



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

Fourth World Movement/USA * 7600 Willow Hill Drive * Landover, MD 20785-4658 * 301-336-9489 * Vol.36 No.2 * October 2004

A Renewed War on Poverty

By Diana Skelton Faujour

"We do not accept that, because of poverty, people live in social isolation, are blamed for their situation, are not consulted on decisions affecting them, and are forced to accept what others think is good for them."

This was part of the message the Fourth World Movement shared at the "No Room for Poverty" National Rally on September 4. Some two thousand grassroots activists from all across the country came together in Washington, DC to call for a White House Conference on American Poverty to develop a plan to end poverty once and for all.

As the United States prepares for the Presidential election, the rally issued a call to all sides of the political debate to renew this country's War on Poverty. This commitment to end poverty must be enduring, as there is no instant fix. It must be shaped in partnership with those who stand on the front lines of this fight: the people grappling every day with issues of survival for themselves, their families and their neighbors.

We also hope that this election season will be one in which the votes and voices of all people matter. It should be a common priority of our country to ensure that every citizen is able to vote. This means not only guaranteeing a reliable system for counting votes but also encouraging those people whose voices are rarely heard to register and to vote.

As crucial as it is, voting is just one way for people to engage in shaping our communities. This issue of the *Fourth World Journal* highlights some other forms of involvement: from running Street Library activities for children to presenting the *Unleashing Hidden Potential* project at a national workshop; from advocating change in child welfare policies to preparing for the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*.

These projects all began at a grassroots level and are our way of battling the injustices of poverty. We hope that a White House Conference on American Poverty can be an opportunity to learn from many such grassroots initiatives about what works and how to end injustice.

How Poverty Separates Parents and Children

Why Family Separation is an Issue in the Fight Against Poverty

By Ben Fehsenfeld

"Many things can be learned from this document, but foremost among them is perhaps the realization of how many hidden efforts parents and children in extreme poverty make in order to stay together." It is with these words that Nitin Desai, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, introduces *How Poverty Separates Parents and Children*, a new study by the International Movement ATD Fourth World in collaboration with the U.N. The study documents difficulties and successes in keeping together families living in extreme poverty in Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Haiti, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The chapter on the United States focuses mainly on New York City and was written by Diana Skelton Faujour, with support from Ariane Eigler.

The national context of the study finds that, as of 2001, more than half a million children in the United States were living in foster care. In New York City alone, some thirty thousand children live in foster care but, of these children, less than 15% have been victims of child abuse. This statistic points to a major undercurrent in the child welfare system: *"the term neglect is a euphemism for poverty and its roots and repercussions: homelessness, family conflict, untreated addiction and mental illness, social isolation and lack of access to the supports all families need."* The study then explains the effects of these factors.

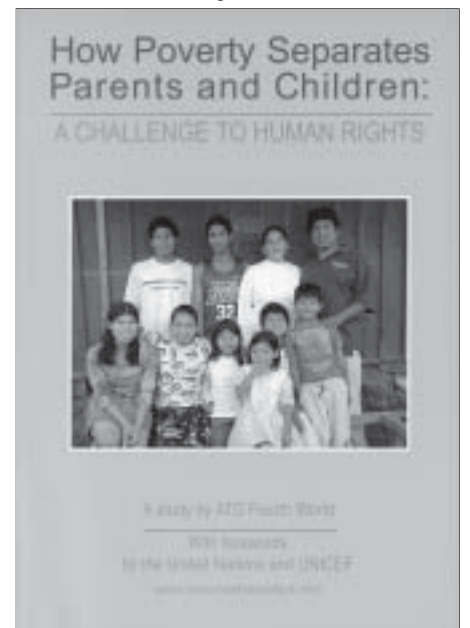
For instance, homelessness and rules in the shelter system can increase the strains on a family. Some shelters prohibit fathers or boys over the age of ten from entry, so if a family wants to stay in the shelter the male members of the family must find alternative accommodation. Also, the welfare reform of 1996 has led to a sharp drop in childcare support from the government, forcing some working-class parents to choose between leaving their children in neighborhoods they consider dangerous while they work long hours or sending them to live with relatives or others.

Sometimes conditions force

parents to separate their family. This can occur if one or both parents migrate to earn a better living, leaving behind their family until they make enough money to pay for the passage of their children. The criminal justice system, which has imprisoned two million people, more than any other country in the world, can also place a burden on maintaining family ties. Either parents are sent to prisons very far away from their children or prisons create rules which make family visits very difficult.

Ill-health, of either a parent or a child, can also lead to hospitalization and referrals to foster care. Mrs. Doris Lewis, a member of Fourth World Movement/USA, explains, *"Mary's children used to participate in the Street Library. She tried to raise her two sons, but the boys were put in foster care. She really wanted to raise her children. I don't think she will get them back because she has AIDS."* For many in the foster care system, this web of factors separating families leads to an impression of neglect by parents living in poverty. One gruesome result of this has been the sterilization programs geared toward drug users, poor, and minority mothers.

While these conditions apply to much of the United States, the picture in New York City is unique and so the study outlines the many flaws and some achievements of the child welfare system in the city. *"In 1995, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) was formed, with a mission statement that any 'ambiguity' about child safety would be resolved in favor of removal,"* says Michael Arsham, Executive Director of the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP). Following a rule change in 1996, neglect cases began to trigger child removals and criminal charges rather than support programs and counselling. In fact, just one phone call to ACS, even an anonymous one, can set in motion a process of investigation and charges that is very hard to stop. This harshness falls most often on poor and minority parents: 96% of children in foster care in New York City are African-American or Hispanic. Conse-



quently, the relationship between parents living in poverty and ACS has become one of misunderstanding and distrust. Because of fear, many parents do not seek the help and support they could have access to through ACS before a punitive process begins.

Once children enter the child welfare system, few benefit. The study describes how children can enter the system very easily, but reunification with their families is much more tricky. Children in foster care are sometimes placed with families whose culture or language is different than their own, and frequently so for a number of years. If a family is reunited, the parents and children can often have difficulty relating to each other and the children may harbor resentment towards the parents for failing to protect them from the foster care system. Additionally, the children's education suffers when they must move to different schools, and depending on their foster care situation they may have to change schools a number of times. Such shifts can result in students not graduating or earning the grades their efforts deserve due to the differing requirements between schools and states.

Despite the problems of the child welfare system, its structure perpetuates the status quo. Some 79% of New York City's foster care cases are handled by private agencies that make recommendations about whether a child should be returned home or not, but at the

See *How Poverty Separates...* p. 2

How Poverty Separates... from p. 1

same time the funding of these same agencies is based on the number of children they have in custody, creating a financial incentive for these agencies not to reunite children with their families. To compound this, the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, passed by the federal government, makes adoption of children in the child welfare system easier than the reunification of families.

In response, child advocates formed two groups in the mid-1990s to assist parents involved in the child welfare system. People United for Children supports parents with children in foster care and helps them understand and then navigate the system. The Child Welfare Organizing Project works to let parents and children affected by ACS influence its policies. Some gains have been made by these organizations. ACS added Parent Advocate Consortium to its organization to talk about issues related to parenting and child welfare. One CWOP Parent Organizer now participates in the Advisory Committee of ACS, which mostly includes representatives of foster care agencies and legal services organizations.

So what can be done to improve the child welfare system? First, greater emphasis should be placed on preventive services. Preventive services cost an average of \$6,900 per year for a family with three children, while foster care costs \$17,000 to \$54,000 per year per child. Secondly, both parents and children must be involved more in child welfare policy and practice. According to CWOP, "...by supporting parents to have a voice in the system, we want to create more partnership and respect of the client." And thirdly, more contracts for child welfare should be handed to small, local providers run by people of color which would be more trusted and have more understanding of the community. Finally, legal representatives of families in the system need better training and support.

The study ends with the words of Ms. Nanette Schorr, the supervisor of Bronx Legal Services. "Policies which drive the child welfare system can have the effect of diminishing the humanity of the parents who enter the system, most of whom are low-income... Child welfare advocates need to think of themselves as anti-poverty advocates, and to think of radical reforms to the system."

How Poverty Separates Parents and Children is available now through the Order Form on page 3 or through the National Center

Ten Years On from the Fourth World Family Congress

By Fanchette Clement-Fanelli

"We are a people that resists the misery that eats away at the hearts of our children, that destroys our families and communities and comes between us and our future. Yet we do all we can to keep our families going, hour by hour, day by day, year in and year out, generation after generation. We are a people that believe that tomorrow things will be different."

Ten years have passed since Gavino Yucra Tunqi of Peru and Patricia McConalogue from Scotland read these words aloud at the U.N. Plaza in New York. They were among the three hundred Fourth World Movement delegates who came from forty-five countries around the world to take part in the second Fourth World Family Congress, designed to coincide with the U.N.-sponsored *International Year of the Family* in 1994. Having spent months preparing in their own communities, the delegates of the Congress were fulfilling the promise made in 1957 by Fr. Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, to the homeless families of the housing camp of Noisy-le-Grand, France: he had pledged to bring the poorest families of the world to institutions such as the United Nations and all those places where decisions affecting their future are made.

At their arrival on the North American continent, delegates were welcomed by members and friends of the Fourth World Movement in thirteen different locations across the United States and Canada. Strong bonds of friendship were formed between the delegates and their hosts, and vivid memories of the warmth that both groups felt for

each other still remain. The Congress was an opportunity for the delegates to learn more about each other and about the people that they were all representing, and its most obvious expression came through the celebration of October 17, the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, at the United Nations with the U.N. Secretary General and other dignitaries. It was there that they pledged to work together to free the world from extreme poverty, a declaration that sent the delegates home with renewed energy and determination to struggle not only for themselves and their families, but also for those poorer and more excluded than themselves.

The Fourth World Family Congress continues to resonate in a number of ways at both the local and at the international level. Just two years after the Congress, a replica of the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Poverty was laid in the gardens of the United Nations and celebrations of October 17, involving families who struggle against extreme poverty and those who stand alongside them in their struggle, have been held there

every year since. Inspired by the Congress and its celebration of October 17, delegates from southwestern Virginia decided to mark the day in their own area and have done so each year since 1995, a tradition that they continue to hold to. That same year they also welcomed Fourth World Movement volunteers to their area in order to further develop the Movement in the Appalachian region.

Now, ten years on, the message of the Fourth World Family Congress is more relevant than ever. Families here in the United States and throughout the world find themselves face to face with increased unemployment, rising violence, the dangers of drugs and homelessness, and a lack of opportunities to break out of such cycles. Family poverty has become a forgotten issue in national debate. It is time for a wake-up call for many more people, whatever their position in life, to join together with families in poverty and decide that the eradication of extreme poverty is the goal they want to pursue for a more just world.



Continuing to Communicate for a Better Education

By Denis Cretinon

On September 3, we were invited to present an *Unleashing Hidden Potential* workshop during the annual convention of the Community Action Partnership in Washington, DC. A network of community-based organizations created during the War on Poverty, Community Action Partnership organizes a number of programs covering job training, housing difficulties and anti-poverty projects. Participants at the workshop came from far and wide - Hawaii, Illinois, Missouri, New York, Ohio and Oregon - and all were linked to the issues of education either as teachers, school board members or parents.

Using the *Unleashing Hidden Potential* CD-Rom, we highlighted the

story of Ms. Russell and her son Corey. On her son's first day of school, Ms. Russell went to see the principal and took a doctor's note saying that Corey should be placed in special education. And yet it was only after the intervention of a teacher at the school and a meeting with the school board that Corey was finally placed in the appropriate setting, a process that took fifty-seven days. As the audience listened to Ms. Russell telling her own story, their eyes lit up.

In relating to the challenge faced by Ms. Russell of convincing the school that she had information about her son that the school needed to hear and use, the workshop participants revealed how the situations illustrated on the CD-Rom were very close to those of their own lives or the lives of the families that they work with. This

reaction was evident in the discussion: while most of participants initially wanted to learn about how to help students and schools in their area "meet the standards," they also enjoyed the chance to talk about those issues which are all too often neglected but do affect "the standards." Several participants asked for an evaluation copy of the CD-Rom to use with teachers.

We have also been invited by Discovery Charter School to present three *Unleashing Hidden Potential* CD-Rom workshops to classes of 'alternate route' trainee teachers in New Jersey. These training sessions will be held at the beginning of next year and will allow us to share the experiences of parents dealing with extreme poverty with more people in the education system.

The Learning Experience of One Summer in New York

By Anna Fagergren

As is the case in many places, summer for New York children, like snow, is a cause for excitement. And with school out, members of the Fourth World Movement team working in under-resourced communities in New York strove to create activities that engaged children and their families, such as Street Libraries, a community parks festival and family vacation weekends.

As a summer intern, I participated in Street Libraries and their extended counterpart, the three-day Street Library Festivals. Situated in the courtyard of the Ocean Hill housing development in Brooklyn, we read books from our rickety, red book box and built a brand new box from scratch. We painted, beaded, completed photography projects, enacted plays, planted vegetables in plant-boxes, and joined in the pass-the-parcel game where children unwrap layers of a gift whenever music stops. In addition, through "Café Input," we created opportunities to chat with parents over coffee and cake about the volunteers' presence in Ocean Hill.

In another grassroots summer project, Fourth World Movement Volunteers joined other community groups and residents around the Ocean Hill and Bushwick neighborhoods to plan the Third Annual East Bushwick Parks Festival. People came together to share a cook-out, face-painting, a traveling dinosaur exhibit with real bones, and a talent show including singers, dance troupes and poetry reading. People from all walks of life and vocations joined in, including the NYPD, whose offer to let young people ride in police cars and sound the sirens elicited squeals of excitement.

In another event involving travel, members of the Movement from New York left the city's five busy boroughs for a few days, piling into vans and heading south to lodge at the Kateri Environmental Camp and Center in New Jersey. Because I had never been to Kateri before, I felt fortunate to have the company of experienced Kateri-goers, some of whom have been making the trip since they were children. Never before had I seen so many white shoes muddied or heard so much advice about the best techniques for capturing the biggest frogs as we took turns stretching our nets into the bright green pond.



As part of these New Jersey weekends, we day-tripped to a park that offers a lake for swimming, tide-water for crabbing, and grills for, well, grilling. Here, I learned to listen to women who knew better than I when a storm was about to hit and send us sprinting for shelter - bearing babies, baskets and blankets. I also watched as new swimmers learned how to fearlessly float while other people's hands offered support, and experienced first-hand that nobody is safe from a splashing, no matter how much they plead to keep their hair dry.

The final part of the Kateri experience, before a return to what often turned out to be the welcome and familiar noises of the city ("I could never live out here," I heard more than once at Kateri, "it's too quiet."), was the visit to a local farm. It was here that baby animals, milking cows, and old-fashioned furniture and farm-equipment all came together. Children and adults alike milked cows, squealed at baby pigs, gasped at the size of the piglets' mother, and wondered at the sight of carriages used in the 1800's and funny-looking chickens whose feathers were 'molting.'

Kateri weekends made up a good-sized piece of summer for the Fourth World Movement in New York, and of my experience as a summer intern. But every experience I had of meeting families, speaking with members of the Movement from different walks of life, and of taking part in activities that brought together people with common goals will remain with me forever.

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A copy of our latest annual report may be obtained, upon request, from us or from the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

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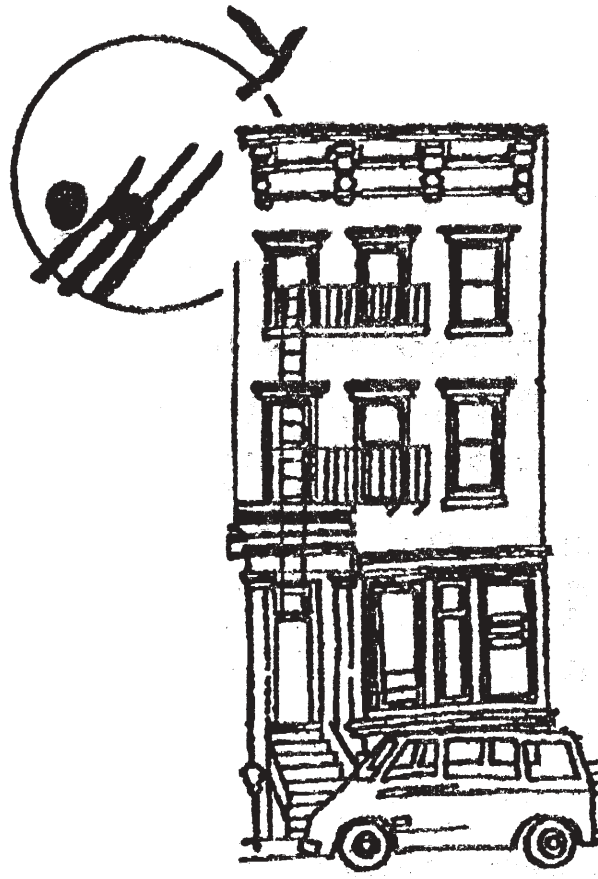
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Fourth World House Capital Campaign Update

The renovation and expansion of the Fourth World House in New York continues apace and remains on schedule for its official re-opening in January 2005. Over the summer, a further \$33,000 was raised towards this \$1.3 million project, through a grant from the 42nd Street Development Foundation and through the many individual donors who have responded to the fundraising appeal sent out by the President of Fourth World Movement/USA.

The majority of the money raised this summer has come from alumni of the Fourth World Movement Volunteer Corps, including many who undertook a three-month internship but did not join the Volunteer Corps. Former volunteer Robin Mohr, now working for a scholarship fund which assists very low-income children in the San Francisco area, spearheaded this campaign by writing a personal letter to her fellow alumni.

"That old Fourth World House on First Avenue is the site of a lot of important memories for me. My experience as a Fourth World Movement Volunteer changed my life. I learned a new way to understand the lives of very poor people and I learned that it was really possible to work in partnership with the families, with my co-workers and with people in ordinary jobs, to fight poverty together. As you may know, the house in New York is currently undergoing the first major renovations in thirty years. Imagine no more rickety stairs. Bedroom walls you can't hear through. Plumbing and electricity that meet modern building codes. Smooth floorboards that children won't trip on. What a joy for families,



"That old Fourth World House on First Avenue is the site of a lot of important memories for me. My experience as a Fourth World Movement Volunteer changed my life."

volunteers and allies alike to come together in a space that respects their needs for functional meeting space and comfortable living quarters and simple beauty.

"There are so many of us who have been touched deeply by the Fourth World Movement. If we were able to get together, each giving some small amount, we could make a significant contribution. So I would like to challenge you. I propose that each of us pledge an amount equal to one month of our current rent or mortgage payment, to be paid over six months or a year, if necessary. For my husband and me personally, that's a huge gift, more than we've ever given to any organization. But this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pay a little rent on the memories, the training, the support we have received from the Movement over the years."

We are very grateful to all our donors, and particularly so to Robin and our alumni, but we still need to raise more than \$360,000 by next January to cover the cost of this renovation project.

We urge you to make a pledge or a donation now so that your name can be recorded for posterity in the renovated and expanded Fourth World House. Bequests or planned gifts of all sizes can make a difference. We also urge you to help us raise money in other ways, whether by selling our greeting cards in your community, inviting friends for a fundraising party, or asking your employer for a matching grant. Please contact us for more ideas and support with fundraising activities.

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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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INSIDE:
The Role of the Family
in Fighting Poverty

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