

It Takes a Child to Raise a Village:

Tapori Children Ask,
"Who Can Change the World Without Me?"
October 17, 2010, Washington D.C.

It's been said that the world has become a global village. Amidst extreme poverty, natural disasters, and global warming, it takes a child to raise up this village and confront these urgent issues. Children center us, they ask crucial questions, and point us to the future. The International Movement ATD* Fourth World is a non-governmental organization with no specific religious or political affiliation. It takes a human rights-based approach towards overcoming poverty. Through its children's network, Tapori, ATD Fourth World has learned that reaching the children whose lives are the hardest due to poverty helps ensure a brighter future for all children.

Not only are children the global village's tomorrow, but many are already taking action to strengthen their families and communities today. For these children to grow and reach their full potential, their parents and their older siblings work hard to provide what is necessary.

All too often the words and actions of people living in extreme poverty are not taken into account in community and international development projects. Nevertheless, they continue to take action and speak out in their own communities. Those living in extreme poverty work to serve others, not wanting only to "be served." At ATD Fourth World, we believe that the United States must take a leading role in recognizing and building on the contributions of its own citizens and in those in developing countries who live in extreme poverty.

In order to strengthen the fight against extreme poverty at home and abroad, we are inviting President Obama and his administration to dialogue with a delegation of fifty children, youths and adults from all backgrounds who are striving to end poverty. This delegation will gather in Washington D.C. on October 17, 2010, the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.



"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



The message unveiled on October 17, 1987 at the Human Rights Plaza in Paris by the founder of ATD Fourth World

** All Together in Dignity: the International Movement ATD Fourth World was founded in France in 1957 and has consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF, UNESCO and the ILO.*

Fighting Poverty and Exclusion at Home



In an ATD Street Library, everyone's a learner, everyone's a teacher

ATD Fourth World's long-term volunteer corps members partner with those who are most marginalized in communities throughout the United States that were hurting even before the current economic crisis. They witness the incredible initiative of parents and children who are living in homeless shelters, doing their utmost to hold onto their first apartment, or who have stabilized their lives and have the personal resources to help others do the same.

In post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans, ATD Fourth World knows families who have made enormous efforts to take in distant relatives, despite overcrowding and concerns about providing for everyone. Members of ATD Fourth World who were scattered by Katrina's aftermath and remain in many other states today are collaborating on a book about their lives, before, during, and after Katrina called "Not Meant to Live Like This." Despite the many hardships, their determination to give children a good future is thriving. Young mothers who participated in a Street Library themselves as children invented a home-based learning project with ATD Fourth World ("Play and Learn Together") with the hope of giving their children a good start.

Teens who were part of ATD Fourth World's Street Library Program in Brooklyn, New York, now support their younger brothers and sisters. They encourage children to participate in the open-air time around books, computers, and art. Along with parents, they make sure the Street Library area is a welcoming learning space for the next generation. They put blankets down on the sidewalks and children knock on each other's doors to make sure that no one is left out.

Children in an isolated, under-resourced coal mining area of Southwestern Virginia benefit from adults gathering at ATD Fourth World's Appalachian Learning Cooperative for the free exchange of knowledge and skills. From quilting to bluegrass, foreign language workshops to computer training, the sharing at the communally-built Learning Co-op reinforces the community. It also supports residents' efforts to gain new employment, secure a broadband service center, and plan for solar energy use. With children and youth as their inspiration, adults volunteer to run after-school programs in local schools and community centers. All generations find strength in the region's traditional crafts, music, and art and are proud to open up and connect their own culture and creativity to others around the world through Tapori and ATD Fourth World campaigns.

Fighting Poverty and Exclusion Abroad

What connects these children and families in the United States with others abroad? All around the world, children bear the brunt of their family's extreme poverty. Like those in Brooklyn, New Orleans, and Appalachia, they don't accept being victims of their situations; they take action, on their own and in partnership with others, to help their family and friends overcome poverty. Tapori links children from the United States with others from every continent who are learning, growing, helping out their families, and improving their neighborhoods and schools.

Tapori also includes children who do not have a first hand experience of poverty. Through Tapori, children from all different backgrounds have a chance to learn from one another and to create friendships that can really transform our societies.

Following the recent earthquake in Haiti, a young girl named Flore was rescued from the rubble of her home, in which her brothers and sisters were still trapped. Though injured, she immediately began to help free others from the rubble. Children at a family shelter in Boston wrote to Flore and her friends, "Dear Citizens of Haiti, You are very lucky to have many residents that care for you. I hope you can get through the tough season. Many other people do too." Flore's family and other members of ATD Fourth World in Haiti are on the job, working to make sure that people in the most hard-to-reach areas have access to the food, water, medical help and tents being distributed and have a voice in the way their country will be rebuilt.

In Honduras, ATD Fourth World knows young people who grew up in violent neighborhoods, hard-hit by gangs and drugs. These youths run Street Libraries to make sure their younger brothers and sisters grow up more prepared to build a better life.

In Tanzania, many of the young members of ATD Fourth World know what it is like to live on the streets. They clean up the marketplace or do dangerous work in a rock quarry to get by. They also run programs to help children and adults become more literate. The children and youths from Haiti, Honduras, and Tanzania fight poverty when they support their friends, their families, and their country.

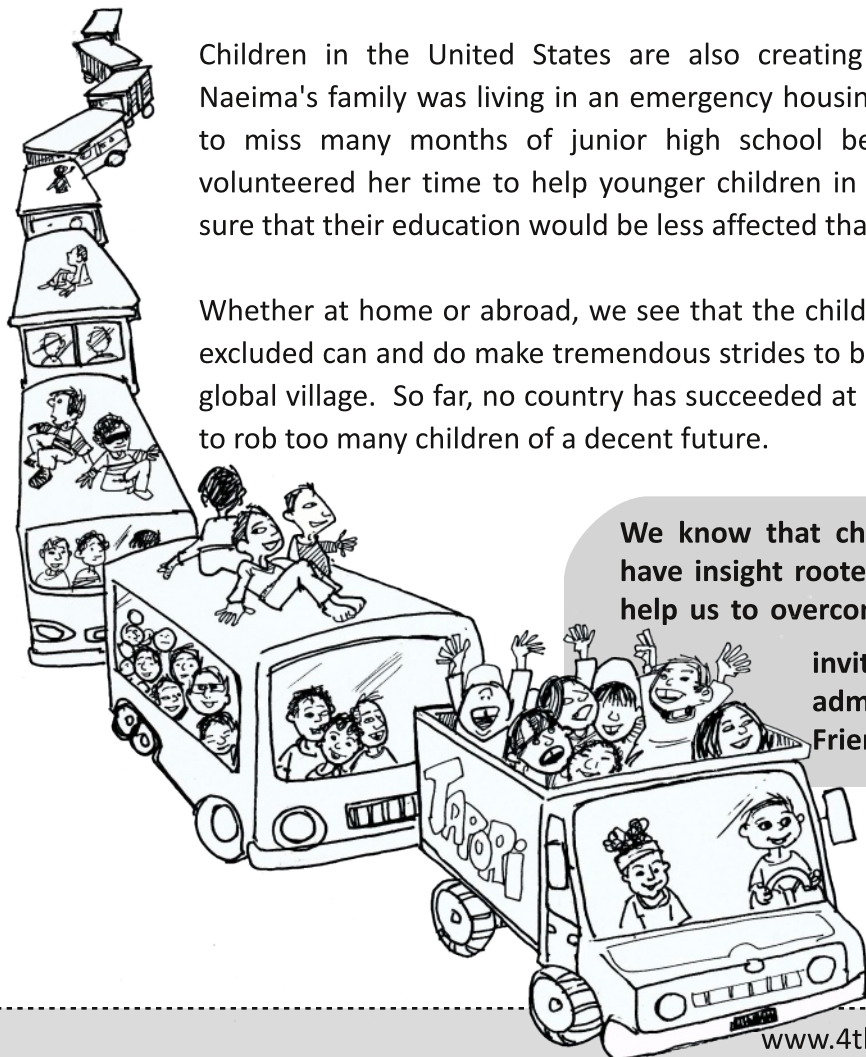


What can President Obama Learn from Tapori?



The fifty participants at this October 17th event will be gathering on behalf of the millions of children and families struggling against extreme poverty around the world. Since 2008, Tapori has been inviting children to participate in the “Friendship Train” campaign. The Friendship Train recognizes the importance of children’s actions to include those who are left out, to help each other learn and thrive, and even to help their parents during the most difficult moments for their families. A milestone in this campaign came in December 2009, when thirty children and adults met the Deputy High Commissioner on Human Rights at the United Nations in Switzerland. They discussed how to organize communities, governments, and the United Nations to support the voices and actions of the most excluded children and their families. This meeting followed up a successful meeting in 1999 with Mary Robinson, then the High Commissioner on Human Rights.

During this Tapori campaign, children from all around Western Africa, who met together to celebrate children's rights, wrote, “We children know that to grow up happy, we need friends to get together, play, dance, and talk with. We help other children. For example, some of us asked the adults from our neighborhood to help us rebuild one of our friend's houses. We want all children to become friends because friendship allows us to live happily, even when we're poor, even when we have nothing. Friendship is stronger than hunger.” Two teenage participants living on the streets created many social relationships during the preparation and the meeting itself. Afterward, they found the courage to return to their families who missed them so much. One is now studying to become a mason and the other to become a tailor.



Children in the United States are also creating friendships and helping others. When Naeima's family was living in an emergency housing shelter in the Bronx, Naeima was forced to miss many months of junior high school because of administrative obstacles. She volunteered her time to help younger children in the shelter with their homework to make sure that their education would be less affected than hers was by their homelessness.

Whether at home or abroad, we see that the children and families who are the most socially excluded can and do make tremendous strides to better their own lives, their villages, and the global village. So far, no country has succeeded at ending the grinding poverty that continues to rob too many children of a decent future.

We know that children, young people and their families have insight rooted in their first-hand experience that can help us to overcome poverty together. That's why we're

inviting President Obama and his administration to come aboard and ride the Friendship Train with us.