



Dignity

**Inside:
in focus**

**The European Young People's
Project**

**Fourth World Journal
Autumn 2010**

Louise's Story: A Diary of Family Support

ATD Fourth World's Family Support Programme works alongside people facing challenges in areas such as housing, unemployment, health, benefits and lack of basic skills. This is Martin Kalisa's diary of eighteen months supporting Louise.

Spring 2009

Louise grew up in the care of the local authority. At eighteen, she left care and was housed in supported accommodation before moving to an independent flat outside of London. Social Services remained involved with her and in Spring 2009, just before Louise's twenty-first birthday, I met her social worker to evaluate their work with her and to think about her future.

I challenged the social worker about the support that had been provided for Louise. I asked why Louise did not even have basic skills even though she was under the responsibility of the local authority. The social worker told me that they had provided Louise with the best support they could and that it was time for her to take some responsibility for her future.

The other major issue facing Louise at the beginning of last year was housing; she had accrued rent arrears and the housing trust was taking her to court to evict her. Louise was understandably stressed by this but Joanna Kennedy, from Zacchaeus 2000 Trust, agreed to support her in court.

I decided to go to the benefit office with Louise to ask for help with the rent arrears; they said that there was nothing they could do. We went back to explain the work of ATD Fourth World in supporting the most disadvantaged families and to plead Louise's case a second time. Half an hour later they said, "*We are going to pay the housing trust £1,200. We can't do any more than that.*" That money covered more than half of Louise's rent arrears! We could not believe it; neither could Joanna. The housing trust received a cheque for £1,200 the next day.

This taught me that people do have the power to support families if they want to. We still do not know where the money came from but Louise would not have seen a penny of it if we had not gone back and insisted on it. And it is clear to me that Louise would not have been supported had she gone alone.

With half of her rent arrears thus paid off we went back to court and agreed on a payment plan that Louise is still keeping to; she pays her rent and a little more each month to slowly clear her arrears (which will take more than eight years).

Spring-Summer 2009

As Spring 2009 turned into Summer, the question of Louise's benefits became more and more important. I accompanied her to the job centre a number of times and learned that, despite her being



on Jobseeker's Allowance, she was always seen by a Disability Employment Adviser. I asked why this was the case and even the adviser did not know.

I asked the adviser about Louise's chances of finding a job. Her answer was clear: "*Who do you think today is going to give a job to somebody who doesn't have any GCSEs? Even those who've got GCSEs can't get a job easily. And Louise will never be accepted on a course without basic skills in Maths and English.*"

Knowing that the only way to improve Louise's future prospects was to improve her basic skills in English and Maths, we encouraged her to do just that. Paul, a friend and supporter of ATD Fourth World working in the education system, agreed to visit her regularly to prepare with her before she went back to college.

Autumn 2009

In September, Louise started college. I was proud of her but it did not last. Within two months she had stopped going regularly. I pushed her to go back but realised her difficulties with the housing trust

See also **Louise...**, p. 2.

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Louise's Story: A Diary of Family Support

were weighing on her mind. *"I need to sort out my problems first,"* she told me.

March-April 2010

And there were difficulties with the housing trust: by the following March they were taking her to court again, this time for anti-social behaviour. This had real consequences as somebody evicted for anti-social behaviour cannot be accommodated anywhere else, even in private accommodation. At the root of the problem was the fact that the youngest tenant in Louise's building is over 60 years-old and the walls are thin. This means that her neighbours hear everything: when she speaks, argues with friends, has her nephew for the day, switches on her TV or music, when people come and go or when she moves around her flat. As a result, the housing trust had received more than 40 official and written complaints in less than six months.

Louise had repeatedly asked to be moved to more suitable accommodation but the answer from the housing trust had always been, *"Our policy is clear. We never move people with rent arrears."*

The manager of the housing trust called a meeting to warn Louise about her conduct. At the same time, she said that were now trying to find suitable accommodation for Louise elsewhere in the best interests of all concerned. Louise was confused; on the one hand they were taking her to court to evict her due to the other residents' complaints and on the other they were trying to re-house her.

With Louise, I came to understand how hard it is to live with neighbours who do not like you, who scare you, and where you feel

you do not have any freedom. She told me, *"Living here is like jail; when I walk to the toilet in the evening, I know that my neighbours will make a complaint the following morning. I can't cope any more"*.

Joanna Kennedy from Zacchaeus 2000 Trust helped us find a solicitor to take the case. He was very good and very strict. He told Louise, *"It's up to you. I will defend you, and we have a great chance of winning the case, but if there are more complaints you will be evicted. You have to choose between your friends and being on the street."*



But the following week, the housing trust received four more complaints from residents, and copies were sent to Louise's solicitor. He was not happy; Louise was very upset. She told me, *"Martin, I give up. There's nothing I can do. I'm going to end up on the street anyway."*

In April, we were due to go back to court. The solicitor was confident of winning Louise's case. He explained that councils and housing trusts have to explore alternative solutions in cases with vulnerable people which may lead to the prevention of anti-social behaviour in the future. In his view it was unreasonable to proceed without applying the policy on vulnerable people to Louise's case. He also argued that Louise's learning difficulties and need to socialise made it unrealistic to ask her to behave like an old person and not have guests, friends and family

around, given that she was only twenty-one years-old.

Two days later, the housing trust called and left a message asking me to call them urgently. I was afraid that there were more complaints. Instead they wanted Louise to visit a new flat for a possible exchange. This was a surprise since the housing trust had said there was a real shortage of housing for single people.

I did not go with Louise to visit the flat; I thought it better for her to see the flat and make her own mind up. I encouraged her, saying, *"Don't worry. If you don't like the flat, don't take it. If you like, I'll go back with you for a second visit but I don't want to choose for you; you will be the one living there."*

Louise went alone and rang me straight away, crying with happiness. She said, *"It's really good. It's on the ground floor; very big and there's a mixture of people: young people, children, parents. I like it."* I was very happy for Louise. We visited the flat together soon after and helped her move in. And the case against her was dismissed; we are not going back to court. It is a very big relief for us and especially for Louise.

Her words once she had her new flat? *"I need to go back to college."*

September 2010

Louise is back on track now and back at college, studying Maths and English. She is motivated.

I really hope she will complete her course this time, and maybe then follow a course on childcare. I hope that her dream of working with children will one day come true. Our journey with Louise continues.

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Anna Vass: "I Am Not An Expert!"



Anna Vass is a long-term friend and supporter of ATD Fourth World. Here she explains what family support means to her.

In my role as a friend and supporter in ATD Fourth World's Family Support Programme, I am proud to declare that "I am not an expert!" I think this is a great place to start.

Often this statement is used as a way of excusing ourselves from being responsible, protecting ourselves from the repercussions of being wrong, belittling ourselves to avoid embarrassment, or maybe setting up clear expectations that our opinions should not be mistaken for facts just in case they turn out to be miscalculated.

But can we fully embrace the advantages of not being an expert? I think that this position has a lot to offer in family support, perhaps more than we might think.

Rachel's life is full of experts. Whether they are delivering a social service or whether they are experts she has called upon for help, these professionals have collectively exercised a lot of power in determining where she lives, how much money she is entitled to live off, what courses she can take

and where, what jobs she can apply for, how often she can speak to her sisters, whether she will continue to have a roof over her head and whether she is allowed to leave the country or get ill without her benefits getting stopped...

All these decisions have been very real and very concerning for her over the seven years that I have known her. After witnessing these experiences, I find it curious to ask the question "what makes a person an expert and what difference can you make if you're not one?"

I got involved in Rachel's family support when I was 23, and she was 15. Now I am 30, she is 22, and all I can say is that we have both been growing up and learning at the same time as each other.

There have been periods in time where things have looked pretty scary for Rachel, and when there do not seem to have been any professionals making a positive intervention in Rachel's life at all. There have been moments when it has felt like everyone was on her back, taking things away, making judgements and imposing threats.

In times of crisis, family support can easily become about attempting to plug the gaps, but I think family support is very distinct from being an expert. In the face of so many people knowing what is best for someone, family support is a combination of not knowing, not assuming and not imposing an agenda. It is about standing alongside an individual, recognising that they are the expert and that they are entitled to experience things in a way that is real for them. If there are any goals and aspirations, they have to come from the individual.

I like the idea that a family support role is to be a non-expert in relation to these aspirations, and can be very present in the process of their being figured out and met. For me, family support is about creating something new together, and discovering things that neither person knew would be possible.

Rachel and I do this through cooking. We have been making our own recipe book and learning a new recipe every month. This came about at a mutual agreement that we could both benefit from learning how to cook a wider variety of meals. Thinking about health, hygiene, budgets and nutrition along the way, we have learned a lot. Here, I am most certainly not the expert.

We select the desired dish together, I source the recipe, we both source the ingredients and we cook at Rachel's house. Time and again, Rachel's intuition for cooking improves the recipe, often against my better judgement. Whether we consider the meal to be a success or not, we always enjoy it and feel that it was time well spent.

Through family support, I think it is important to reconsider how we value expertise, who has it, what we do with it and what power it gives.

What good are services if, in the end, these services disempower families from being able to make real choices - beyond the limited options that are made available to them - in housing, education and employment? If, through family support, families can gain real knowledge (or expertise) about who they are and what they want from life there is no predicting what might follow.

The European Young People's Project

Bea Roberts: "I'll Be Part of the Young People's Project 'Til I Die"



One July morning in 1994, I left my home in Hackney bound for Paris and an ATD Fourth World Young People's Project meeting. Sixteen years later, the Young People's Project has offered me amazing experiences and some of the happiest times of my life. I love it dearly and every time I return I feel like I'm coming home.

The Young People's Project has enabled me to channel my energy and anger into something positive. It has kept me motivated, interested and out of trouble! It has changed the way I see life and the way I continue to live it. It has allowed me to attend events, write articles for magazines and journals, speak at prestigious European NGO and government gatherings and represent ATD Fourth World at an international level. I have developed skills and taken part in things that I would never have had the opportunity to do otherwise.

I remember sitting on old blanket with a box of books and a group of small kids under the concrete walkway of a housing estate while it rained and children shouted animal noises and acted scenes as we read the books aloud. I remember laughing as seven different languages all tried to sing Beatles songs in tune as we helped sand a floor in a youth centre. I remember

laying in a hammock on the deck of a canal boat and looking at the night sky as a steel mill sprayed orange sparks into the heavens where they mixed with the stars. I remember sitting in a conference room and crying at the testimony of an 18 year-old man, not out of pity but out of knowing what he was living and feeling. I remember the people, their stories, their struggles, their small but precious victories, their dignity and strength, the acts of solidarity I experienced and witnessed, the friendships and families that have grown from the Young People's Project and the huge impact it has had on all of our lives.

When twenty young people met at Frimhurst Family House this summer, to prepare for the Jambville rally, I sat and listened to their stories, their day-to-day experiences and their involvement with services and voluntary community work, their anger at their misrepresentation in the media and by the government as well as their solutions to global warming, poor housing, hoodies, drugs and benefits; they were brimming with ideas and energy.

And this is why the Young People's Project is so important to me. When I started, there was nothing for me or my age group; the meetings just did not apply to my situation or personal realities. I felt totally isolated in the organisation and in my personal life. I was so angry and frustrated and had no way to express myself. It was only when the Young People's Project asked me to talk about what it meant to be sixteen and living independently

that I felt able to fully participate in ATD Fourth World.

Until then, I'd felt insignificant, unheard and unrepresented in the world outside. But by talking to and being with other young people like myself I was able to see my situation anew and find ways to take control of my life and make changes in how I dealt with it.

Through the Youth People's Project I learned that being poor and uneducated did not mean I had to be another statistic, that if we fight and keep fighting against our situations and the systems that create them we can live with dignity and through our actions can better ourselves and help those around us to do the same.

The Young People's Project was a place where I could be totally honest in what I felt, thought and said. For the first time I felt truly listened to, heard, supported and respected. I had friends who I could be open with in a place where I did not feel shamed or blamed for my circumstances. I had a purpose there; I felt that what we were doing would benefit my younger sibling's generation and beyond. We were going to change the world.

The Young People's Project is a home away from home; somewhere I can be known for being me, somewhere I do not have to censor what I say for risk of upsetting my family by admitting that I find our situation hard, somewhere my struggles are seen as victories and I can be of some use. Sometimes I think I'll be part of the Young People's Project 'til I die.

The European Young People's Project

The European Young People's Project Rally in Jambville

There is a popular image of young people in the mainstream media as apathetic, self-absorbed and caring only for their own material well-being and not about politics. The picture drawn of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is even worse, ranging from feckless and work-shy to the delinquent.



This is, of course, so much lazy stereotyping; anyone who has worked with young people knows that they are not socially and politically apathetic. In fact, they know that it is their futures that will be most directly affected by policies decided on today. If there has been a movement away from mainstream politics it is because politicians seem to take no account of young people's aspirations or the daily realities they face.

Certainly, the young people that ATD Fourth World works with play active and important roles in their communities, families and circles of friends. Some volunteer their time to help improve their local areas, some act as carers for relatives or neighbours and others simply provide a shoulder to cry on and a sympathetic ear.

It was the realisation of the value of these contributions, as well as the hurdles they face, that led ATD Fourth World to form the Young

People's Project to give a voice to 18-30 year-olds from across Europe. With this in mind, in July, a group of over 200 young people met in Jambville, France, for a week-long rally focusing on what it means to be young and poor in Europe today.

The delegation from the UK included Anna Bowell, Charlotte Brown, Brendan Coyne, Rachel Dixon-Warren, Sarah Green, Paul MacDonald, James Riley, Bea Roberts and Justyna Skuza. Over five days they shared their experiences through a series of meetings and creative workshops on subjects such as education, employment, crime, housing, public attitudes and the quality of state services.



One of the striking things was how, from Dublin to Warsaw and London to Marseille, the stories told had familiar themes: there were no jobs, no decent training, no attempt by the authorities to consider people's dignity and no empathy when young people rebelled against systems mostly interested in monitoring them.

But it was not just the problems they experienced daily that united the young people at Jambville. They

also shared a burning anger about the situations they found themselves in that was matched by a feeling of energy and a determination that things should change.

A Message from the Young People of Europe was written collectively from testimonies gathered in each country and groups then discussed how to take concrete actions in their own countries to promote the message. They also talked about how to deliver this message at a meeting in front of the European Parliament in Brussels on 17 October, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The British group – despite late nights, early mornings, catering problems and language barriers – took part in all of this with great enthusiasm. According to James Riley, *"The workshops were mad but really fun... I came away from the whole thing with a positive view and hope for the future."*

The young people from London were also keen to follow up Jambville by attending the Brussels rally and doing more in the UK. As Paul MacDonald said on his return to England, *"I feel important to ATD Fourth World and to the EU... I feel we should push our message deep into the heart of the EU and ensure they listen."*

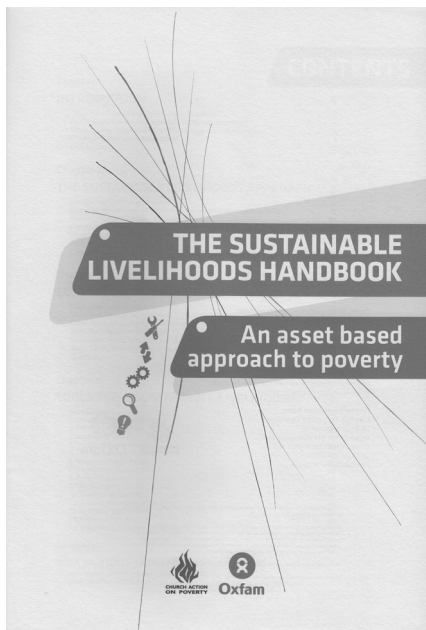


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The Oxfam Key Family Research Project

ATD Fourth World, with funding from Oxfam GB, spent five months earlier this year running a participative research project on the lives of a group of families in London.

This Key Family Research Project used the Oxfam-supported *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* methodology to examine in greater depth the situation of several key families identified by ATD Fourth World's Family Support Programme.



It was hoped that the Key Family Research would contribute to ATD Fourth World's Family Support Programme in three ways: by building a clearer, rounded picture of the lives of the families in the context of their local communities; by focusing on the assets and strengths within the household and the community that could be built on in order to address the challenges being faced; and by identifying the family's own priority areas for action as a starting point for future support.

The research project progressed

in a number of stages, the first of which involved drawing a 'map' of the local area in which each family lived. However, these were maps with a difference as they focused on the local services and facilities available in the vicinity of each family's home. Studying the local environment in this way helped to uncover which organisations and agencies had a presence in the community and could potentially impact on the lives of the families.

The next stage of the project involved interviewing members of the families to get a better understanding of who they felt they could rely on for support, where they turned when they needed help or advice, how they managed to get by financially, what skills or experience they had already and what areas they would like to improve on. This was the most significant aspect of the work as it highlighted the positives in people's lives - their assets, the strengths they could build on and their aspirations - rather than their problems or what they are said to lack. The final thrust of this stage involved annotating and analysing the interviews to gain a better understanding of the real support individuals and families wished to have from ATD Fourth World in order to move forward.

In the course of the research, some innovative participatory tools were used to make it easier to draw out vital information. One exercise placed a house in the middle of a sheet of paper, with a number of rings around it. The names of those living in the house were placed in the first ring, other family members and close friends were placed in the second ring and other people who visit the house (possibly from the community, Social Services or

the local authorities) were placed in the third ring away from the house. This exercise illustrated how many people had contact with the household that could offer them support and how excluded (or not) its inhabitants might be.

Another exercise involved asking the families themselves to sketch a map of their area showing the places they visit the most: the local shopping centre, the market, the supermarket, the doctor's surgery and the post office, for example. This exercise complemented the research that had already been done about the local area and allowed people to talk about the services and the places that were most important to them, giving another insight into their lives.

The final stage of the project was to analyse all the information that had come out of the research and plan future steps with the families themselves based on what they had said in their interviews and what they wanted to see happen in the future. It also determined which aspects of their lives ATD Fourth World would focus on reinforcing through the Family Support Programme. This has allowed all of those interviewed to be supported to take some of the steps they themselves identified during the project, including plans for debt repayment, applications for new housing and beginning training courses.

Such successes are a strong advocate for Oxfam's *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* and the focused family support that accompanied the research.

For more information on this research project, contact Sarah Kenningham on 020 7703 3231.

Even Better Together

This August saw new families, and some old ones, participate in three days of workshops to mark the third year of the *Even Better Together* project, run in partnership with contemporary arts organisation Gasworks and funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

Using techniques ranging from drawing, clay modelling and film to performance, sculpture and photography, *Even Better Together* provides free arts activities to members of the local community to increase family learning through intergenerational activities, promote the enjoyment of learning through art and provide opportunities for community cohesion.

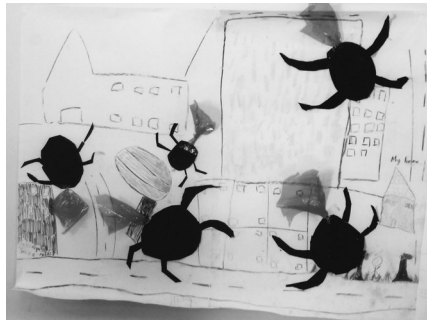


To chime with the previous years' themes of ideas of home and how buildings can communicate ideas and ideals, this year's workshops focused bringing to life stories grounded in peoples' neighbourhoods.

The first day of the programme looked back over past work and took in a film before families took the time to draw their neighbourhoods, incorporating potential disaster scenarios into their sketches and creating characters for them. The more fantastic ideas involved, among other things, aliens, floods and hot air balloons.

On the second day, the families visited the interactive Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre to observe current exhibitions, particularly one concerning the decoration of outdoor

spaces. An unused area outside the gallery building was then decorated with simple supplies, such as string, post-it notes and sellotape.



The programme then culminated in a day at Gasworks Gallery, situated next to the Brit Oval cricket ground. To finish the story started on day one, scenes were designed with characters from a chosen disaster scenario and props and costumes were produced from paper and cardboard. A narration of the script was recorded and photographs were taken to illustrate a number of scenes to form a short film that all the families will be able to keep.

For Dea Henry, the workshops were a chance to do something out of the ordinary. *"We had a lot of fun; the girls really enjoyed it. They don't usually like art, but they had a really good time."*

Fellow participant Yvonne Lee agreed: *"We loved it, really loved it! I would definitely do it again. It was nice to have something for the kids to do in the holidays, and I had fun getting tangled up at the exhibit at the Hayward Gallery!"*



Dale Farm

For a number of months now, ATD Fourth World has been following the plight of almost 100 families who face imminent eviction from their land at Dale Farm in Crays Hill, Essex.

Dale Farm is the largest Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller site in the UK, with many living there entirely legally since the 1970s, but the site is now due for demolition.

In support of the Dale Farm travelling community, a delegation from ATD Fourth World recently visited the site and attended a housing rights workshop held by the Essex Human Rights Clinic and Dale Farm Housing Association.

According to Seamus Neville, one of the ATD Fourth World delegation, *"It was good to see so many people there to support the Travellers; they are fighting for their right to live as a community. One mother said that they wanted to stay together as community because they felt safe. A lot of the group were family and have known each other for years. They seem to be judged by the local community, and find it difficult to access local services... It is important that we recognise and support this group, as they have to face many struggles."*

"Everyone has a right to live where they want," says Patricia Bailey, another ATD Fourth World delegate, *"and I ask for everyone's support to stop these evictions and to let the families of Hovefields and Dale Farm live in peace."*

For additional information and to find out how to take action please contact Grattan Puxon of Dale Farm Housing Association at dale.farm@btinternet.com.



Fundraising

The Addington Square kitchen appeal, which was launched in January, has so far raised £6,300, including a grant from Santander for £2,200. The appeal is ongoing.

ATD Fourth World UK also wishes to thank the Bishop of Guildford's Foundation for a kind donation of £500.

Heartfelt thanks go to Miriam Alaoui and Yusuf Chbini, Matt Allcock, Hazel Berry, Brendan Coyne, Beverley Jones, Paul MacDonald, James Riley, Sue Ritchie, Nazrett Sellasie, Melanie de Villiers and Claire Willis for taking part in a sponsored bike ride which raised over £1,200 towards sending a delegation of young people to Jambville, France.

The bikes were provided free of charge by Recycle of Elephant Road while food and water were provided by Bookers Cash and Carry.



Dates for your Diary

16 November: *Building a Fairer Future* event, organised by ATD Fourth World in partnership with EAPN England and Southwark Council, at St. George's Cathedral, Southwark.

11 December: Christmas Party at Heartbeat International Mission in Brisbane Street, Camberwell.

20-21 November, 21-22 January and 18-19 March: Information Weekends in London. Contact atd@atd-uk.org or 020 7703 3231.

Fulham Court Summer Activities

In link with the Doorstep Library run by ATD Fourth World and local volunteers and friends, this summer saw five weeks of workshops of sewing and crafts for the children of the Fulham Court Estate.



In collaboration with artist Cynthia Bernheim, and with help from local friends and volunteers, children and mothers were invited each week to afternoon workshops for making purses, animal toys and personalised brooches. Sunnier days offered an outing to read in the park and a drumming workshop.

Leading up to the summer, ATD Fourth World took the time to speak to the parents and children of the estate to better gauge what kind of activities were wanted. Excitement at last year's arts and craft activities, as well as the success of a sewing workshop during the June half-term holiday, pointed the way forward. Parents and children alike also asked for daytime workshops to occupy the children and so, in partnership with the estate's Tenants and Residents Association, a plan



was set out to give the children sports, cooking and craft activities throughout the week, with ATD Fourth World taking charge of the weekly sewing and craft workshops.

The workshops were a great success, with children of all ages taking part and mothers eager to have a go at making their own artistic creations. Over the five weeks it was evident that not only skills but also friendships were built up within the community between children as well as their parents.



Dignity

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