



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.

October 17, 1987, Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), Founder, International Movement ATD Fourth World

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Building a True Community

By Colette Jay

Community is defined as the people living in one locality; a group of people having cultural, religious, ethnic, or other characteristics in common. We know, however, that a true community is more than just a collection of homes or common characteristics. A true community is one in which its members care about and support one another. This sense of community, of connectedness to each other, is a powerful force in the fight to overcome persistent poverty. Whether it is through art activities in a Bangkok slum or the Unleashing Hidden Potential CD-Rom project here in the US, you will see in this issue that Fourth World Movement projects always strive to seek out, support and build upon these human connections. More than paints, books or computers, FWM projects are about creating a dialogue among people from different backgrounds in a way that respects each of them, so that we can all advance together.

A recent study done by the Project for Human Development has scientifically shown that this sense of community, or collective efficacy as they call it, is an important factor in reducing neighborhood crime rates and other social problems.* Those of us who live in a tight-knit community may take this for granted; it's just common sense. But for those who struggle to survive in poor and often violent neighborhoods, for children who try to learn in schools crippled by blame and accusations, building community is not usually society's first response. In fact, our initial emergency responses often break the fragile threads of connectedness that do exist. They also often make poor families dependent on outsiders who, even though they may be generous, are rarely willing to build a real community with them.

A long-term approach, a "shared life" approach as Nicole Kiefer explains (see right), is vital to overcoming persistent poverty and social exclusion. A shared life also means that it is not just one person or group who brings the answers or decides the projects. Building community is about searching together. As one parent says, the Unleashing Hidden Potential CD-Rom is not a cookbook, because we've all got different ingredients (see p. 2). Going beyond blame and emergency responses to build a true community takes time. How many of us are willing to take this time and make this effort to build a community with all of our fellow human beings?

*See www.hms.harvard.edu/chase/projects/chicago.

Making a Difference through a Shared Life

A Former Fourth World Volunteer Reflects on Her Experience

By Nicole Kiefer

Here Pii Nicole – I made this for you!* Awn thrust a drawing in my hands and backed away. It was a beautiful landscape of the sea, carefully drawn and framed, offered to me as a going-away present. Awn is 16 and has spent most of her life living in the streets. Living conditions under the bridge where she sleeps are harsh and precarious. Awn and her friends are regularly harassed by police, and she has been in and out of juvenile detention centers, usually on charges of vagrancy. Drugs, violence, and HIV/AIDS have claimed many of her friends and are a constant threat to her own survival. Awn sniffs glue to escape, and although she regularly joins our activities, she is often high and cannot concentrate. This drawing showed all the creativity and talent we knew she was capable of. She made a frame from a scrap of red cardboard she had found in the trash and outlined the drawing with a bit of colored yarn. There was a hook on the back for hanging, as well as a fold-out



Luuk Muu 3 Tua: Children at the Saphun Phut Street Library act out the story of the three little pigs.

stand so I could put it on a table. The drawing was in pencil, except for a few blue birds – she explained that a blue marker was the only color she could find.

Nine years before, when I pulled up to the Fourth World House in Landover, MD for the first time, I never dreamed that I would be a member of the full-time volunteer corps for more than

* Pii means older sister in Thai and is used as a term of respect for people older than oneself.

two or three years. Over the course of my time with the Fourth World Movement my responsibilities ranged from running street libraries in New York, to organizing respite stays and supporting families in England, to coordinating, planning and evaluating projects in Bangkok. But contrary to what my 23-year-old self would have thought, it is not the projects that have been important. First it was children like Gemma and Daniel in England or Awn and Ploy in Thailand who reeled in my heart with their smiles, love and easy acceptance. Gradually I met their parents who fight every day to create a better future for them, and they too became part of my reason for wanting to stay. They opened their lives and shared so much with me. They are the people who gave me the courage to stay and who have taught me so much.

In 1997, after a little over two years in England, I joined the team of volunteers in Bangkok. In Thailand, the main objective of the Movement is to be a bridge, to make links between the poorest



Hats for the whole family: children at the Street Library show off their creations for New Year's Eve.

want their situation to change, and like Awn, every day they fight to survive. One of their primary concerns is for their children to learn and have opportunities. The Fourth World Movement's regular art workshops and outings with the children were a means to establish relationships with members of the community and work together towards this goal in trusting, respectful ways.

During my six years in Bangkok we asked ourselves a lot of questions about our presence in the face of such extreme poverty. What good are a few books and craft materials when faced with the reality of run-down housing, poor health, unemployment and hunger? One mother whose children participate regularly in the art workshops explained to me what the Movement meant to her: "Here, there are a lot of organizations who come. They ask us many things and tell us that they have projects for us. But if it doesn't work, they just disappear. You, you don't ask us anything, but you are always there."

This was the first time I began to understand what Joseph Wresinski meant by "everything is born from a shared life." We did not give money, and we never fixed their housing situation. But they called us when someone was in the hospital and we went to visit. When a child drowned we

See *Shared Life*, p. 2.

Recent Activities around the Unleashing Hidden Potential CD-Rom

— Compiled by Carl Egner —

The Unleashing Hidden Potential seminar, which took place in November 2000, was designed to demonstrate that a truly inclusive dialogue around school improvement is possible. Since that time we have been working in other ways to promote the same ideas, and we now have available the CD-ROM which is a

unique tool designed to foster such dialogues. We have continued to be in contact with the people who participated in the seminar, and we have met new people who are working on similar issues. On this page are examples of some of the contacts we have had recently.



Tina Lindsey and Christopher Cleary work on an early version of the UHP CD-Rom.

Building a Dialogue with Others

Since last November, several participants in the Unleashing Hidden Potential seminar have shared the CD-Rom with a diverse array of teachers, academics, parents and university students. The following are examples of some of these presentations and the dialogue they led to.

Clinchco, Virginia. We met with a group of concerned citizens from a small community in Appalachia. Most of participants are parents who are involved in different ways in the school system. The stories from the CD-ROM immediately led to a spirited discussion about many school issues. For example, in reaction to a story about how a child was embarrassed by his teacher, one of the adults said, "I remember once when my teacher said something like that to me. I am 53 years old and I still remember to this day how I felt."

Wise, Virginia. We presented the CD-ROM to two teachers at a high school in this rural community. We were concerned that perhaps the stories on the CD-ROM were too centered on urban school systems, but the teachers assured us that the issues raised were also relevant to their setting. They invited us to come back in May to give a presentation at a training day for all the teachers in their county.

New York City. We met with Dr. Michelle Fine of the City

University of New York. She is well known for working with community groups on school issues. A mother who had participated in the UHP seminar came with us to this meeting and told her story and what the experience had meant to her. Dr. Fine encouraged us by saying, "This is an important tool because its aim is to foster dialogue. In many cases we know today what to do to improve schools, but what is lacking is a dialogue about how to make that happen."

New York City, Columbia University. We were invited to give a presentation to the Education Forum at Columbia University, an interdisciplinary group of graduate students who meet regularly to discuss education issues. After a general presentation about the CD-ROM and the UHP project, a listener asked what the main lessons were from the project. One of the presenters, a parent from New York City, replied that its goal is not to provide lessons or answers; it is a tool to foster dialogue. She said, "You don't use this as a cookbook . . . because you have to use your own ingredients. It's just a tool to let your eyes open up, that these are some of the things that can happen and that you can be prepared for. . . . And the communication [is key], because if there is no communication there's not going to be anything else going on."

Continuing to Communicate through UHP

— By Maria Sandvik —

It's about communication, it's still about communication, Ms.

Grimes explained as she and her son, Darnell, looked through the Unleashing Hidden Potential (UHP) CD-Rom. Ms. Grimes was referring to the UHP Seminar, the preparation process prior to the seminar, and now the UHP CD-Rom that she and all the seminar participants received in February.

Although the UHP CD-Rom is not yet published and still needs a few finishing touches, the content is now complete and ready for use by a wider public. Giving everyone who was part of the seminar the opportunity to see, work through, and give feedback about the CD-Rom was one of the most recent steps in the project.

"It's really beautiful. I'll take it to the school and show the teacher and principal," Ms. Bragg offered. Ms. Grimes can also see bringing the CD-Rom to each of her children's teachers and explaining the communication that was necessary throughout the UHP process. She recalled a workshop at the seminar in which each participant built a structure with blocks and then needed to communicate to a partner what that structure looked like so it could be accurately reproduced without the partner ever seeing it. For Ms. Grimes there is a correlation between the need for positive communication in this

workshop exercise and in the daily interactions between parents and their children's teachers. Mutual effort to speak respectfully and listen carefully is key in both cases.

Looking through the UHP CD-Rom reminded Ms. Lindsey about what was discussed at the UHP Seminar, as well as the people she met and worked with there. In the future, as she uses the CD-Rom to speak about UHP she will be able to tell of her experiences and those of the other parents, teachers, community workers, and university professors who shared their successes in helping children learn. Ms. Williams and Ms. Lindsey also suggested that staff at their local recreation centers should see the UHP CD-Rom, not only classroom teachers and principals.

These and other reactions from UHP Seminar participants to the CD-Rom emphasized what has been the focus of UHP all along: open communication between everyone involved in a child's education, parents, community workers, and teachers. The tool to pass this lesson along is now in the hands of the people who created it, Unleashing Hidden Potential Seminar participants. Over the next several months they will take the UHP CD-Rom to educators who haven't yet had the UHP experience. They will encourage and help parents, educators, and community workers create an open dialogue that is essential for all children to succeed in school and learn.



WhyUHP?

The basic tenets of the Unleashing Hidden Potential Project are simple:

- The public school system in the United States is still struggling to provide a quality education to ALL children, especially those from disadvantaged families;
- All interested partners—parents, communities, teachers, administrators, academics, and policy makers—need to work together in school improvement efforts;
- Many parents—especially parents living in poverty—have very little positive contact with their children's schools and have not contributed to school-reform efforts;
- It is possible—even for parents living in persistent poverty—to be full and constructive partners in their children's education and in school reform efforts.

Bringing a Learning Community to Life: Part II

As in our previous issue, we are printing here excerpts from one of the UHP CD-Rom units. Benzner Grimes, a UHP Seminar participant, presented this one to Dr. Michelle Fine in March (see p. 2).



When her daughter started misbehaving with a new teacher, Benzner Grimes tried to solve the conflict.

Samantha

The new teacher and the principal asked me to sit in the classroom to see how bad Samantha was acting up. They wanted me to come every day, but I got tired from staying two or three hours in that classroom with my baby in the stroller. I had other things to do. What the new teacher didn't notice is that Samantha was getting picked on. Children would make fun of her short hair or the way she walked. Samantha has a strong temper and she would get mad. [...] I told Samantha that the three of us needed to talk together so that she will understand, I will understand and the teacher will understand what's going on between her and Samantha. We had a meeting and then things went better.



A parent reminds us how difficult it can be to keep open the lines of communication.

I Can't Talk to You

There was an incident between my child and his teacher. I went to speak to the teacher who said: "I can't talk to you, I am too busy." The teacher refused to talk to me. I just continued and I went to the principal. Everyone in the school treated me like I was a second-class citizen, as though I was trying to make trouble for the school. My child was not progressing in class and I just had to put him in another school.



Why do so many parents and teachers have such a hard time communicating?

The School is Scary

Parent:
I'm a mother of six children. I know parents who don't go to their kids' school because they don't feel respected. Sometimes, parents are scared to go to school. They are scared of what will be said about them and their children. It's hard for parents who don't know how to read and write to go to their children's school.

Teacher:
We have to admit that four out of five of the teachers are not from a very poor background. They don't have experience of this reality. So, very often, they arrive and are faced with kids having terrible difficulties and the teachers can't understand what's going on. They expect those kids to do the same work, to have the same concentration, to have the same attitude as other kids who don't have problems at all.

Drawings by Nurit Karlin

~In Memory~

Esperanza XXX, a long-time friend and member of the Fourth World Movement, passed away on _____ at the age of 110. Dona Esperanza was a tower of strength, stability, and love for each member of her large family. She helped everyone who was in need in whatever way she could, having often one or several of her grandchildren with her. One can just try to imagine what the life of this amazing lady was, from her childhood in the fields in Puerto Rico to the projects of NY City. She lived a very long life with many hardships and it seems that she just stepped over those to remain a loving, strong presence for all her descendants. She was this for the Fourth World Movement also.

Lois Franco, an elementary school teacher, tells how she succeeded in working with a mother to help her improve in school.

Maria's Blossoming

Maria was not listening at all. She was also not doing her homework. Her mother spoke to me a couple of times after school. She was very angry. I tried to tell her what Maria wasn't doing. It didn't work and nothing changed. When we had the parent-teacher conference, Maria's mother came about two minutes before the end and wanted to talk with me about her daughter. She appeared to be very upset. I decided to stay late and listen to what she had to say. [...] As we continued our discussion, the mother began to calm down and we worked out a plan together. [...] Throughout the rest of the year, Maria did blossom and made a lot of improvement. It was well worth the hour after school, just talking with the woman calmly.

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Making Human Connections

Shared Life, from p. 1.

went down to the river with his mother so she could make an offering to the spirits. We stood alongside families for other important events such as births, ordination ceremonies, first days of school, and visits to relatives in prison. Often times we could not “do” anything, but we could be there. Even though we did not live in the slum, our long-term presence and activities allowed us to establish links of friendship and trust sufficiently strong for the people in these communities to share their concerns, pains and joys with us. Such a privileged relationship naturally changes how people act and understand the world around them, and it was a continuous challenge for us to find ways to share this knowledge and understanding with our supporters who could further create bridges between the very poor and wider society. Whether through participation in art activities, meetings or special events, this “shared life” transforms and brings people closer together. It is these human connections based on mutual trust and respect from which



The families from Saphan Phut and Bangkok Noi give Nicole one last hug goodbye.

partnerships are built and change is possible.

I joined the Fourth World Movement volunteer corps to put my commitment to social justice into practice. My experiences as a volunteer, and the relationships I have built with Awn, Paa Noi and many others, have strengthened my dedication to the fight against poverty. As a next step, I am currently

pursuing a Masters in Social Work at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It is a challenge to return to academia. However, I hope to find ways to integrate my belief in human relationships as a vehicle for change with current social work practices and theories so as ultimately to be better able to build partnerships and ensure the full participation of people living in poverty. Sometimes it's hard to see what we are doing or to know if our presence and daily activities make sense in the face of such extreme poverty. Awn's painting was a precious gift - an expression of a relationship built up slowly over six years, an indication that our presence and the act of “sharing life” can make a difference.

Fourth World House Capital Campaign Update



The renovation and expansion of the Fourth World House in New York is on schedule and within budget (\$1.3 million).

As of March 31, 2004, renovation and construction work was 60% completed.

Amount raised,
as of March 31, 2004:
\$900,000

We will be starting a general
pledge drive in July.

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FOURTH WORLD JOURNAL

The Fourth World Journal is a regular publication of the Fourth World Movement/USA, the US branch of an international association working with and on behalf of those around the world who live in extreme poverty.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and the Council of Europe.

The Fourth World Journal aims to bring together different points of view, especially those of the very poor themselves, on topics related to extreme poverty. We encourage our readers to share with us their reactions and comments.

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