

Sample Testimonies

Promoting and Marking October 17, 2018

We have to fight to get our freedom back

New Orleans, United States of America

People call me Shay; I am 28 years old, a mother of 4 boys from 1 -13 years old. I have lived in New Orleans my entire life.

When I was a little girl I dreamt of becoming either a police officer, a lawyer or a hair doer (dresser).

I wanted to be an independent woman and to sacrifice my life for my kids and not to depend on others.



Very soon I realized that these were not going to happen for me. School was tough, and the kids were picking on me calling me 'bald head'. I was in 11th grade when Hurricane Katrina hit. I was displaced and separated from my family. I could not find my mother, my brothers and sisters. I missed school and ended up getting pregnant with my first-born, Ryan.

I think I am left behind because now I live on food stamps to feed my kids. When the government have your information in the system and knows what you are doing, you are not free. If I have a full time job they will cut my food stamps and I will continue to struggle to raise my kids.

This world is not a just place for all of us because everything is a struggle for us. It's a struggle every day and I have to do what I have to do. I take part-time jobs and I have my food stamps to keep us going. We cannot find housing because we don't have jobs.

I am afraid and I fear they (the government) are going to take my freedom away. I am worrying for my kids and other mothers too due to the violence and shootings in the city.

I have to step up and find our community; to fight for our community and to stand up for our civil rights. We have to fight the system to get our freedom back. I hope for a better place for me and other mothers, and to help others in need.

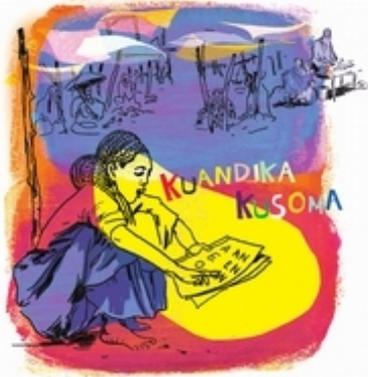
I say to all young mothers to be strong and stay beautiful. Do what you need and have to do for your kids.

Author: Shay.

Date: 27/10/2017.

If you hear about such an opportunity, don't hesitate to learn

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



I'm a mother of 5 children. I work at Fish Market, at the area called "the Lebanon" beside the official market. When I met Rachel and Laurent of ATD, I learned about the literacy class. It gave me hope to hear this news.

When I was a kid, I didn't have chance to go to school and life was very hard. My mother lived alone and had to take care of me, my brothers and sisters. It was difficult to find our daily food, so we didn't even think about going to school. My mother spent her time finding ways to feed us. I had to leave my family early to be a housemaid in order to survive and support my family. I had to fight hard until I met my husband and then, together, we tried to improve our situation.

Still, I used to feel the pain of not knowing how to read and write. It meant I had no chance to find a better job because I was being asked to read and sign. I used to feel bad about this. I didn't imagine there could be a place to learn to read and write for us adults.

When I met Rachel and Laurent, I saw a chance to hope new things. Even at the beginning I was very shy, worried and was wondering where do I go? I didn't feel confident. I tried to attend all classes, but sometimes I missed one... Life is still difficult, I have to leave home at 4.00 am, I work all day long... But every Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, I do all I can to join the group of learners. Sometimes I have to carry with me the food that I sell; it's not so easy.

One challenge was to face the stares of people around me and their harsh words - they laugh at me, joking about me going to a class, leaving my job. But I am determined.

I feel a lot of joy to be part of the group. I see I need to make a lot of effort to improve. And we help each other; we pay attention that nobody is lost. The atmosphere in the class is very good. We feel the teachers love what they are doing. They commit themselves with their heart, they support us, and they follow us in our rhythm.

I get support from my children, even if before they used to laugh about me in my first lessons. But now they are proud of me because I know how to read and write. Now we take time to read together. Today I manage to buy at the best prices, I can read the writing on the pack, I can work out change, I can count my money when I have to buy something, and I have stopped losing money in my small business. I feel much better in my life in general because before I felt like I was disabled. It was difficult to communicate and I used to stay silent.

I never thought I could have this chance one day. I think of all of us who didn't have the chance to go to school - I would say to them if they hear about such an opportunity to learn that they should not hesitate to take it up. Don't hesitate to learn - that way we can overcome ignorance.

Author: Jenifa Ninaitwa.

Date: 14/10/2016.

Let us work hand in hand to reach for a brighter future

I am Diana. I live under a bridge in Paco, Manila. I have three children. My husband Benjie is physically disabled. He had an accident while selling mineral water by the highway. At present, we earn our living by selling all sorts of goods.

I am a community teacher of Ang Galing, the basic literacy program of ATD Fourth World. We teach the children in our community. When ATD asked me to teach, I was hesitant. I told them that I was only a high school graduate and I did not have any experience in teaching. The ATD volunteers responded that I have a rich background and experience, and that the children and parents know me and trust me.

We teach reading and writing in Filipino. The program participants include children who are six years old and above, those who are out of school, and those who attend school but experience difficulties in learning. Many of the children do not go to school because they face bullying due to their age or the fact that they live under the bridge. In the beginning, many did not participate. But we did not give up and tried to find ways to encourage them to join. Before, we used to hold the session in a hall. However, the children did not like to go there. We transferred to the sidewalk which is nearer where they live. The new site enabled the parents to see what we are doing with their children.

We realized that every child is capable of learning, and because of the trust that we showed them, they often ask: "Ate, do we have classes today?" The parents encourage their children to participate. Partnership with the parents is important for the success of the program as parents see what the program is doing with their children. We also allocate time to meet with the parents and inform them of the progress of their children.



Benjie, my husband, supports me in this activity, despite his disability. He looks after the goods and takes care of our children while I am away teaching. He also assists in the preparation during teaching days. He allows the use of our house as venue for teaching when it rains. Though we are poor, we exert every effort to live honestly.

For me, the meaning of 'no one is left behind' is to be able to see the talent of every person and not his deficiencies. Like my spouse, though he is disabled, he does good things. I did not finish a teaching course, but I am able to help other children to learn. Though we are poor, we exert considerable effort to earn an honest and decent living.

We ask you to look around you and find out what the poor really need. For me, today, October 17, is a very significant day to reaffirm our call for you to see and understand our dire situation and to join with us. We do not demand that you provide us with a good life. Rather we earnestly ask you to help us to find solutions to our predicament: and to design programs with proper funding that will ease or alleviate our poor condition, and so ensure brighter future for our children.

Like in teaching, everyone experiences difficulties. However, we learned and implemented new and doable solutions to make learning easy and more effective. We hope that you too can emulate the same and find creative solutions to overcome extreme poverty. Please give attention to people in poverty to find new ways to get ahead in life.

Together we fight to leave and end extreme poverty. Let us work hand in hand to reach for a brighter future. Thank you.

Author: Diana. Date: 28/10/2014 - Manila, Philippines

Development exists, but there is currently not enough for everyone. Give us the chance to make our own contributions

Port Louis, Mauritius

This past week saw the death of one of the men who lived in the homeless shelter of Port Louis, Mauritius. Noel had been an active member of the Committee for the World Day for Overcoming Poverty since its creation. In order to prepare this year's observance of that event on October 17, he joined with other residents of the shelter to write a collective testimony. In particular, he contributed this reflection: *"Wherever there is exclusion, our human rights are not being respected at all. This word 'exclusion' should never have been brought into existence. Many people say that there is great progress everywhere; but there are always some people being left out. It is the people who suffer these situations who know what they have to go through."*

Below is the full text of the testimony that other shelter residents read on 17 October as a tribute to the memory of Noel.

"We, the temporary residents of the 'Abri de Nuit' shelter, have to live here for one reason: a lack of housing. We are living here only for the time being, waiting until we are able to find a solution to our problem.

"We would like to call on the community to address this problem of housing.

"Development is occurring, but not everyone benefits from it.

"We see that where there is exclusion, our human rights are not being respected. This word 'exclusion' should not even exist. The very idea of excluding some people shouldn't exist.

"People say that development is moving ahead at full speed; but there are always people being left out. It is those people living in deep poverty who know this better than anyone else.

"Temporary housing has been built at the foot of the mountains. Each time it rains, there are landslides and the homes collapse. How many people have died because of the torrential rainfalls? And yet those very buildings were built as a project of 'development'. We have 'development', but it's sustainability that matters.

"Home ownership would mean getting a twenty-year mortgage. But our jobs don't last long. So after two or three years of debt, we end up here in this shelter. In our country, most manual workers don't even have jobs. Employers don't hire us because they hire immigrant workers instead. Why? Is it because they are cheaper? Because they make them more money? Because they work overtime? We don't even know.

"What about a person who has done time in prison and wants to change his life. To do that, you need work. But employers say, 'No, we're not interested in hiring anyone disreputable.' Today, everything is about ethics — but don't we also need to earn money? Every day we need money to survive. Everything costs money. That's why, after years of

being turned away, some people feel forced to resort to robbery. So all of us are viewed as outlaws. Others may fall into depression, alcoholism, or addiction....

“Sometimes, even if there is work for us, the pay is so low that you lose heart. There are even some places that we are not even allowed to enter if we have only flip-flops on our feet [instead of proper shoes].

“This is why we say that development is not working for us. We don’t benefit from it at all. Fifty percent of people like us are in prison. All that matters is the letter of the law. Even if we speak too loudly we may be thrown back in jail. But what is very rare is that two people sat with us to listen to what we have to say to help us prepare our message for this event. Elsewhere, no one takes time with us like that, it just doesn’t happen.

“Sustainable development doesn’t work for everyone. For some, yes it works. But it should work for everyone not just a few.

“We are confident that the government can change the ways things are, for they have the power in their hands and are aware of our situation. For example, whenever there is a cyclone, the government, through the prime minister’s relief fund, helps those affected. We think that the state can ask the private sector to contribute a certain sum of money each month to that relief fund as a way to help overcome poverty too.

“As long as people must rely on charity, it will not be easy to truly overcome poverty. If we think negatively, we will always have difficulties, so we must keep a positive attitude. What we have to do is collaborate, put our heads together, and unite our efforts to create sustainable development that benefits all, instead of one where only a few people get more than their share.

“In order to build our future, we want to put our own mark on a new kind of sustainable development for all.”

Author: Residents of Homeless Shelter, Port Louis.

Date: 23/10/2015.



Community Contributions

We are 20 men and women from Dublin who worked together to write this message for October 17. Most of us know very well what it means living on a very low income, and some of us have slept in the street. We know what it is to be put down.

To leave no one behind, we have first, to put the homeless on a bigger agenda. They live extreme poverty and are isolated, especially the very young. It's easy to turn to drugs when you're homeless, because you give up. Taking drugs is an easy delusion.

Jackie said : "Leaving no one behind means bringing back a homeless person to my home, like some one from my family. I could lose my flat for taking this risk. But I do it because I was homeless."



Teresa said: "Now I have my flat, but I would not walk past a homeless person. If you're my friend when I'm on the street, You're still my friend when I'm not."

When you are in the street, it helps a lot when fathers and mothers can keep contact with their children. If you have children, it gives you the will power to say: 'We don't want this for them! So, we can start to get help.'

Around town we see homeless people, young and old. Why can't all the empty buildings be used to offer them proper homes? What can we do to leave no one behind? We are born equal and in innocence, but our paths in life are not equal.

One father said, "I was left behind at school years ago. The class teacher hit me and I reacted. I told the teacher what I thought of him. I was then thrown out. I was just 13 and school was finished for me. There were no more chances to learn. I stopped going to school. No one ever came to my house to ask why?. Yes, I was left behind."

It is life-long access to education that gives people another chance. To leave no one behind, we have to understand each other, to take time to walk in each other's shoes, especially when we want to work together.

In everyone's life, it's important to have people who set an example. Our communities can offer the chance not to be left behind. For each person who faces hardship and a risk of isolation, for those who receive a prison sentence, let's not turn our backs on them.

An answer lies in friendship and in the people you get to know in your community; keeping contact and talking with each other; and being a good neighbour is very important. We need to have a sense of humour as well, that we share with others. It is part of being together. But we never should, put anyone down.

All this gives you the understanding of belonging somewhere. Everyone should have their chance to make their mark in their community.

Today we want to remember all those who have died in misery, especially those who died during the past year. Their lives were too hard. Sometimes our lives are the same.

Whether our problems take us to hell and back, we do still have feelings and we have the right to live with respect. Our humanity can never be taken away from us.

Author: A group of adults, Dublin, Ireland Date: 23/10/2014.

There's not enough being told about poverty all over the world

Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

There's not enough being told about poverty all over the world. It feels like everything is shutting down all over the place. I'm worried because I hear about them shutting hostels.

If you take away our human rights, what have we got left? It's a tough time for us. Who do you turn to? Some people are vulnerable and they have no-one to turn to.

It feels like things are changing all over the world. Everything has changed.

I have places like Bridging the Gap, The Poverty Truth Commission and the Citizens Theatre that I can go to. They are places I feel involved, feel part of, places where I can strive. It helps my depression and helps me to understand things. These places encourage me to get out of bed. I want to go to college next year.

I look back on the last 4 years and what a roller coaster it has been. But I'm striving as a person. My voice has been heard. I spoke at an event with a Cabinet Secretary for Communities about my experiences with the Department of Working Pensions (DWP).

My life story has been shared all over the world thanks to project organised by ATD.

To be standing here right now is so important to me. Everyone has difficult times and we all need to come together.

Auteur: William from Glasgow, Scotland.

Date: 18/10/2016.

