

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

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## FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 102 -

### WITH CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES, LET'S CREATE A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL !

« *There are no dreams in my head: other people don't like us.* » Anastasia says out loud what so many children think inside.

There are so many children who are not expected to be anywhere, who are constantly criticised for making noise, for being distracted, or for not knowing their lessons. They never hear "good job!" even when they can recite lessons by heart. These are children who are insulted from across the street, who clench their fists when their families are attacked or when people speak badly of their parents. They are children who live in slums, who are driven from place to place, and who cannot attend school regularly. With their parents or alone, they often must flee their country without knowing if they will be welcomed anywhere.

Children living in poverty are first and foremost children who, like everyone else, like to laugh, play and be with others. But from a young age, they have realised how tough the lives of their families are. Fatimata, whose blind parents struggled to earn a living, once told us: *"We often had nothing to eat. But despite everything, we went to school. Our education was fed by our parents' courage. Without them, we would never have been able to learn anything."*

Children can see that their parents are exhausted. They know that, alone, no one can solve that many problems: *"We have to support our parents!"* says Alma.

All children know that no one can live alone, without friends, without someone who respects them. Some take action, such as the Tabori children who live in a large city where war has been raging for years. Their mission is to be "friends of the friendless". They choose to visit others their age, former child soldiers whom everyone is afraid of. They make friends with refugee children from neighbouring countries who they know are alone or mistreated. "A child is a child," they say, "so why are some children set apart?"

Around the world, children and young people are urgently calling for action to slow down climate change so that life on earth can continue. Isn't it equally urgent that these young activists be able to connect with the children and their families who stand up to poverty in their daily lives? What are we doing to help them? Will they be able to count on our ability to unite, to share our experiences, our energy, our know-how to make progress in respecting nature and every last human being?

**Isabelle Pypaert Perrin,**  
Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World  
World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, October 17 2019

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### WORDS FROM THE TEAM

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This year 2019 reminded us that we have to do everything in our power to allow all children to be able to "learn, play and develop physically and intellectually in a safe, supportive and caring environment."<sup>(1)</sup> However, we know that when their families, their parents and they themselves are forced to live in extreme poverty, this is not possible. That is why on October 17, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, the UN reiterated the absolute necessity of "acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty".

In this light, this *Letter to Friends around the World* presents an international workshop which was held in September in Bulgaria, on the theme of "an inclusive education

for all". The participants shared their experiences and worked to establish best practices which would be useful for everyone. They emphasized that it is not possible to achieve inclusive education without involving the parents above all.

In this Letter we can also read messages from children from different parts of the world. They express their worries for their families, that no child be left behind. At their level and with their means, they want to contribute to the development of their community, of their country and want to be seen in their own right as actors in the construction of a world without extreme poverty.

<sup>(1)</sup>Message from the International Committee for October 17

# «INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL»

An international workshop was held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, in early September 2019. This workshop was the result of several years of ATD Fourth World Movement's presence and work in the southeast of Europe as part of a process of mutual understanding with people and groups fighting against poverty. This meeting also was built on the experience of the Mobile School Stolipinovo (Bulgaria).

For three days, 30 participants (parents, professionals, mediators and members of different communities and neighborhoods who are experiencing poverty) from Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Romania and Serbia, engaged in educational projects, worked together on the theme «Inclusive education for all». The meeting was held in five languages.

During the first two days, interactive workshops enabled participants to share their life and work experiences in a very concrete way, and to learn from each other's best practices. "I was shocked by the cruelty of the conditions of life of children living in the streets." "Despite differing situations in each

country, some of the poorest parents' concerns are universal». During an open meeting, they were also able to confront their experiences with those of other people, teachers and families from the Stolipinovo neighborhood in Plovdiv. For some, it was an unusual step outside the neighborhood and one of their first chances to make their voices heard in public.

Then, the participants identified challenges they face and would like to work on together. In this way, they developed priorities, which all have one thing in common: **it is not possible to achieve inclusive education for all without involving parents from the very beginning, while at the same time seeking the participation of all other education stakeholders.**

In conclusion, Elena from Romania shared her impressions, "The time I have spent here has helped me appreciate the work of all these people who are struggling for change. Things don't seem as dark now, and it has also given me a broader perspective."



## Center for Youth Integration - Serbia

Through their outreach teams, the Center for Youth Integration (CYI) goes looking for children, youths and their families living in non-formal settlements of Belgrade. Some of these children do not go to school and support the family budget by doing odd jobs in the city streets. This is why the CYI tries to recreate ties between schools and families.

The children can go to a drop-in shelter as they like. Creative artistic activities such as singing, dancing, art and craft, are offered as well as education support. Steps are being undertaken in dialogue with parents to create a strong agreement so that children can go to school and have access to identity documents if they do not already have them.

An educational programme is offered to youths over the age of 15 and a cafe bar has been opened where they are offered

professional training. This year, after his training, one of the youths asked to work in the drop-in shelter to support children who are in the same situation which he himself has experienced.

The CYI has experimented with an inequality awareness exercise. Each participant is given a paper on which are written a short description of a child's situation and internalizes it. Everyone gets in line, then statements such as, "Both my parents know how to read and write" are read. If the answer is "yes", that person takes a step forward. If it is "No" they stay put. Very quickly it is clear that some children face huge disadvantages to move forward in life, and that they don't all have the same opportunities to learn. The exercise is concluded with a discussion to analyze together what has been felt and learnt.

### - Best practices -

- It is essential not to be alone in order to progress, not to lose bonds with one's community. This can be done thanks to other members of the community who have already had the same experience, or to members of the outreach team;
- Create a regular dialogue with parents by visiting them where they live; and
- Take the time to understand and identify the steps which make it possible to overcome inequalities through education.

## Mobile School Stolipinovo - Bulgaria

The Mobile School Stolipinovo offers the opportunity for creativity and informal education for the children of Stolipinovo, the biggest multiethnic and most looked-down-on neighborhood in Bulgaria. All the inhabitants of this district face exclusion and discrimination. These are heightened

in the areas of the neighborhood made up of barracks, where living conditions are very difficult

Every week, workshops take place in two of the local schools and in one of the improvised areas. The choice was

made to stay outside, so as to give all children the opportunity of coming. This initiative is led



by three groups who have pooled their abilities: The Architectural Workshop for Children, Discovered Spaces and ATD Fourth World.

The accent is put on manual activities which will help the children to learn by experimenting individually or in groups. This happens through the creation of three dimensional models, through play. Paper, cardboard, wood, clay, string and pencils are used. At the same time, a book corner and physical activities are set up so that the children can move from one activity to another. Thanks to the manual work done in the architecture workshop, they are able to work with other children, to communicate together and to gain new skills.

A large number of these children do not always go to school. And yet a father echoed what many others think when he said, "I want all my children to learn at school, to stop to live in the mud as now". A mother added, "We want to say that our lives are extremely difficult. We do our best to ensure a living to our children. It's not enough. We are exhausted."

The most important thing is to move forward with the parents, to have their support and to create links and bridges between schools and families.

### - Best practices -

- Offer a variety of activities by being in the streets: art and architecture, books to read, sport, etc;
- Allow children to achieve rapid and visible results. Making useful everyday objects by hand motivates the children to come. Adapt the activities each week to their interests;
- Ask for the parents' help, offer them to get involved and to take on responsibilities; and
- Be regular over the long-term: the same people, the same day, every week. This creates mutual confidence and makes it possible for people to work together.

## «School – Families – Neighborhood» initiative - France

This initiative, taken by the Mosaic Social Center and ATD Fourth World, brought together all the educational stakeholders in the Lille-Fives district, including the parents, so that all children can succeed in school. Eight years of presence and dialogue through different activities have been necessary to develop the conditions that enable to better understand each other and act together.

Lille-Fives is a neighborhood where many people are experiencing poverty, and where many misunderstandings between parents and teachers occurred. Teachers were thinking that some parents did not care about their children's education because they were not present at the first meeting of the year. On the other hand, some parents said that their children were always placed at the back of the classroom.

Among the tools offered in the neighborhood, the «Little Words of the Tuesdays» enable parents to express themselves, and to make their voice heard from the teachers. Here is how it works:

- A team is posted at the entrance of the school once a week (in this case, on Tuesdays) and meet parents who come to pick up their children. They are asked to give their opinion about an important sentence. Anyone can answer. Answers are written and displayed in the teachers' room.

- A group of parents meets and chooses one sentence from all answers. The following Tuesday, it is displayed outside on a poster. All sentences from the previous week are also displayed next to it. Again, parents are being asked to react on the new sentence.

- The process is renewed week after week.



### - Good practices -

- Try to be close to the educational team of the schools as much as the parents;
- Take opportunities for discussion, exchange and action;
- Ask advices to teachers and school directors, as well as their expectations;
- At each and every step, ask for the parents' opinion and agreement; and
- Highlight the skills of the neighborhood's inhabitants.

**The participants came from different groups:** Belgium (ATD Fourth World Belgium); Bulgaria (Discovered Spaces, Architecture workshop for children, Hesed, Center of hope, Duvar Kolektiv, ATD Fourth World); France (ATD Fourth World Lille, Social Center Mosaïque-Lille, ATD Fourth World Rennes); Hungary (The Real Pearl Foundation); Romania (Parada, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities); Serbia (Center for Youth Integration) and international dynamics (Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty, Tapori, ATD Fourth World Europe).

## CHILDREN'S VOICES - 17 OCTOBER 2019

"I'm lucky to have a mum who works hard for me and my brothers and sisters. My mum wants to stop using the food bank. Every child deserves to have a home, food and a proper bed to sleep in. Some children don't have a family to love them, to cuddle them when they're sad. I have all of that. Let's pray for all the children in the world to have water, food, love, happiness, for all children to be able to live without fear of war or sadness." **Aiden, 12 years old, Glasgow, Scotland**

"I have been in care for ten years. Parents should be more supported so that they can look after children like my grandma does. We need friends who respect our parents, who love them as they are. I love my mum as she is." **Cindy, Switzerland**

"To escape poverty and destitution, I help my mum to sell products at the market when I get home from school. This business pays for my schooling." **A young boy, Douala, Cameroon**

My mum always tells me: "you won't drop out of school; you won't get married until you have a house, a job. I agree. My mum has experienced a lot of poverty. Her life is hard, so she wants us to succeed...I want to be a doctor because the day I found out that my grandma had diabetes I decided to be a doctor, and I could help everyone."

**Ouarda, 12 years old, Noisy-le-Grand, France**

"A child was telling us that there are too many floods in his area. It attracts mosquitoes and they cause malaria and people start dying. So, it's my dream one day to unblock all the gutters in my area and I also want to build a hospital and a school for my area."

"Today we have an opportunity to say that we too feel responsible for our country's development. But to get there, society, the government, our families need to join forces so that in the future we can achieve a better life for everyone." **Group of children, Bangui, Central African Republic**

## REACTIONS TO THE VIDEO «ACTING TOGETHER TO END POVERTY»

We have had some feedback on the video "**Acting together to end poverty**". The video presents actions where we can see people working together for children's rights and to end poverty.

*"In the video it was really interesting to find out about the different initiatives and experiences of poverty that exist, such as in the Philippines where children are living in a cemetery. Seeing their experience really moved me. I would never have imagined something like that. And especially finding out there are people who support them to make sure that they continue learning, that they don't drop out of school, and keep hope."*

*"I really liked the video showing the marches in the street, the public speeches. And the later examples show that what we assert on October 17 is deeply embedded in the work carried out on a day to day basis."*

*"It's interesting that the film ends with a reflection on identity. Because what unites us is that everyone has the right to exist."*

