published. The Centre for the Study of Atlantic History, which hosted the conference, was an appropriate venue, since it has developed its own project, Historia, devoted to collecting, preserving and publishing life writings by ordinary Madeirans.

In his keynote lecture, Timothy Ashplant (Centre for Life-Writing Research, King's College London) emphasised the wide range of such life writings from below across the different countries of Europe, over the past five centuries. He noted that many of these texts challenged the imbalance of representation in favour of the elite, by telling truths about a way of life unknown to a wider world in the hope of receiving sympathetic understanding, and perhaps achieving social justice. He emphasised that such efforts are still required today, during an economic crisis in which negative attitudes are often expressed towards vulnerable and excluded people. He used quotations and photographs from *The Roles We Play* as one example of such projects.

*The Roles We Play* met Timothy Ashplant through a visit to Kings College. He attended our book launch, public conversation and again participated in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford event. Tim is very interested in our methodology and participatory



Timothy Ashplant presenting *The Roles We Play* at IABA 4th conference



Tammy, Proud Mother - *The Roles We Play*

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# The Roles We Play

## What's next...



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We will continue to take the project to community spaces, public meetings, and conferences all over the UK and beyond. Why not help us to share the stories of the roles that people living in poverty play in their communities by coming along to an event and bringing a friend or two. With your support we will be able to further our goal of challenging stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the poorest in our society. As said by one participant:

**“The stereotyping of all poor people dehumanises us in the eyes of others.”** Moraene, Anti-Poverty Campaigner - The Roles We Play



Moraene, Anti-Poverty Campaigner - The Roles We Play

We would like to say thank you to all who have supported the project so far. Together we will change the current media, political and public debate labelling people experiencing poverty as lazy, self-interested, ‘scroungers’. This exhibition challenges this view in a positive and engaging manner. As one participant said:

**“We all bring something to our communities, be we unemployed or someone earning multi-millions. We all have something to give.”**  
James, Jack of All Trades - The Roles We Play



James, Jack of All Trades - The Roles We Play



# The Roles We Play

## It's been an amazing journey!



ATD Fourth World

Thank you to all of our supporters both on and offline. From volunteers helping us to organise events to members of the public participating in our social media campaign, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. To find out where The Roles We Play will be next, follow the project online at: [therolesweplay.co.uk](http://therolesweplay.co.uk), Facebook: **ATD Fourth World UK**, Twitter: **@ATDFourthWorld** and Instagram: **rolesweplay**. **#RolesWePlay**

