



"We lost everything,"

Isabelle says about her experiences of being evicted. It was a very cold winter, and her family had to return to PATH (Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing) in New York City seven times before getting a space at the shelter.

A Fourth World People's University facilitator asks Isabelle what could have helped her in this situation. When she responds that she hoped the staff would be more open-minded, Simon, an invited guest who has worked for a state-funded shelter program in Massachusetts, asks: "Were they not open minded about your situation? Or was it the options they were giving you?"

"It was both," she answers, explaining further said that she didn't know where to go, and she needed to be shown more compassion. Sitting next to Simon, Cory, another invited guest who is a district leader for Harlem in NYC, admits that he has never been to PATH although he has been working in the government for a long time. After hearing Isabelle and Simon, Cory says he will suggest to the members of the City Council that they take a walk through of PATH: "When I read the reports, I only read that PATH served 900 people. The report doesn't tell you what those people go through, what they feel."

This is the kind of vital encounter that happens in the Fourth World People's University (FWPU) in New York.

Overcoming poverty means building the relationships that create a safe, trusting environment where people from different social backgrounds can come together to discuss and share ideas that lead to meaningful change. To make this happen, there's a huge investment by all involved over a long period of time.

Donate today to support Fourth World People's University, a longstanding program in which the knowledge and experience of people living in poverty give birth to new ideas and proposals for social change.



“There’s something about this People’s University that acts like a trigger, giving us an opportunity to have a chance to know what is going on in our lives. It’s knowing the person as a human being.”

~ Jean Quinn, Executive of UNANIMA International

Fostering frank exchanges on complex topics related to poverty that allow for new discoveries and positive changes means a lot of communication behind the scenes. ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps members who are trained to hear from and work with people coming from different points of view have a lead role in Fourth World People’s University. They work closely with a FWPU Preparation Team, made up of members from different walks of life and experiences. Together this team:

- Ensures that topics related to poverty are relevant to ATD Fourth World members and today’s context
- Organizes two preparation meetings with people who will be at the FWPU
- Prepares interactive activities to address key questions related to the theme. For example, a Forum Theater workshop during the FWPU on “Youth” was a powerful way to address the challenges in communication between different generations on sensitive topics. It’s also playful and engaging for young people.
- Gets to know the guest stakeholders working in professional jobs related to the theme and prepare with them beforehand. These preparations are unique and important as guest stakeholders are expected to contribute to the dialogue off the cuff rather than give a prepared presentation.

The outcomes of this three hour FWPU exchange are rich, often unexpected, and needed in our collective work to overcome poverty. From the early steps to the FWPU session itself, flexibility and collaboration foster the confidence, agency, and open dialogues that reveal many aspects of poverty otherwise unknown and discover new solutions.

Sincerely,
Virginie Charvon & Marcia Kresge
ATD Fourth World New York

