



Stories of Change

Bringing together stories showing that poverty can be overcome if we work together



ATD FOURTH WORLD
ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY TO OVERCOME POVERTY



Table of contents

Click on the title of
a Story to read it.

Introduction		3
A Total Change of Perspective	(Bulgaria)	5
Standing Up Together	(Hungary)	9
Struggling for Education	(Romania)	13
110% of Children Enrolled in School	(Guatemala)	17
I am a Mediator	(Macedonia)	20
The Circus is Like a Rainbow	(Romania)	23
There is always hope	(Hungary)	27
When Knowledge Merges and Increases	(France)	30
Inspired by a walnut tree	(Romania)	34
Team of Hope	(Bulgaria)	38
Where do leaders come from?	(USA)	41
I'll never give up!	(Romania)	44
Bringing Everyone Together	(Hungary)	47
I don't even know their names	(Burkina Faso)	51
Step by step, restarting school	(Romania)	54
A Life Spent Caring for Her Family	(Romania)	57
I am 13 and I Play Football With Migrants	(France)	59
The keys to Friendship and Peace - Tapor	(Croatia)	62
The keys to Friendship and Peace - Tapor	(Serbia)	64
United, we are a rock	(Madagascar)	66
Fight for our rights	(Spain)	69
International Charter for October 17	(International)	73

Click on a logo to go
back to the Table of
contents.



Bringing together Stories of Change showing that poverty can be overcome if we work together.

This booklet aims to share stories that show poverty can be overcome. It presents a positive message in contrast to the continuous stream of negative news that has left so many people feeling discouraged and powerless.

These stories show the benefit of working together for change - stories of those who were excluded, finding their place and contributing to build a better world.

These are not only personal stories, but stories of people from different backgrounds and of different ages who have supported each other towards a common goal and made concrete progress or brought about a positive change.

They show the courage, the resistance, the dignity, and the pride of people living in poverty and those struggling with them.

In this booklet, we present Stories of Change from different countries from south-east Europe, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. We spent a lot of time meeting all the people involved, interviewing them, and writing together the story they wanted to make known. They have greatly inspired us, and we hope their stories will inspire you too to get involved with those who resist poverty in their daily lives.

However, there are people struggling against poverty all over the world. This is why stories from other parts of the world have been included in our booklet, and which are featured in the website www.poverty-stop.org

Many other persons and groups are taking initiatives, carrying out actions against poverty and ensuring that the contribution of those

who are most excluded are heard and recognized. Other stories are being told and more need to be told!

We invite everyone to join the mosaic of people from around the world who are saying, “we want to put an end to poverty”, and to gather on 17 October, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. Have a look on the International Charter for October 17 at the end of the booklet or on the website of the Forum for Overcoming Extreme Poverty: www.overcomingpoverty.org.

This booklet is available in 5 languages (Bulgarian, English, French, Hungarian, Romanian) and we would like to warmly thank all the people - and they are many - who made this possible.

Véronique and Benoit Reboul-Salze
ATD Fourth World (All Together in Dignity)

"Poverty is a form of violence. It leads to humiliation and it silences people. It destroys lives. But poverty is not inevitable.

Like slavery or discrimination, it can be overcome. Those who endure poverty resist its injustice in countless ways. If we are to confront the challenges facing the world today, we need their intelligence and courage.

Today, people who feel outcast are making themselves heard and are taking action. Others are joining them to build a peaceful world where no one is left behind.

Call to action: www.poverty-stop.org



A Total Change of Perspective

Genika and her friends make connections through music and creative conversation with the residents of Stolipinovo, a neighborhood of Plovdiv city in Bulgaria.

By Genika Baycheva (Bulgaria)



I was part of the Foundation Plovdiv 2019 team formed with the aim of having Plovdiv city recognized as the European Capital of Culture in 2019. We wanted to focus on Stolipinovo, a part of the city which seemed to have been forgotten and abandoned by everybody. Being newly settled in Plovdiv, I decided to visit Stolipinovo to see it for myself and was pleasantly surprised that it was not that dangerous, contrary to what everybody had told me.

With the Foundation, we met a very good musician, a German guy who was traveling with his piano around the world and we invited him to come to Stolipinovo. It was great to observe the interaction between him and the people in the neighborhood. How happy they were to have him there, to give them the opportunity to discover music. So, this is how we started thinking more and more about how we could involve arts and culture in the neighborhood. Although I stopped working for the Foundation Plovdiv 2019, I continued to visit Stolipinovo more and more.

During a workshop in Plovdiv, a Dutch artist developed a very interesting artistic approach named 'Chair sessions'. It was to take plastic garden chairs and to walk in the neighborhood with them. Our task was to sit next to inhabitants from the neighborhood and talk about what they liked in their area, what they didn't like, and what they would like to improve. Then we would write the main sentences, chosen with the people, on the chairs.

In smaller parts of the neighborhood, called informal settlements, people had no chairs at all. That was why, later, with a carpenter from the neighborhood, we built yellow wooden cubes to meet people so together they could write or draw their thoughts on them and share them from one place to another.

I really liked this approach because it was connecting me at a very personal level with people from the neighborhood. I loved to listen to their stories and it opened my mind to new horizons.

We were six of us going around meeting people in Stolipinovo. From phrases collected during these chair sessions, the idea came to write a song with lyrics and then a music video. We were walking through the neighborhood, looking for talented young people, for musicians, who would collaborate together for this song. And I think this was one of the very inspiring moments for me, this search for talents in the neighborhood. Again, it was opening new horizons; a journey of discovery about the creativity of the neighborhood.

All this was possible because we took the time to get to know the people of Stoliponovo.

It is a common mistake of people coming from outside a neighborhood to believe that they can change the residents there. At the beginning, I was full of energy and optimism for doing something good for the people, with very ambitious ideas to change the neighborhood, to change the people.

But then, being there and talking with the people over a 2-year period, I could connect much better with their needs, their desires, and their thoughts.

I revised my own thinking: I no longer wanted to change the people. I wanted them to have a better life, to change the conditions they live in, but not to change them. The most important thing was to connect with the people, and there is no other way to do this than by taking sufficient time.

Secondly, what was very inspiring for me was that when we went with the yellow cubes, we were able to connect with the children. It was physically very interesting to observe this because once we arrived with the cubes, it was like a magnet for the children; they just came. They were hiding before this.

We saw so many children and they were so happy to express themselves on the cubes.

This was a big breakthrough moment. For example, I remember when I first met the daughter of Kamelia; she came to me smiling. And the last time I met her, we had our first conversation in Bulgarian together. I think it was because she became more relaxed with me. We often stay with her mother, Kamelia, at her place for hours on end. I remember the first time Kamelia said *“These are my friends”*, and how much time it took to come to this moment when confidence and trust is found.



Recently, Kamelia said: *“You sit with us, we have coffee together and chat. We exchange what’s on, what’s not – everything. You aren’t hiding anything, neither do I. You speak with all the children separately, how is their study, what they do...That’s what I learnt from you: friendship. I learnt that it doesn’t matter if I am a Christian or a Muslim. This is not a reason not to be good friends. There are people who say: ‘Those are Christians, we are Muslims’, and they keep a distance. I don’t keep a distance. That’s why everyone who is like me, they all come here.*

By making connections through music and conversation with the people of Stolipinovo, supporting them and not trying to change them, and by taking the time needed, we came to discover and learn so much together.

These connections also helped all of us to deconstruct prejudices – a huge and necessary work.



Standing Up Together

« A Város Mindenkié » or “The City is for All” is a volunteer-based, grassroots organization from Budapest (Hungary) in which activists who are homeless or living in housing poverty and activists who are non-homeless work together for housing rights and social justice.

A story written with Jutka Lakatosné, László Murányi and Anna Alexandrov (Hungary)

We, at The City is for All, are always looking for contact with people who live in informal settlements or without any home, to build new contacts, and to know if everything is alright for them. The aim is that there shouldn't be any people that the world doesn't know about. It is not acceptable that no one would go there to help them.

Jutka, a member of The City is for All who lives herself in an informal settlement, described how we work, saying: “*This is a very ‘accepting’ place and environment where people who live in poverty get leadership roles*”



and really play important roles in this fight, standing up for their own rights, where there is no difference among the people who work together, and where everyone is accepted, and everyone is trusted. In Hungarian marriage law, it is said, “In the good and in the bad, until death do us part”. How nice it will be if the world could work like that: people standing together, in the good and in the bad?”

László came to The City is for All through a person he met at a homeless shelter. Our work offers him, “the opportunity to learn new skills. I would say that coming together and working together makes people strong. But if they are even more people working together, then it makes them even stronger”.

Not everyone involved in our work comes from a background of poverty - Anna, who recently joined as an ally, wanted to join a group which was, *“based on working together and with people who actually experience these injustices. You can’t help from outside.*

It has to be the person who experiences poverty that is key. They are the people who want and can stand up for themselves. It just looks a lot more real. That would be my most important message to people who try to join activists groups: ‘You can’t just tell people what to do’.”

When The City is for All receives word that there is an informal settlement somewhere, the coordination committee comes together to ask: “Who can go there?”

Then a “World Hut Meeting” is organized. The group creates a place open to everyone, where people from everywhere can come and speak about anything, close to these informal settlements. It’s a funny name for it, but it is based on a picnic. Anyone can go: allies (non-homeless activists) and homeless people living in poverty. Together they make sandwiches, bring water, put down a blanket, sit with food, and invite people who live there to join them. Then it depends on these people whether they want to join in, whether they want to participate in The City is for All’s work, or to just keep in contact.

Regardless, the aim is not to let any person there go unnoticed. Members of "The City is for All" can keep in contact with them, talk to them, and help them.

There is a forest, in the 19th district of Budapest, which is informally called "Sherwood Forest." There are people who live there in informal settlements within little houses called Huts, or "Kunyhó" in Hungarian. A "Kunyhó" is a house which is made of pieces of wood, plastic, any useful materials that are discarded by other people. Some people build their own little houses out of this and that's a "Kunyhó".

Years ago, a World Hut Meeting was organized in a part of this Sherwood forest. Ten to fifteen homeless people have been living here for more than 15 years, including a couple who had a leading role in the group, Erika and János. They were also founding members of The City is for All. The eleven people living in Sherwood Forest were all linked together like family.

As there is a law that forbids houses to be built there, the foresting authorities ordered these people to move away. Together, we decided to respond through action. We went to talk to the foresting authorities, and to the Vice-President of the District and to people from the municipality. We asked them to give homes to these people whom they were ordering to leave the forest.



There were a few months of discussing, arguing, then at last, an agreement was found: as a start the municipality would provide two flats to these people. The people from the informal settlement would have to renovate the flat they were going to live in.

Another organization called “Utcáról Lakásba Egyesület” (From the Street to Homes) would help with the renovation. A call went out for tools and volunteers came to do the work - not only members of The City is for All, but their sympathizers and friends also take part in the renovation. The municipality also offered a small contribution.

To date, six people have been accommodated in renovated flats. There is an additional flat which is being presently renovated, and then two more flats will be provided next year. By then, everyone who is still alive from this group will have had a flat.

Sadly, that does not include Erika and János. Erika died in a worker’s shelter before she could move into their own flat. János followed her a year later, so he could enjoy the flat for only a short time.

There are now two municipalities that are providing homes to homeless people thanks to the work done with members of The City is for All. The municipality of the 10th District offers two flats each year to people living in huts or in the streets. That’s a real change.

Even in cases where a municipality does the right thing at first, but then does something unjust, The City is for All still goes to demonstrate. **There is no such situation which The City is for All will not fight against.**



Struggling for Education

Cati, an educational assistant in one of the Alternative Education Clubs of the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities in Bucharest, explains how her struggle for education for all is rooted in her own history.

by Cati Vatală (Romania)



Life is giving me strength. Because I grew up in a ghetto in Bucharest and had to take care of many kids, and of my people - and even if sometimes I feel done or if I am tired - I remember my experience, as I want to make a change for my community.

I spent my childhood and grew up in the Rahova ghetto, in Bucharest. It was a happy time for me because nobody cared if you were Romanian, Roma, or poor. We shared everything between us and even if we were poor, we didn't feel the effects as much because we were helping each other.

When I was in 5th grade, I put some pressure on my mother to come to my school. My mother didn't want to, but I persuaded her and she came. Then, the other kids started to bully me, to laugh at me, and they discriminated against us because my mother has dark skin. So from that moment, I didn't go to school any more.

Despite this, I liked school. I liked the education. I tried to return to school, but I didn't manage. I became an adult, an uneducated adult.

When I left the Rahova ghetto, I saw the other parts of the town and their better living conditions. I moved from job to job: I was a cleaning lady, a sewing lady; I was a hygienist. I managed to work with cosmetics. But the pay wasn't very good with these jobs because I didn't have the papers, the diplomas, to say that I was an educated individual.

From that moment on, and also in my present job, I talk with the kids and the adults to tell them that education is very important so as to have a better life.

I was 26 years old when I managed to re-enroll myself in the education system. I managed to finish another two classes; 7th and 8th grades. As a mother, I try to give to my kids the best that I can because I don't want them to go

through what I have experienced. I am proud that my older boy has just finished high school with his qualification. He wants to go to university. And my girl has also finished 8th grade. Right now she is enrolled in high school. I have another kid, a little one who has autism. It was very hard to find some help for him. Fortunately, I met an NGO that supports us. I learnt so much from my boy while helping his development.

Then I met the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, who offered me work as an educational assistant in an Alternative Education Club.

The club has been described as a safe and creative space which is inside the school, open 6 days a week, even during summer holidays, and where the children interact with educational assistants and volunteers who offer them support and mentoring. The educational assistants support the participation of the parents in promoting education and in the life of their neighborhood.

Their role is very important, as they help to make bridges between teachers, children and their parents.

Without the educational assistants emerging from the community, the Alternative Education Club will not bring about change for the school and the children. The children won't come to this space if they don't find people there they can trust.

It has been four years now since I became involved with the club. I like to help the kids as an educational assistant and I can do it because of the skills I have learnt with my younger boy.

Sometimes it's very hard to make others aware that they need to study. I speak a lot with the kids and I go to the home of their parents as well. Often, I feel frustrated because kids leave school or skip classes and go to work. Parents tell me, *"Now he is a man. He has to go to work"*.

On the other hand, it's very hard for the families as they are given 84 lei (18 euros) per month for each kid by the National Government program to buy the materials and clothes needed for school. It's not enough.

To be effective, the role of the educational assistant has to be accepted by everybody. It means the educational capacity of the assistant has to be recognized by the teachers within the school and by the parents of the neighborhood, as well as the personal capacities to create bridges. These capacities, this know-how are not something that is achieved easily or quickly. They are rooted in a long history.

Now, it's another struggle for me to obtain a diploma to show to my community that I am a good educator.

I managed to start high school at 36 years of age. I wanted also to show to my older boy that it's a good thing. It doesn't matter how old you are. Somehow I became aware that I am worth something as an individual.

Things can change for the better when you improve your education, but you have to put a lot of effort and a lot of hard work into it.



110% of Children Enrolled in School

When we were with the families in the shantytowns in Guatemala, they used to tell us two things. The first one, we don't want our children to live what we have lived, we don't want them to know this poverty. The second one, the only thing we can leave to our children is education.

By Paul Maréchal (Guatemala)



So, together with those families we decided to fight for the children to be able to attend school, remain at school, and succeed in their schooling. Therefore together with those families and with the teachers in those shantytowns, we tried to identify the obstacles. Firstly because the children were not registered and had no birth certificates, or because there were some financial issues (enrollment in school, uniforms, school supplies) and then secondly because of fear, humiliation for children who had never gone to school and for the parents who had no idea what school was like.

So, together with the families we started thinking about what the obstacles could be, but we also carried out some experiments. With them we carried out a pilot project on lifting all the obstacles. We were involved in their daily life, but also with street libraries, school work support, connections and meetings with the parents. One mother was elected a representative of the parents in her school

when she actually came from an extremely poor and very excluded background.

The first thing the movement did was to establish links with those families and with the teachers from the area, and then with other associations which were fighting either for the children's rights or for education in general. Those associations helped us also to gain visibility, to enable us to meet the United Nations rapporteur for education, to set up a round table with journalists. So we went all the way, backed by others and thanks to them, but keeping our specific role, namely to be very close to the families and to genuinely work directly with them.

And from the work we did with the teachers and with the families, we made proposals for public policies in Guatemala, education policies. Together with the families, we met those candidates standing for the presidential elections. After the elections, we met the Minister of Education, several times actually, and also other associations. We were heard and

we managed to win a governmental agreement confirming that school would be free in Guatemala and another important point, that it will not be necessary for a child to be registered and hold a birth certificate to enroll in school.

Which means that those children who had disappeared, who had no legal existence... in fact, they could enroll in school the following year. And while Guatemala, in certain shantytowns, thought that 98% of all children actually had access to schooling, it appeared the following year that in fact the figure went up to 110%, simply because some children appeared that had not been included in the statistics.

This project enabled a governmental agreement on free schooling and access for all children, even those who were not registered and had no official birth certificates. Not only did this impact the 600 children we were supporting on a daily basis, but it also had an impact on 3 million children who, in Guatemala, had problems attending school.



Obviously that is not the solution to everything, but it sent a signal of hope for many many families who started thinking: “school is also for us then”.



I am a Mediator

This story shows how acting as a mediator to support the efforts of a community to improve its rights requires getting to know the people. Muarem, as member of this community, can work with everyone.

By Muarem Abdi, with the support of Llatifa Sikovska (Macedonia)



My name is Muarem Abdi and I live in the municipality of Shutka, part of the city of Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia. In my life, I have seen that discrimination exists against the Roma nationality and that the Roma people is considered as a lower class.

Then I thought to myself, “I must do something. I will seek out an NGO which engages with Roma people, and see if I can support the NGO in its work for Roma rights and for Roma people to have a better life”.

I soon discovered a new Roma educational centre called Ambrela. In 2007, I began working with them as a volunteer and then in 2011, I worked as a mediator. From 2013 to 2015, I worked as an educator in their children's project called 'Step by Step', which I was very happy with as I like to work with kids.

The parents bring their kids to the project in part because they are so busy with having to work to survive and so, have very little free time.

We in the NGO team support the children to prepare for starting school by helping them with basic but important things, such as being able to say, “good morning”, “excuse me”, or “thank you”, and how to wash their hands before and after meals. We also organize workshops and meetings with the parents. Here, parents share with us how important it is that the kids come to Ambrela and how much their Macedonian language has improved.

In my work for Ambrela, I act now as a mediator between the health system and the families. For example, in Shutka, especially in the streets of Brsjacka Buna, Gjarsija Lorka, Pelagonija and Zivot, there are no house numbers. So for the workers from the Health Centre of the City, it is not so easy to find the people. I give the invitation for the families to bring the kids for vaccinations to the Health Centre. I explain how important it is. In case the parents can't go there, then together with the workers of the Health Centre, we visit the families and directly give vaccinations to the children.

My role in Ambrela involves spending quite a lot of time visiting families. As a Roma who speaks their language, they more easily understand me and are less fearful than speaking with other Macedonians where there can be a language barrier.

In Brsjacka Buna, 50 families live in substandard conditions, with children aged from 0 to 17 years old. Only some of them have access to water and electricity. Parents and children do not have personal documents for themselves or their children. While the children can access the local kindergarten and school, they don't receive social protection benefits and have no health insurance: **they are discriminated against and excluded from the state system. For Ambrela, Brsjacka Buna is its biggest challenge in its work as an NGO.**

We are a service to support families there. We help them to obtain their personal documents and to have their children included in the

education system. We support them to realize their rights and to have access to health and social care. They believe and trust in Ambrela and its members. If our team sees that we can help, we will do what is needed. For example, if a family needs support with ID or personal documents, while this is not part of my official role, I help out by getting their personal details and passing this information on to my colleague, Llatifa, who follows up.

In this way, the families retain confidence and trust. When they know you as one of their own, they are more open to speaking about any issues or problems they may have.

What would I like to tell other people outside from Shutka?

I'd like to tell them that before judging anyone, they should first get to know the people, to understand who they are, what their problems are, and why they are in the situation that they find themselves.

We want people to stop thinking of the Roma people as a people who behave badly, who are poorly educated, or who steal. **If they are open to this approach, they will soon discover that the Roma people are good people who aspire to more education.**



The Circus is Like a Rainbow

By Benoît and Véronique Reboul-Salze, in collaboration with Marian Milea et Tania Pulcino

The first time we went to the Parada Foundation, something clicked right away. We had never met before, and yet it was as if we had always known each other!



The House of the Foundation Parada pulses with life on every floor. You can feel it even before you walk through the gate. Young people, children, and sometimes parents are all there talking together. Every face shows the signs of a difficult life, but full of smiles even if they are fleeting.

Children and teens who live and work in the streets of Bucharest can come to the second floor to take a break and hang out with other people. They can eat there, wash their things, and take care of themselves. Some get tutoring there, in the hope of joining the “Second Chance” school. Other, more personal, forms of support are available too.

There is also the Caravan team, which goes out in search of these children and young people living in the streets that are often invisible to the residents of Bucharest, and omitted from the official record since their country became part of the European Union.

Ionut, the Director of Parada, states often that everything occurs through *“restoring their dignity by talking and by being open and available”*.

Everything is happening on the ground floor. This is the circus area, where they practice, rehearse and prepare to perform. From our own experiences doing circus arts on the street, we know that they are an incredible tool for helping people to grow together as a group.

It's the place where Marian and Tania are working. They got to know Parada when Miloud, the founder and a clown artist, was working closely with all of the boys and girls living in the streets and in the train stations of the capital city of Romania, just after the change of regime in 1989.

This is how Marian describes his teaching approach:

“The circus is a way for children and teens to connect with society. Being part of a circus

means performing in front of an audience, on a stage or on the street, and being seen in a positive light by a society that does not accept you. Life in the streets does not teach you History or Geography. It teaches you how to survive. Society doesn't accept children who live in the streets. The circus fosters their self-esteem. It takes a lot of courage to get up in front of people, and the circus is the 'instrument' that gives them that courage. We can use it to struggle against poverty.

“Circus arts give people a chance to reclaim space they are excluded from by overcoming their shyness. They help change the idea that people have about who children living in the streets really are.... “Oh! You're the one I saw in the show. That was good, it's ok.”

Marian is currently a socio-cultural facilitator. Miloud trusted him. Then Marian trained in several circus schools. He organized tours for the Parada circus troupe in different European countries. For him, the most important thing is

to stay here in Romania and continue to work with children who live in the street, as well as with the new generation of facilitators. All this gives him a lot of hope.

Tania started out participating in the Parada circus when she was 15 years old, while she was living in a children's care home. With Parada, she was trained to be a social facilitator. She says:

"I come here to lead circus workshops with Marian. It's wonderful for me to work with children who live in the streets. The children work on juggling, acrobatics, and all the activities involved in a circus. These children living in the street are so curious. For them, the circus is a big game, and Parada is like a family."

Marian adds, *"It is a game, but it becomes a serious game. It's not just to pass the time. Through the game, we can get to something deeper. It's really hard to work and only use circus arts. We use circus arts not just to recruit young people and artists. We are not a*

circus arts school. We are only a pathway for young people. It's the beginning of a journey for them. You stay, you learn so that afterwards you can fly with your own wings. You continue your life.

"We dream together, we make a community, a team. We do what we do and we do it well. The young people come in with so much hope. We're there to pass on our experience."

Flying with their own wings, finding their own way, that's exactly what happens for dozens of young people who participate in Parada.



Marian talks about one of these young people, Florin.

“He was part of the circus troupe. One day, we learned that the police were looking for him. Without papers, it's complicated: how can you prove your identity? Your age? Florin had never had a birth certificate or an ID card. How is this possible in a European country? An ID card is so important.

“One day, in downtown Bucharest, a police officer saw Florin in a performance. Being seen performing a circus show made all the difference for him. The police officer recognized him and then came to the House of Parada. There the police officer took the time to explain the procedure that we could go through so that Florin could get his ID card.

“But why had the police never done that before, we wondered? It changed Florin's life!

“With proper identification, he was able to participate in the Homeless World Cup in Mexico.

“Florin is a normal boy, like all the children and teens we know. Enabling society to start accepting them and helping them is so important.

“It's unacceptable to see these children and their families living in the streets, sometimes worn out by drug use or illness, and all too often physically or emotionally exploited.”

Circus arts provoke changes for everyone.

For Tania, *“It comes from being curious and getting involved.”* For Marian, *“It's like a rainbow: you focus on what is beautiful, not on the difficulties.”*



There is Always Hope

From Mrs Y (Hungary)

Véronique and Benoît Reboul-Salze have known Mrs Y. through activities at the Community center of a village in Hungary, first when she was sixteen years old. They lost contact and when they met again, the community center has been closed for many years. But from her experience of the activities there, Mrs Y stayed open to understanding the world around her. Each time they meet, they are impressed by her courage, her energy and her determination to support her family, her friends and neighbors. Mrs Y., with her husband, has now 5 children and 3 grandchildren. She wants poverty to be stopped for everyone. Here she bears witness to the ways she tries to help others to make life better in her village.



I would have wanted to do better work than what I have now that we are sweeping the streets. Usually I don't accept that kind of work. I don't like it when they dominate me. Here, it isn't like it is in other places. They check us and they give orders in a humiliating way. People who give you work put pressure on the people they are employing, to keep them from speaking out. It isn't fair and I want people to know this.

I went through all this, and because I am a person who argues, I had bad experiences. I am arguing, but there are consequences for my family.

For example, this year, winter has been brutally hard. Wood was distributed, but some were told “You weren’t with me, you didn’t vote for me. You can go, no wood for you”. A man was standing there in his shoes, without socks. I felt very sorry for that man when they didn’t give him wood. There were also women who were not given wood. Such things happen. There is shocking poverty in the village.

My husband works all day so that our children can have something to eat. I know how hard it is. Many times, my husband just didn’t have any more strength but I still did somehow. Because we don’t have school degrees, we have to work hard with our hands.

There is always hope. You have to believe there is always a way out. Although I am not a believer, I always find a way.

I find it because of my children. I have never been so desperate that I say “Oh my god, what will happen?”, and stay at home. Rather, I stand up, I start moving. We don’t steal, we don’t cheat. There is always a place where I can go, where I can find help. I always find something to make things better.

You must always concentrate on the children. That’s why I don’t show when something isn’t going well so that the children will never know. Sometimes even I become sad, but only if the children don’t see it. This is what I have to do.

Four of my children are here with me, plus the two little babies of my daughters and their partner. I sometimes think to myself: “What will happen to my children?” A proper mother thinks this way. If the children are there, you must make a living, because life has to go on. In Hungary, we say “You move every stone” which means “We try everything”.

When I can, I help my neighbors, because they too are poor. We aren't the poorest, because we can feed our children. I try to help the poorest. I give them advice. My sister told me "While I am still asking myself if I would help someone, you have already done it".

But I must say that I am broken, life has broken me already.

The other day, I asked for an appointment at the beautician to recover some strength. I was ready to go to have a facial. But my little daughter fell ill and I had to buy medicines for her. I didn't get there, just like for other places I need to go to. Although I would like to go, and it would be good for me, I can't.

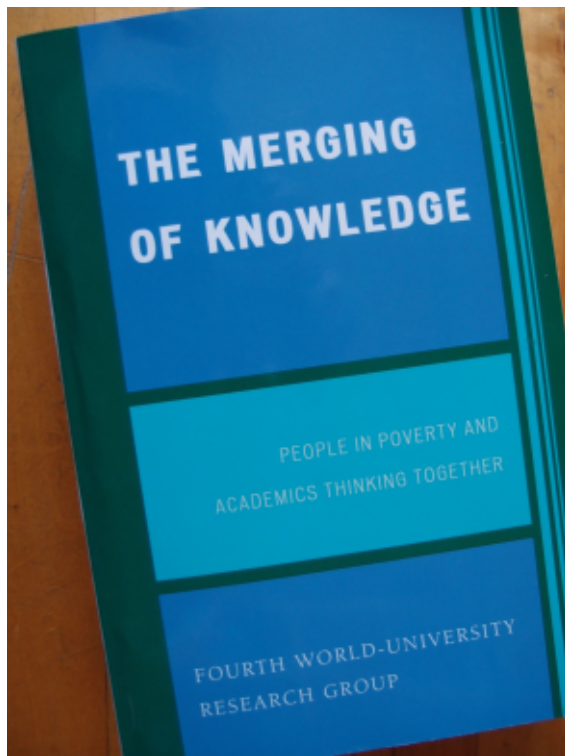
Poor people are the same people as others. We have the right to live the same life. Even if we are in poverty, we are the same people.



When Knowledge Merges and Increases

This story describes the beginning of a participative research approach in merging knowledge with populations in situations of extreme poverty.

By Francoise Ferrand (France)



In the year 2000, a group of academic researchers, ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps members, and activists with a lived experience of poverty came together to discuss civic engagement. The encounter was part of an ongoing research project run with the Merging Knowledge research approach.

Merging Knowledge is a research technique that seeks to create spaces where people in poverty can openly share their thoughts with researchers as equals. By breaking down the sort of unequal relationships between researchers and subjects that traditionally define academic work, Merging Knowledge opens up all those involved in a project to new perspectives.

In this discussion, the theme was that of the essential needs of all human beings.

A housing professional spoke of the hierarchy of people's needs that must be respected and closed her presentation by referring to Maslow, an American psychologist.

The activists and I, who co-led the group on participation, had never heard of Maslow. I asked for an explanation. A specialist then drew Maslow's 'Pyramid of Needs' on a board. Along with the activists, I discovered this ranking of needs and especially the hierarchy established by Maslow: namely the principle that one cannot access the next level if the needs of the lower levels have not already been met.

Carine, Patricia, and Baudoin reacted similarly to Joelle, who said, *"I lived in a slum outside the village but I still needed to listen to classical music in order to keep going"*.

An animated debate followed on the place and importance given to people's needs and who defines them?

A professional in charge of a Community Centre for Social Action had previously explained how his town dealt with people without homes: all those people are provided with housing. In one case, the professional explained how, a short time after

being rehoused, one of these people, aged around 40, was found dead in his apartment. *"He died decently"*, concluded this professional. The activists asked questions: *"Right, he had a home, he was off the streets, but had we really taken into account this man's needs?"*

For Carine, Patricia, Baudouin, and Joelle, people's needs cannot be divided up so neatly as Maslow would have it. They stressed the importance of seeing the person as a whole: not only seeing what he is lacking, but also his aspirations.

It seems that only the primary needs are considered essential for people living in poverty. *"A person may have cultural needs even if he doesn't have any food or a home. It's sometimes the only thing left he can hang on to"*, they said.

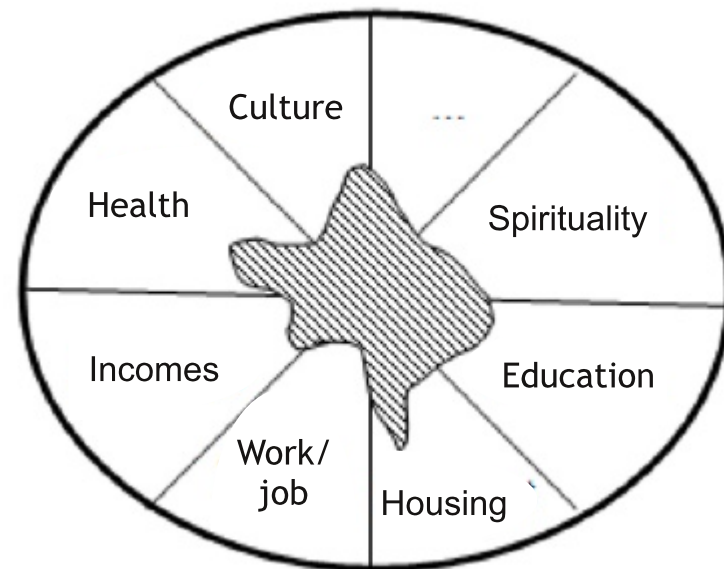
Joelle explained: *"My daughter doesn't care about sleeping in a bed because instead of buying a bed she prefers to use the money for her horse riding lessons"*.

Patricia quoted Genevieve Anthonioz de Gaulle, President of the ATD 4th World Movement. During the Second World War, Genevieve was in the concentration camp at Ravensbruck: *“She told us that, deprived of everything, it was culture and spirituality that had helped her to hold out.”*

At this point in the debate, I suggested that the activists use the board to present their way of seeing people’s needs. The pyramid became a circle divided into parts, with a need written

in each part, in no particular order (health, culture, resources, housing, spirituality, education, work, etc.).

The community centre professional then suggested that this diagram become an evaluation tool for both the person with the needs and the professional: *“In that way, the person may be relatively happy with his housing, but worried about his health, his children’s schooling, his work....”*



The pyramid transformed into a circle is now taught in a number of social worker training institutes, and the findings of the Merging Knowledge and Practices experimental research programmes have resulted over the years in a number of training programmes in professional institutions. There is also an increased interest in the academic world in participative merging knowledge research programmes which take into account the knowledge and experience of people facing extreme poverty.



Inspired by a walnut tree

By Marina Penciu - Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (Romania)

On Livezilor street, in the most run-down area in the Ferentari neighbourhood in Bucharest, there is an old walnut tree, with big, strong branches and a lot of garbage around it. Across the street from the tree, there is a block of flats, no. 38, with the address written carefully on a piece of paper above the main entrance.

That piece of paper is the only decent part of the building. Everything else looks heart-breaking, just like all the other buildings in the neighbourhood. Almost none of them have been renovated since they were built more than 40 years ago. No. 38, 15 square meters of studio apartments, belongs to an ensemble of degraded real estate. Built between 1970 and 1980, the studio apartments were originally “homes for the unmarried”, and were used as temporary housing for workers with no family. Today, entire families live in these cramped one-room apartments.



© photos Goran Mihailov

When you enter the building, the scene changes. There is no garbage. The interior looks and smells clean from the ground floor to the fourth floor. It wasn't always this way. Until recently, the building was full of mould, garbage, and destroyed walls. Water leaked in and windows were missing. In 2017, these deplorable housing conditions represent the reality for the poorest and most vulnerable inhabitants of Romania's capital.

The people living in no. 38 explain how they tried for years to solve their problems and transform the building into a clean, safe space for their families but they could never manage to do anything. They could not count on the local government because there was always a lack of funds. But there was also mistrust between neighbours who were always accusing each other of trying to make money out of renovation efforts.

The mobilisation of people living in no. 38 started with a challenge launched by the Policy

Centre for Roma and Minorities Foundation in partnership with the electrical company Enel Romania. This was part of a major effort to improve access to electricity and create better living conditions in Ferentari. The idea of the project was disseminated within the community by "The Mothers' Club", a civic group formed by more than 20 women, some Roma, some not. They are determined to change the bad image of the Ferentari neighbourhood so they are working together to search for and identify solutions to the community's problems.

Ten thousand lei (€2.200) were available through this project on the condition that a group could find at least 15 people who would choose a problem affecting a small community, then find and implement the solution themselves. The inhabitants of no. 38 created a team of neighbours who decided to renovate the staircase of no. 38, repair the roof, and install a new door for the building and windows in the stairway.

With the foundation's help, this new team organised their resources and planned the work itself. With Enel's funding, they bought the necessary materials. They did the renovation work all by themselves.

It was not easy getting people together and organising them. They said, *“Not all the people living here got involved. We could not convince everybody, but some of those who did not work bought bottles of soda for the people actually doing the work.”*

People worked mostly on weekends and in the evenings after coming home from their jobs, some working as late as 20:00. Almost 30 people got involved in all aspects of the project, from planning the activities (end of March) to finishing the renovation (beginning of August). They worked in their free time as they could, dividing the projects, supporting each other, and making sure everything got done.

Even though it was an arduous project, the residents are delighted and they “get goose

bumps” when they talk about what they’ve accomplished. They are happy to congratulate each other for the work they’ve done. Someone described the special efforts of one resident: *“She’s a tenant with two children and one of them is very sick, but she helped. She swept the floors; she painted the whole stairway, not only the part on her floor. And there is another lady that got very involved, even though she has epilepsy”*. In addition to the renovations, the project helped build confidence among the residents and brought them closer as a community.



© photo Goran Mihailov

You can see their eyes sparkle every time they tell their story. They are happy with their work and thankful for the help they received without which *“their hopes would have remained unfulfilled”*. Today they look after their clean building like it’s a treasure: *“Our stairway is cleaner than all the others. There’s a different atmosphere here now, so we make sure everybody keeps it clean. Even my six year old daughter takes care of the building and forbids people to touch the walls.”*

Even though there is much joy in no. 38, nobody forgets that problems still remain. The garbage keeps piling up outside because there are no garbage containers. This leads to infestations of rats and cockroaches, flooding in the cellar, water dripping down the walls and the list goes on. For the people of Ferentari, their only hope is to be better organised in order to improve their community. They want to serve as an example to others in the neighbourhood and to help end the prejudice that people feel towards their home.

The residents of no. 38 keep making plans in front of the building, right across from the walnut tree. This old tree they love is a great companion in guarding the community and inspires them, especially when the wind blows and makes the garbage disperse, just with the power of its leaves.



Team of Hope

A group of boys playing in the Homeless World Cup have their eyes opened to a better life.

By Vitkor Kirkov (Bulgaria)

From 29th August 2017 to 5th September 2017, the Homeless World Cup took place in Oslo, Norway. A team from Bulgaria, the 'Team of Hope', participated in this football tournament.



It will be the sixth year that we have a Team of Hope. The most important thing is to create a team. Most of the players, boys, have never left their neighborhood, their city before. So even coming to Sofia for the preparation is a big challenge for them. We are assembling them for 50 days so that they can be fully prepared. They are staying all together without their parents, without any social workers, to focus on one purpose: the football championship.

We work by following the laws of the Suggestopedia method. It's not a classic way to learn. It's a Bulgarian, very dynamic and alternative methodology using art and play in a friendly and free environment. Young people won't stay on a chair to learn. Suggestopedia gives them the opportunity to move and to learn at the same time. We use it for sport, but also to help them learn English. Every morning, there is an English course in order to give them more opportunities to communicate with others during the championship.

It gives them the possibility to interact, to do what they want. Each afternoon is given over to football training with the coaches. And now, one boy from children's care homes became a coach and works with me.

We'd like to propose this way of working all year round for different children. At this moment, we have local teams in seven different towns in Bulgaria, with between 70 to 100 young people involved in total. And the National team is changing every year. The boys going to the Homeless World Cup are coming from these teams. They are from children's care homes, from temporary accommodations, have been released from jail, or are boys from Roma neighborhoods. When they first become involved in a team, they don't really have a purpose in their lives.

At the beginning, most of the boys, if they think that they aren't so good, they stop playing. But we aren't asking them to stop. If they join a team, we give them all our love

and all our experience to improve their lives. We give them opportunities, but they need to make the best of them.

Some are more talented than others, but that isn't the most important thing.

For example, one of these boys started to play in 2011. He was living in a temporary accommodation in Sofia, renting a room there. At the beginning, he wasn't able even to stop the ball - it was like the ball bouncing against a wall! But finally, 3 years later he joined the National Team for the Homeless Cup in Chile. He wasn't such a good player, but he worked a lot during these 3 years and finally joined the national team. Now this guy is working in a window cleaning company. He's doing fine.

All this work with these boys enables them, step by step, little by little, to have the possibility to change their lives, to find a job.

When it happens 3 to 6 months after they have started, we can really say that it is because of their participation in the Team of Hope. Actually, many of them aren't very serious during the first trainings, but 3 months later, they completely change. I believe, it's not just because of the Team of Hope.



It gives them the chance to see that others have a better life, have a job and enough money to live. They change their way of thinking, their way of working. They are in contact with other people, so this is a chance to change their lives for the better. Lots of

them now have jobs for example.

What I am sure of is that participating in a football team is opening their minds.

For them, and especially for those participating in the Homeless World Cup in Oslo, the Team of Hope is changing the way they accept the world and the way the world accepts them.



Where do Leaders Come From?

In Bushwick, Brooklyn, USA, a young mother finds a community center that gives her just what she needs to move her life forward.

By Marcia Kresge (United States of America)



A young woman named Toni came to the community center where I used to work, asking for money to feed her children. We did not have cash on hand to help her. We gave her a walk around the center instead, described the computer area, the dance and piano lessons, and that we had an open mic with guest artists and a potluck dinner once a month. She was so excited to see the computer area, and maybe she could read a poem or one of her short stories at the next open mic? Of course!

After that she started coming in every day with her computer and would write and write. Several board members complained that her then seven year old son was watching TV all day in the center. More complaints from board members came in when Toni stayed all day while other neighbors and residents only occasionally used the computer area.

As the center manager I was under pressure to control how many free hours of internet Toni used, how long her son could stay and watch TV.

Sometimes she left him by himself while she went home to take care of her elderly partner who could not work. There was also pressure to bring in more people to use the space. Nevertheless, it was clear that Toni was looking for work and trying to improve her situation - she regularly asked us for help with her resume or on cover letters.

One day, Toni explained that coming to the center gave her space to think. She said that she told her family, *“Mommy’s going to work at the center.”* She came every day staying until closing time, mingling with residents and other members and working on her computer.

One open mic night, Toni shared a story and everyone was moved. She shared 3 poems, too. She asked everyone to be ready for the release of her first book of poems, to be published online. It seemed indeed she was working, just not for any wages.

As the months rolled by, Toni kept coming to the center. She asked us to proofread her book. At the next open mic she sang a poem in blues style. What a voice she revealed. Her son was there in the audience and her teenage daughter and her friend came to see Mom’s work.

For someone living in poverty with the stresses of raising a family combined with her determination to keep working on what she was passionate about, Toni had a gift for networking that was revealed when she came up with the idea to have the open mic every week.

Toni got table cloths, candles and curtains to transform the open studio into a jazz club. Her initiative was so appreciated because she, from being in the center all the time, and linking with likeminded musicians, poets and artists, believed that the community needed a club to share their art. Just as those of us who worked in the center believed that an underserved community needed an open mic

and exposure to various artists from outside the hood, she believed that we needed to go one step forward and have a weekly get together to hear what was being produced locally.

Toni managed all the preparations. On opening night, the Board came and changed their minds about how the space was used. They experienced the results of having space and time to grow where before they seemed to believe the center resources were not being used properly. What happened? The center had unknowingly “fed” a new leader in the community.

One board member offered to coach Toni in developing an audience and bringing in donations. The board member explained that if we charge admission, the musicians and poets could earn some money, and maybe Toni could get something for her organizing. That was the beginning of change for both the community center and for Toni.

Today, you can see Toni published her book. The title, “From Me to You,” shows her heartfelt vision to share through poetry what inspires her in life.



“I’ll never give up!”

A member of the Roma Community in Mintia, Romania, teaches dance and music, and it encourages children to go to school.

By Florin Michi (Romania)



Dance and music are everybody’s joy in my community. Seeing that, I decided to do some education through dance with them. We started the group in 2009 and were even invited abroad, for example in France and in Geneva, Switzerland. We also participated in the TV-show ‘*Romania’s Got Talent*’.

When my community saw where the music took us, they - and especially the children - wanted to learn to dance. So I set up a cultural association. While culture is about 90% of what we do, about 10% is concerned with social issues. In this way, I was able to attract their attention and they decided to join me; they saw that we can go much further this way.

I realized that it is more difficult in our community, but I did not give up because I am compassionate with the children of this generation.

The parents send them to school. But they don't do anything else for the rest of the day. They don't do their homework or anything useful. Knowing this, I wanted to do something. Why let them not make the best use of their time outside? We can do something together, although nobody is paying me and I don't earn any money. I have experienced many different things in my life and I am integrated into the society, so I could help them integrate as well. There are so many things that are holding us back. There are many bad examples, but also good ones. But people, by which I mean Romanians, remember only the bad things that the Roma do and they label us all the same. I said to myself, let's change something, so that my community stops being dishonoured.

Through dance they can see the world and this gives them the courage to go to school.

A few days ago, a parent came to me and told me that his child didn't go to school. I sat and

talked to the child and said that school is very important. I said to him, *"Whoever doesn't go to school shouldn't come to the rehearsals either, because I will not teach them"*.

The next day the child woke up early and went to school because he was afraid of not being able to come to my dance classes anymore. This is good news for me, because if things work that way, the children know that I can gently "pressure" them to go to school. They need to go to school, to learn how to behave and how to act in society, and after that we can dance to give them joy, to motivate them, and to give them something to look forward to.

I think that everything starts with education, so a child should be able to go as much as possible to school and to different places.

For example, a child can be learning now in Mintia, then later in Deva, and many things can change for the better for that child: teachers, pupils, mentality, everything.

And the child can see things even beyond this, such as high school, vocational school, and university.

Dancing is good for personal motivation.

If I ask a child to learn a poem, he will not learn it. But if he goes there and dances in front of the public and after that I ask to him learn a poem, this timnne he will learn it. I am talking also about older children, children that are in high school, like my own child who is in 9th grade. When they go to high school, it is normal that their mentality changes.

To have someone behind you, who supports you, this is what is missing in our community.

I believe that one day I will succeed because I know that Roma love music. I like to say to others to keep going because it is possible to change things. Even though we don't have big results that have a big impact on the community, knowing that there is a group of

thirteen children that can learn something is important to me.

My dream is for certified teachers to teach music to the Roma children and to make professional instruments available for them to play.

I will never give up.



Bringing Everyone Together

In Hungary, in a small village, key workers of an organization, prepare on their own a Christmas party which opens new possibilities to improve the relationship within the village for the long term.

A story told by Balog Jenőné (Móni) and Gertiver Erszébét (Erzsi) - Hungary

Moni has been working for 6 years now in her village of Told in Hungary. She is one of 9 key workers from the Real Pearl Foundation, which runs a community development program there. She coordinates the different programs linked to the village's community centre.

Erzsi has been working with Moni for one year. Erzsi explained: *“Our village is a dead end. We have no jobs, no grocery store, nothing.*



The Real Pearl Foundation spends a lot of time with the children, improving their learning skills. They organize a meeting every week where we can discuss many things, both with them and among ourselves. A lot has changed around here. Most importantly, we get along much better. If we have a disagreement, we can talk it out. We enjoy being together. More and more of us think that together we can improve life here. I believe this tiny village has a future and that our children will have it better.”

Moni adds: *“We have a garden where there are vegetables and spices. A new project is to harvest the tomatoes. We organized programs for the community every week and also for the children. The women of the village are doing sewing work, prepared from the drawings of the children. They can earn some money this way.”* Moni and Erzsi are also painting drawings made by children on the wooden boxes and on textiles. They paint icons.

What they are most proud of is the Christmas party from last year. Nobody from the team of the Real Pearl Foundation was available to organize it so Moni decided to organize it herself and to make it a surprise for the managers of the foundation: *“At the end of the community program, I asked the parents to stay a bit more, with the children. The parents became our partners. I talked with them about the Christmas party when the people from the Foundation weren’t there. I also got the parents involved, I encouraged them to go on stage and sing together with the children.”*

Then they prepared once a week, with the children rehearsing the songs and with Moni speaking with the parents to prepare the party.

Erzsi, of course, helped: *“We rehearsed a lot with the children. We rehearsed the songs, the poems, everyone’s turn in the play, and I helped guiding them. The small children - you know how sweet they are - we had to tell them to stay put and not to wonder off, but it was very enjoyable!”*

Moni was amazed by the enthusiasm of everyone:

"I told every person to bake a tray of pastries and I was surprised because I never would have thought that the people from the village would come. And they were so many.

The community centre was too small for all of us. Also, people that we haven't seen for a year showed up and for me it was a big surprise to see them arriving with the children and also carrying pastries. We were able to set more tables and I was overcome with emotion seeing that it was possible to bring everyone together and that they supported us. The most beautiful thing was when the children were on stage, everyone dressed in white, all with candles in their hands and we started singing. They sang beautifully and quite a few people got emotional.

That was when I felt like a huge weight was lifted off my chest and thank God, everything went smoothly and it was beautiful! To see people whom you haven't seen all year come along and sitting with us was tremendous.

And we succeeded in bringing everyone together and they were helping, do you understand? It was something that I would never have dreamed of! That Christmas was about celebrating love and everyone feeling happy!"



Nora L.Ritok, founder of the Real Pearl Foundation, remarked on what had occurred: *"The Christmas program was wonderful. I think it was the first event that they organized alone.*

They experienced their own strength and the strength of the community. After, Moni and the small group who prepared the activity, organized other events on their own. And many times, they proposed a new approach.”

After the Christmas party, only one family didn't come back to the community center, due to tension. Moni shared many times how difficult it is to involve all the families of the village and that some do not want to join in: *“I don't always understand them, but we continue to try...”*

“I really love my job, even if sometimes it's difficult. When we don't succeed, it affects me, but I also experience joys that encourage me to continue what we are doing. This Christmas party has been one such joy.”



I Don't Even Know Their Names

Dramane left his family when he was only a child. His family's position within its community was weakened by his departure. Little by little, Dramane is reviving his ties with the past and his family is re-establishing a place in the village.

By Guillaume Charvon (Burkina Faso)



Every Wednesday over several months, with Yacouba, a Burkanibé member of the ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps, we would meet with Dramane, a 13 year old boy living in the streets of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. He was not only participating in the 'Library Under the Streetlights' project, he began to respond to the friendship we had offered. He often came to see us at the "Courtyard of 100 Trades", a place where for over 30 years the isolated children, youngsters and adults came to learn, share their knowledge, cultivate their strength and hope that they could overcome their poverty. The start of a new phase in his life had arrived for Dramane.

So we invited him to participate in a masonry workshop being held at the Courtyard. He wouldn't earn a lot of money, but he would have the opportunity to follow something through with others, something he would be proud of. Together with a group of youngsters,

we laughed, sweated, and encouraged each other and finally managed to straighten the mud walls of one of the Courtyard buildings. “I’m a builder, just like my father”, Dramane told us proudly. We had become true friends!

In Burkina Faso we have a proverb which says, *‘One cannot be someone’s friend without also knowing his family’*. When discussing our experiences during this workshop and our friendship together, we told Dramane that we would like to meet his family in order to present to them the workshop of which he was so proud. Dramane confided in us his wish to learn to sew. Shortly after, he accepted to join a training centre where he began to study tailoring.

At the same time, Yacouba and I began visiting his family on a regular basis in a region some distance from Ouagadougou. Each visit provided the opportunity to learn about each other, to show photos of Dramane in his training centre and above all to get advice about Dramane and his future. After more than

a year and several visits, Dramane’s father explained that he lived away from the village with his family as he had been held responsible for Dramane’s departure. He was suspected of selling him, and many people in the village still doubted that Dramane was alive.

Dramane, for his part, hadn’t been able to find his place within the group of children at the centre. He fought and then ran away to hide his shame. We proposed that he come with us to meet his family. He was quick to accept, and was full of smiles.

After many years of separation, an intense and emotional event took place when Dramane returned to his family.

He discovered his little brother and sister. Yacouba and I fully understood that returning to one’s family does not mean that you immediately regain your position that you once had. But nevertheless a path opens.....

We took the opportunity presented by this short visit to walk around the village, to greet the village leader, and Dramane's uncles and aunts. They could see that Dramane was really there! On the way back home, Dramane confided, *"My aunts call me by my first name, and I don't even know their names...."*

During the next rainy season, Dramane returned to the village and helped his family to cultivate crops. During the dry season, he left for Ouagadougou, but as soon as the rains started, he went back home again to support his family. Following his father's advice, one year he went to Mali to work with an uncle who had a small business. Dramane is 17 now. He is preparing to get married and to start his own family in his village.

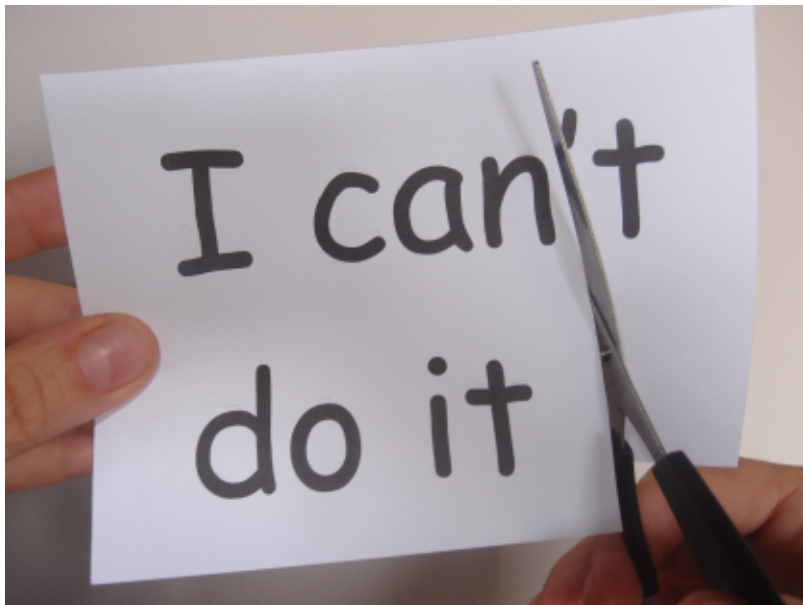
Thanks to some support, then, Dramane had been successful in restoring his and his family's ties with their own village.



Step by step, restarting school

My name is Sergiu and I am 28 years old. I was homeless when I was young. Now I have a job, a house, and a normal life.

By Sergiu, - Bucharest - Romania



But it took me time and support, especially the support I got from Parada. Parada is an NGO involved with kids and young people who are homeless in Bucharest. There are hundreds of people in that situation. Parada is also working with families living in poverty.

Parada worked with me through education. We discussed a lot as they were trying to convince me to go back to school, and finally I got back to school and continued my studies up to High School, and then a lot of doors opened for me. Parada also supported me very concretely, for example to have the necessary materials to go to school.

Parada supported me by giving me advice. This is what they do with all the kids, and all the young people who come to their centre. They don't force them to do anything.

With some generations before my generation it was different. Nowadays, many kids are coming straight from the street.

They never went to school before, as many of us did. I am a bit lucky as I had access to education in the orphanage I lived in before becoming homeless. Now it's very hard to convince the kids to continue their education. Their families are living without school, just surviving day by day. Their parents didn't go to school very long and it's hard for them to support their kids.

Some kids are going to school, trying to finish school. Their families let them go. In some other situations, kids are just coming to the centre, learning the basics, and getting enough to manage day to day. It depends from kid to kid.

When you are a homeless kid, you have the feeling, like I had before, that you will never succeed. The kids are worn out by their situation and they are disappointed in themselves. They don't trust themselves.

That's why, when I thought about restarting school, I didn't think about it only because of Parada, but also because of me. My first step was to convince myself that I could do it, that I would be successful. If you restore your self-confidence by yourself you can do a lot of things.

You need a good environment. You need to always have a positive person around you. We know this because we can't have it all the time. But, even if a person receives complete trust from everyone and all possible support, like Parada gives, if that person doesn't recover his self-confidence by himself, it's all for nothing. Parada, or any people willing to help, will have wasted their time.

Life is really difficult in our situation. If you are complaining all the time, "Why? Why? Why this is happening only to me?" it's like being stuck in the same situation. But when you have a positive attitude, and treat everything that happens as an experience, like I do now, little by little you will succeed.

I continue to come to Parada to help out and to share trust. Some kids say to me, “Oh, I heard you have your own house, your own job.” They ask questions like, “Ok, what’s your secret? How do you manage?” It’s like being an example. Word spreads quickly when you are doing something good.

In the past, in our situation, the people who were around us in Parada trusted us. So, step by step, we were able to recover our self-confidence by ourselves. It’s one of the roles that Parada has with children living in the streets: to tell them, “We trust you.”



A Life Spent Caring for Her Family

Maria decides to stay in her poor neighborhood to support her family and other people living there.

By Maria, Benoit and Veronique Reboul-Salze (Romania)



Photo captions: Martha (Heart's Home) and Maria

Maria has lived in the Grigorescu District in Deva, Romania for the past twenty years, ever since the neighbourhood was created from the buildings of an old pig farm.

One of the residents said, "When you live in a place that used to be a pig farm, you become an animal. Though you know that's not true, it still affects you."

Maria is 63 and has 24 grandchildren. When you listen to Maria, you understand why this area seems dirty compared to others:

"Many people live here: children, their mothers. The mothers send their little children to put the garbage in a container, but it's too high and they can't throw the bags in correctly, so they put them on the ground. Then the wind blows everything away. I'm not happy about that, but what can I do? Inside our houses, we try to keep everything nice and clean. We painted the walls in the other room and, this week, we'll paint this wall. The first room is clean and this one will soon be clean too. We're people living in poverty".

In two buildings not far from here, there is an on-going rehousing project. Maria was offered a flat there last year, but she preferred to stay in this neighbourhood, even though she really wants to leave it. She gave the flat she was offered to one of her two daughters living with her.

“I was offered a flat that only had one room. I’ve got another daughter who has three children, Narcis, Zana and Emmanuel. When her husband came back, I let Elena live in the new flat, and I stayed here with my other daughter and her two children. We’ve got two bedrooms. I’ve got one and my daughter has the other. We don’t close the door. We live together and I help her.”

Maria doesn’t want to leave this neighbourhood without her children and grandchildren. She’ll stay until they all can leave together. She remembers that it took 10 years to get electricity installed in the local houses. She still has to fetch water the single water tap outside.

When volunteers who didn’t live in the neighbourhood came to play with the children there, Maria helped to foster a peaceful atmosphere in their activities. This is one of the ways she helps out in her neighbourhood.

“I feel good here. I don’t have any problems. I just don’t like all of this clutter here in the yard. You see how it is. But I help my family. I take care of the babies, I do the cooking for everyone, and I do the laundry. The police came here not too long ago and said, ‘Maria, God put you here on earth so that you can help others.’ That’s what I do every day. I wake up in the morning, wash, and pray to our Father in heave. I work and I work, and I wash and I work. I always work. I always pray, ‘God, give me strength. God, please don’t let me get sick.’”



I am 13 and I Play Football With Migrants

In the beginning I was afraid, but then thanks to football, we became friends.

By Dorian (France)



photo blog : <http://www.histoiresordinaires.fr/>

My name is Dorian, I am thirteen. I go to a secondary school in a Paris suburb and seventy migrants have just come to our town. They have been hosted by a local association and set up in a building just outside the industrial area and next to a municipal stadium. The local paper had announced their arrival.

I also live just outside the industrial area and I was expecting them impatiently, but also with some anxiety because I did not quite know who they were, and I even thought they might be dangerous and would come and annoy us.

A seventeen-year old migrant was the first to arrive from Africa before the others and he had no documents. He had been welcomed by the local association and he came there every day. That is where he learnt French. He also received some help there to get his documents. Then, registered with the Job Centre, he was able to find a job.

He joined us to play football in the municipal stadium. We got to know him. As he was starting to speak French, we talked.

One month later, when the other seventy migrants arrived, some inhabitants in the town were not in favour and distributed an anonymous letter in all the letter boxes of the town to say that the migrants were not welcome and that they were dangerous. Fortunately, the mayor reacted immediately and sent a letter to all the inhabitants, as well as publishing it on the town website and in the town magazine. He explained that the migrants were looked after by a serious association, that they were not dangerous, and that we should not listen to those who had written this letter and *“did not even have the guts to sign it”*.

Some reassured migrants turned up on the football pitch one day. They played amongst themselves on one side of the pitch and we played on the other.

Then about an hour later, one of the migrants came to talk to us. My friends and I used the few English words we knew to get better acquainted with them. And we realised they were very friendly.

The following day and the following weekends, we played football with them. One day, there were up to thirty of us, about twenty migrants and ten of my friends. **Moreover, the migrants adapted to us: at first, as most of them were around twenty years old, we were afraid of them as they used to hit the football quite strongly, but when we started playing with them, they played a bit more softly to adapt to us.**

One day, a photographer who worked for the town, walked by and took photos of us playing with the migrants. He liked this very much and his photos were published in the town paper.

Gradually we became friends, but we still find it quite difficult to communicate, so the first migrant who was now very proficient in French helped us by acting as an interpreter so that we could understand one another better.

This is how we learnt that they originated from countries at war, that some of them had been subject to violence, and that they had fled their country to escape that violence.

We are still playing peacefully together and we meet new migrants since out of the seventy who originally arrived, I would say I have met about forty of them. Now, I am keen to meet the others.



“Come on! Let’s look together for the keys to friendship and peace!”

TAPORI is a network of children whose motto is: **“We want all children to have the same chances.”** They work together to make this hope a reality. With Tapori, children from all over the world create puppets and write true stories to show that it is possible to build peace, thanks to the friendship between all children.

From Opatija and Lovran in Croatia.

Once a week, during our workshops, Children Forum Society “Our children” of Opatija in Croatia, we talked and discussed a lot about children’s rights, and how to prevent poverty and social exclusion in our country, but also all around the world.

For this activity, every child wrote a short event from his life where one of the rights of the children was violated. Afterwards, we made our puppets with our stories.



They represent our friends and their lives. With other children, we made our chain of friendship and peace with messages.

It is also an opportunity for the children to participate in making decisions

with adults in their city and in their country. Each year, we meet with the representatives from the Government and the Ombudsman for Children of Croatia to present our work. These puppets and true stories are part of it.

My friend Sena lived in a home for unwanted children. No one wanted to help her or to hang out with her. I helped her studying. We became friends. She found her new home in Bosnia.





She lives there now. I think that we are all equal and should be friends.

Jan, 12 years old

My friend Alex is new in our school and she is different religion. All kids at school usually make fun of her. One day I saw her cry at school and when I asked her what's wrong she said that everyone was telling her she will never have friends. I felt really bad for her. I told her that I will be her friend. She was very happy and I was glad that I made her happy. I don't think we should make fun of someone because of their religion.

Emily, 14 years old.



This is my friend Benfik. He's 12 years old. He's a gipsy. He goes to school with me. No one wanted to be friend with him and everyone made fun of him. I became his friend. I think, no matter what color someone is, everyone should be friends and color of someone skin is not a reason not to be friends with someone.

David, 10 years old.



These puppets and their stories are coming from Belgrad - Serbia

The Center for the Integration of Youth is running different projects to contribute to create an inclusive society through consultations between children and community. This is done by improving existing mechanisms and creating some new ones, which provide equal chances for the development of each street-involved child and a child who is at high risk of becoming street-involved.

In its Drop-in Shelter, children between 5 and 15 years old can come and find support. They are children who live or work on the streets of Belgrade and who are exposed to numerous risks due to the living conditions of their family. A team of skilled outreach workers regularly visit places where the children live, work or spend their time.

In the Drop-in Shelter named “Svratište za decu” or “A Inn for children”, during one of

the daily basis workshop it runs with children, some puppets were created made from old puppets and new materials. Then they discussed with the children true stories of friendship. Here are two of them.



“I am Strahinja and I am 8 years old. Now I am going to the second grade. My sister, Natasa, is also with me in the same class. I do not like to go to school. Every morning I need to go to the

Drop in Shelter to take a shower before school. If I do not do that, other children in school tease me. Some kids even run away from me. The teacher scoldes them sometimes because of it. I do not like that at all. I don't have friends. My sister and I always play alone.”

“My name is Sanja. I am 11 years old. I live in the informal settlement. I live with my mom, grandmother, sisters and brother.



Last year I went to the first grade. When I went to school, I was older than the other children and I did not have nice clothes like them. In the beginning, I was hiding from them that I was going to the Drop in Shelter. I was ashamed, and even without that knowledge, nobody wanted to hang out with me anyway. My teacher is very good and he has helped me to get used to schoolmates and those around me.

Now I have a best friend Anisija and I go often to her place where we play together and hang out. I'm also playing with other schoolmates”.



United, We Are a Rock

Jöel is a youth living in Majunga, in the north-western part of Madagascar. Together with the inhabitants of a village, he started to act so that the school could have a new roof and could welcome all the schoolchildren.

By Joël Félicien Heriniaina (Madagascar)



Last September, I went to my brother-in-law's native village, more than one hundred kilometres away from Tananarive in order to help him renovate a tomb. Once there, I went for a walk to discover the village and I observed a primary school which was roofless, having no door, and consisting of only two rooms to welcome the schoolchildren.

I was told that the classes took turns to study for only two hours each day and that only the older class had more than two hours teaching each day so that the pupils could pass their primary certificate. In addition, when it was raining, it was impossible to teach and no school took place. Despite all these difficulties, I was also told that the students' results on the final certificate exams were good.

I felt really moved by it all and I enthusiastically decided that something had to be done. I went to see the head of the village to talk to him. He replied: ***“What’s it got to do with you? You are a stranger to this village.”*** I did my utmost to try and keep calm and I explained to him that I did not like the idea that the children had no school when it was raining. He told me he did not have the funds to build a school.

Once back home, I asked my brother-in-law about that school. He answered, *“You should just get on with your job and keep out of that.”* Deep down I thought I had to try and do something. I met the teacher and told him I had no financial means, but I could exchange ideas with him regarding the school. He told me that he wanted to improve the school, but could not find any solution.

Together we went to the town’s office, a good hour’s walk away. When the mayor saw the teacher, he point blank said:

“There are no funds yet to build a school here and you are unable to find the money.” I insisted stating, *“Please, let us discuss it with you, we are all human”*. The mayor replied, *“And who are you to interfere in the people’s business here? You are a stranger and a newcomer to the village.”* I told him why I was in the village. *“Look after the tomb with your brother and go back home”*. He did not want to hear anything more about it.

I am member of an ATD Fourth World group, called ‘Heads Together’, consisting of people from various social milieu and we are used to sharing our ideas with one another to take decisions about the work of ATD Fourth World in Madagascar. I thought of our exchanges of ideas in trying to address the issue of the school. The teacher and I decided to call the parents together and told them: *“The rainy season is getting closer and if you want your school to be restored properly, you can do so by all contributing to it.”*

It was agreed that a teacher would manage the fund. Everyone gave what they could and ten days later, we had enough money to buy metal sheets, wood and nails. The inhabitants managed to buy eight sheets. Even the mayor contributed. We also involved the parents by inviting them to carry out the work themselves and they happily agreed. Putting the roof on was a success. On that day we not only built the roof, but the people also provided the doors. Two months later, the school was fully repaired and today the children can study in comfort and safety even when it is raining.

My brother-in-law encouraged me when he saw the school. The teacher told me, *“You’re still young and you already behave like this? You are a great example to us!”* And I answered:

“If everyone takes up their responsibilities, the nation will go far.”

He went on like this, but I changed the subject, as I am rather shy of being praised. For me, the work done on the school was a success because everyone got involved.



Fight For Your Rights

Two brothers secure their right to housing residency, which empowers them to want to vindicate their other rights for a better future.

By Ramon, Javi and Sophie (Spain)



Ramon and Agustin are brothers. They lived for many years in a neighborhood of shacks in Madrid that was dismantled by the municipal government as part of a development plan for the area. The idea was to build the so-called neighborhood of Valdecarros, where 150,000 people were going to live.

Like many urban interventions in southeast Madrid, it was never completed because of the financial crisis and the bursting real-estate bubble. The majority of the families left and the houses where they had lived were torn down. However, Ramon, Agustin, and their brothers stayed because they had no other place to live. Condemned to live in a small shack, they didn't know they had the right to 'empadronarse', or to register themselves as official residents in their home.

“We are fighting to fill out the documentation”, Ramon explains. “We’ve always been fending for ourselves, looking for scrap metal, working whenever we can... I recycle scrap metal, I put it all on my bike and I take it to the junkyard. Registering ourselves in a shack is difficult, we’ve been living here for many years, more than 40 years....”

Ramon went a couple of years without building a shack because he had lost hope.

“They’ve always taken down our houses and we ended up here...It’s unacceptable to leave people in the street, but that is what has always happened. We have built these shacks because we don’t have any income and we need them”.

Ramon adds, *“They’ve destroyed many of my houses. I’ve constructed 6 houses in las Barranquillas. The police come to tear down the houses every so often”.*

However, a few months ago, his brother, Agustin, had an accident and spent a couple days in the hospital. Ramon built another shack so that his brother would have the rest necessary to recover from the accident. He proudly shows us the shack that he has built, with its two rooms and its fireplace to keep the cold at bay during the winter. Ramon was a construction worker for many years. At the same time, he marked the house with the number 6 to be able to give an address to the police and register as a resident.

In Spain, official residency is key to having access to basic rights, such as medical attention, public housing and minimum income. But when people live precariously with minimum security, obtaining this right that opens the door to so many other rights becomes a process rife with obstacles.

“To register residency you have to ask the police to come and confirm that you live where you say you live, but it’s a slow and tedious process and it takes months for them

to register you. We went to the municipal office and we asked the police to come verify that we live in the shack. It took them a month to come to confirm it, and if you're not home when they come, you have to ask for them to come all over again. We had to go to the municipal office 3 times for them to come register us. We finally achieved it on 16th November 2016". Throughout this long process, Javi, a permanent ATD Fourth World volunteer, accompanied the brothers.

"All of this land belongs to the government, that's why we didn't build better houses. Now we're registered residents at the shack and that gives us a certain security. But we're here illegally".

Achieving residency gave the brothers hope for a better life.

"I think that with residency, I'm going to have more rights, I'll be able to have health care, a transportation card, and I'll also have access to minimum income.

The next step is to get income, so that I can afford food and medicine".

Ramon knows that the process that's left is long and full of administrative hurdles. Even should he make it, the minimum income isn't enough to afford a house because of the high and rising costs of public rent.

"The state says that housing is a right, so they should make housing available for everyone!" says Jose, Ramon's nephew.



“We are in a daily struggle”, says his brother-in-law bitterly. “They want to eradicate slums so that people have their housing and they can pay for electricity, water, and taxes. But of course, it’s not possible for people to live legally. Living illegally is cheaper”.

Illegality isn’t a decision; it’s a consequence of the inaccessibility of human rights. It’s poverty that should be declared illegal. Next to their shack built among so much insecurity, the cornerstone of access to other rights, Ramon’s smile defies poverty and displays hope for a better future.



International Charter for October 17

World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty

*Proclaimed by the United Nations
as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*

Extracts of the International Charter for 17
october 17.

I- Respect the Spirit of the Day

1-The Day is a gathering for peace and human dignity in the spirit of the declaration engraved on the commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty on Trocadero Square in Paris, France.

On 17 October, 1987, defenders of human rights and citizens of all countries gathered together on this square. They paid tribute to the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence. They expressed their conviction that extreme poverty is not inevitable.

They proclaimed their solidarity with those struggling around the world to destroy it.

"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."

Father Joseph Wresinski

2- The Day provides opportunities to promote meetings that would not normally happen in everyday life, between the poorest and other citizens, around a common desire and commitment to eradicate extreme poverty.

3-The Day must recognize and respect the equal dignity of everyone. Recognizing that the poorest are often the victims of all forms of violence everywhere in the world.

4-The Day should include or reflect the commitments and contributions of people fighting extreme poverty on a daily basis. Contributions from the poorest are integral parts of any gathering or initiative.

5- The Day is meant to promote and demonstrate mutual understanding, solidarity and the shared responsibility of all individuals and groups from different backgrounds, working in close collaboration with people living in poverty. Therefore, the preparations leading up to the celebration of the Day should be a process that continues throughout the year.

6- The Day symbolizes the daily struggle of those who live in extreme poverty.

7-The Day reminds us that the poorest are often forced to live in shame. Therefore, organizers must ensure that all activities undertaken on this occasion as well as all messages, press releases and recorded media (texts, photographs, films, videos, etc...)

respect the dignity of people living in poverty who are at the heart of this gathering.

II. Objectives of the Day

To gather together citizens and institutions, public and private, to express their rejection of extreme poverty through, but not limited to, the followings means :

- Meeting, talking and interacting with people in poverty;
- Demonstrating solidarity with people in poverty, including those who are absent or fear to participate;
- Educating and mobilizing all stakeholders – men, women, children, young and old. In this regard, it is important to educate children and youth in human rights and the fight against poverty;
- Enabling every citizen participating either individually or through an organization, to

express its solidarity and to renew its commitment to unite in a common struggle, by doing a gesture significant in the culture of his country and respecting the spirit of Day;

- Giving an international dimension to the celebration of the Day;
- Raising public visibility to the Day.

III. Proposed guidelines to achieve these objectives

- Celebrate the Day in places that recall and highlight the often ignored history of the poorest or that honour and respect the victims of poverty;
- Honour the victims of extreme poverty by reaffirming the link between poverty and human rights.



IV. Misuse of the Day

The Day shouldn't be used as:

- A forum for people with political, administrative or associative responsibilities;
- A platform or venue to claims or personal publicity, or for public or private organizations to publicize, disseminate or claim what they do for the poorest;
- Place where people living in poverty come to display their situation of distress in front of others.

To know more: www.overcomingpoverty.org



ATD
FOURTH WORLD

Contact for South-East Europe :

benoit.reboulsalze@atd-fourthworld.org

+359 876 718 983

www.atd-fourthworld.org

veronique.reboulsalze@atd-fourthworld.org

+359 878 189 254

www.overcomingpoverty.org

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