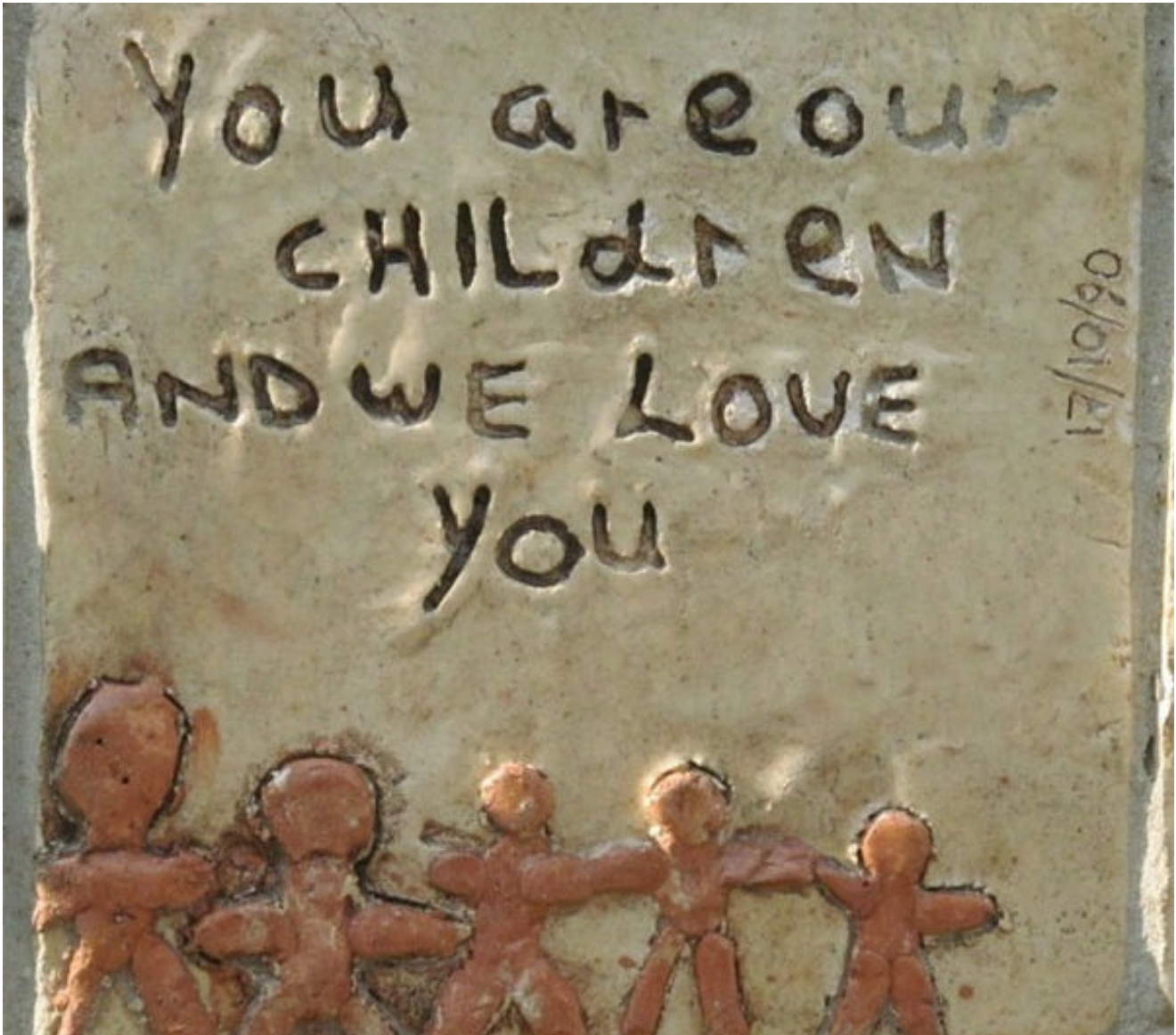


A MOTHER'S STRENGTH



In 2017 ATD Fourth World invited people around the world to document real-life "Stories of Change" starting from situations of injustice and exclusion caused by extreme poverty. These stories, from activists, community leaders, and others, show that when people work together, real change can happen. For more about the ["Stories of Change"](#).

By Isabelle Williams (United Kingdom)

It was the last day the family would be together. The next morning, the children would be taken into foster care. For months, we [ATD's team in the UK] had fought alongside the family for the children to stay at home. In court, no one had been able to deny the love in the family but they said the parents couldn't meet the needs of their five children. The parents knew that no one could ever love their children like they did.

It's impossible to know what's going on in a mother's heart at a time like that. The father had gone away for a few days, overwhelmed by worry, a sense of helplessness and by his own inability to prevent what was happening. With the mother, we thought that the best thing would be to get out of the city and spend the day together in a park where the five children could feel free to run wild, and be together as a family. We drove together to the park.

On the way there, everyone was hushed. Eventually, we arrived at a huge wooded-park where, in midweek, we were almost alone. The sun was shining and we sat down beside a small pond. Little by little, the children began playing, running around and then plunging their feet in the water before stripping to their underclothes and gleefully jumping into the water.

I had always known Jennifer to be a very courageous woman, but on this day, I marvelled at her. She managed to laugh with her children, hiding her hurt and anxiety, except when, away from the children, her eyes welling up with tears, she told me how much she dreaded this moment of separation.

Then she wiped the tears away with the back of her hand and returned to play with children, splashing them, throwing them around in her arms, the children laughing along with their mother's laughter.

The day was spent like that and then the time came to go back. The children got dressed and we set off. On the drive home, the silence returned. The youngest fell asleep and anxiety was visible on the faces of the older ones. But until the end, Jennifer gave her all, joking and playing to the last to protect her children from their fear of tomorrow. She had been in foster care herself as a child and adolescent, and for her, this had remained an open wound. She had often said to us: "I want to do everything in my power to prevent this from happening to my children."

I have often thought about this moment. The children were put into foster care. The local authority had not been able to find other ways to support these parents who were so often overwhelmed by such a difficult life but who loved their children.

That day, Jennifer had drawn on her resources of courage, tenderness and imagination to hide her anguish and pain, to give her children this gift of a "happy day" as a family, a memory to keep in their hearts as a treasure; a moment of happiness to go back to and remember how much she loved them, and to keep them warm against the coldness of

separation.

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