

THIS LOCKDOWN IS A LESSON TO BE LEARNT FROM

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Image above: Paul Uzell at the ATD Fourth World International Centre.

"In this period of lockdown we have all in many ways been made aware of what it means to lose your freedom... to live in isolation... to have reduced choices... to have a finger pointed at you. This is giving people an insight into what we are living – me and many people struggling in our own community live this reality day-to-day."

Paul Uzell, ATD Ireland [Fourth World Activist](#).

Have you ever considered social maltreatment as a dimension of poverty?

In 2019, [ATD Fourth World International and Oxford University](#) carried out participatory [research into dimensions of poverty](#) in 6¹ countries including the UK, which included

people in poverty as peer researchers. SOCIAL MALTREATMENT (International) or STIGMA, BLAME AND JUDGEMENT (UK version) was one such dimension. Below is a conversation (the first in a series about the report's dimensions of poverty) between Paul Uzell, an ATD Ireland community [activist](#) and Dann Kenningham, an ATD Ireland team member and part of [ATD Volunteer Corps](#), on what it is like to experience this in one's life.

The finger-pointing image from the [ATD Fourth World UK research findings](#) is so very powerful; here we see many people turning against one person, shaming and judging them. Yet aren't we supposed to be against this kind of discrimination in our society? People are often shamed because of their poverty or because they are struggling to fit in with social norms. We know what it is like to be shamed and pointed at; we have the day-to-day lived experience to validate this picture.

Shaming and judging people is always present, especially now. Pointing the finger saying, "You are contaminated... you have the virus". In this period of lockdown we have all in many ways been made aware of what it means to lose your freedom... to live in isolation... to have reduced choices... to have a finger pointed at you. This is giving people an insight into what we are living – me and many people struggling in our own community live this reality day-to-day. We are hearing people say: "Covid-19 does not discriminate" (when clearly it does!). Covid-19 has revealed and heightened the social inequalities in our society.

After listening to the rhetoric of slogans like 'We are all in this together' during this lockdown, it has given us an anthem, a common purpose. Now that we are coming out of this together, we have an opportunity to do things together. But to work towards change together, we need to be at the table together – not excluded, as we've always been, never listened to – just directed here and there and told that poverty is our fault.

We are living the consequence of policies that fail us; policies designed to support us, yet designed without us. Those in power, those making policies, please listen: Poverty: it's not my fault or another's. It's a societal issue and people with lived experience of poverty and dealing with a failed system need to be heard and listened to. Our experience and expertise of poverty is not listened to; even our suffering is not recognised.

A fair chance in society

We want the ability to breathe, to have a fair chance in society, to be part of society. Often we don't get the chance to express ourselves. We are too often ignored or our voice is drowned out by other issues.

Why are we once more, waiting and relying on those who have constantly failed us? We need to build partnerships and take the lead in changing society. Where is our seat at the table? We need a seat at the table!

Yet I still feel hopeful. When we get out of this lockdown, this could be a renewed chance to build partnerships. We have a new chance to address poverty based on our shared lived experiences. This new understanding of isolation and lack of freedom that many people have experienced during lockdown might just help wider society to see the injustice forced upon many of us.

As we build and strengthen partnerships going forward, we invite you to join us and work towards overcoming poverty and socio-economic discrimination. We at ATD Ireland have worked relentlessly for many years on these issues and we have faith in building partnerships with others. Together we can make the deep change needed to better our society for the future of all.

This lockdown is a lesson to be learnt from.

1. Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania the UK and the US. [↩](#)

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