



# ATD FOURTH WORLD

**DIGNITY AT THE CENTER OF  
SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY**

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER

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# DIGNITY CENTERED SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY MEANS DIGNITY FOR ALL

The Massachusetts House of Representatives adopted a resolution acknowledging the need to recognize Multidimensional Aspects of Poverty (MAP) when designing policy interventions to poverty. The resolution, introduced by Rep. Christine Barber and passed unanimously, also recognizes that people in poverty should be involved as partners in policy making. Read more about the resolution here: <http://bit.ly/ma-resolution>

Esther Duflo and Abhijit V. Banerjee, winners of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics, have researched an approach to overcoming poverty based on compassion, respect, and dignity. That approach may sound familiar to those who know ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World Movement. In fact, Dr. Duflo and Dr. Banerjee were impacted by meeting with ATD Fourth World members with experiences of extreme poverty, learning directly from them what is needed to overcome poverty. They wrote about this experience in a Time magazine article, "We Can Help Poor People by Treating Them With Respect." The Time article reflects on what the couple learned from this approach: "While [people in poverty] may have problems, they are not the problem. They are entitled to be seen for who they are and to not be defined by the difficulties besieging them." From this lesson, Dr. Duflo and Dr. Banerjee have called for a global shift in attitude and thinking: dignity should be at the center of every social policy and program. This would lead to a very different set of answers to poverty than most implemented today.

Last month the United Nations addressed the urgency of finding concrete and adequate answers to global homelessness. At the same time, just a few blocks from UN Headquarters, the New York City subway authority removed the backs off benches as an effort to stop homeless people from sleeping there. This policy does not resolve the complex problem of people sleeping in subway stations; it just removes people. By doing so, it adds suffering, pain, and a clear sign of exclusion - literally, "we don't have your back!" - to homeless people. It also deprives commuters from having a back on the benches they sit on. Such a decision shows that poor anti-poverty policies not only harm people, they are most often implemented at a loss to all of us. But it doesn't have to be like that.

A dignity centered response to this situation would rely on using the Merging of Knowledge methodology, developed by ATD Fourth World to create conditions so people from different walks of life can think and act together to address poverty. In this instance, conditions would have been put in place to gather the main stakeholders - people experiencing homelessness, commuters, subway authority and city staff - to discuss the issue with shared power in the decision making. No doubt it would have led to finding real, concrete and holistic solutions that would have benefited all.

As you read more about our project with The New School in New York, the resolution adopted by the State House of Representatives in Massachusetts, and a story of multicultural connections through our shared humanity at Story Garden, you'll see how ATD Fourth World is invested in making the Merging of Knowledge approach, enrooted in the dignity of all people, known as a tool to overcome poverty. Please reach out if you think it could be beneficial where you are!

Dignity centered projects teach us: when I undermine your dignity, I also undermine my own. When I respect your dignity, I enhance mine. Dignity is either a lose-lose or win-win partnership. With that, we have our compass to move forward, all together in dignity.

 Guillaume Charvon  
National Director

# TRANSFORMING THE KNOWLEDGE ON POVERTY WITH UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

Throughout its history, ATD Fourth World has sought out and built working relationships with researchers and universities. Collaborating with academics came from an early understanding that merging an academic approach and the knowledge gained from life experience leads to lasting solutions to poverty.

This engagement continues today through a new partnership with The New School, a New York City based university known for its innovative approach to education that helps nurture progressive thinkers. When the ATD Fourth World team in charge of the Multidimensional Aspect of Poverty (MAP) Research was looking for an academic venue to release the research report last March, it was natural to reach out to Alberto Minujin, professor at The New School and expert in multidimensional poverty. One year later, the partnership is leading to many new initiatives!

**First, one outcome of the MAP research project was that university students should learn more about the reality of poverty and how it is experienced by people.**

An expanded understanding of poverty can impact future approaches to addressing it and the narrative around it. A co-training project developed by people with a lived experience of poverty, practitioners, and academics was launched in February, adding a meaningful contribution to The New School's curriculum.

**Second, we still need innovative collaborations to counter poverty.**

Prof. Minujin and Gabriel Crespo, both from Equity for Children at The New School, are bringing in new partners and with ATD Fourth World are organizing a workshop to learn how to build on successful strategies to resist poverty used by people in poverty on a daily basis. By involving New York City and state policy makers and organizations like the Center for New York City Affairs, UNICEF, and the Parsons DESIS Lab, the workshop will push participants forward in identifying collaborative solutions to poverty informed by people most impacted by it.

**Third, embedded in a university we meet young people and can invite them into meaningful ways to fight the injustice of poverty.**

Eight New School students have a coursework assignment that is supporting the local ATD Fourth World team design a social map of Brownsville, Brooklyn (where we run a Story Garden) and explore possibilities of a new project at a family shelter in the neighborhood.

Strong university collaboration grows solutions to poverty in important and sustainable ways. They are a step towards our understanding of poverty being fully informed, therefore transformed, by the contribution of people with that direct experience. With this newly formed knowledge, there is no doubt that programs and policies created in response to it will be more relevant and successful.





# SAME STARS, SAME SKY, SAME HUMANITY



ATD Fourth World was founded on the conviction that we are all part of the same humanity, that even when life is hard, all of us still share a deep aspiration for knowledge, for beauty, for the great achievements that come with life. Story Garden is rooted in this belief.

Winter is a special time for Navajos—who are also known as the “Diné,” which means “the People”—to reflect on the meaning of star patterns in the sky, so ATD Fourth World in New Mexico decided to introduce star constellations as an artistic project at Story Garden at the Gallup flea market. We thank Gloria Begay from the Diné Food Sovereignty Alliance and Noreen Kelly from Diné Council of Elders for Peace in partnering with ATD Fourth World to help inspire this significant art project.

In one January session of Story Garden, we watched a cartoon illustration of how Black God, one of the Gods in the Navajo traditions, placed the stars in the sky to guide the Diné. Being a mischievous trickster, Coyote offered to help Black God but ended up ruining his plan by randomly throwing many stars in the night sky.

Children at Story Garden painted their own version of a dark sky. They used a holed constellation model to trace the one they liked and they added gems to make stars stand out. A vendor at the flea market told us that as a child, she used to look for the Small and the Big Dipper to pass the time. When a 10-year old girl at Story Garden heard this, she offered to make the paintings of the two Dippers and she dedicated them to the vendor’s granddaughter who had to help sell and could not join us. When the young girl was happy with her work, we went to give the paintings to the vendor. On our way to the stand, we met the girl’s mother who is Mexican. She approved of her daughter’s thoughtful gesture by congratulating her.

Just as Black God had originally hoped, stars can indeed guide us – in the multicultural Story Garden of Gallup’s flea market, they guided us in building unity!

***If you are interested in learning more about astronomy, contact us to find out about ATD Fourth World’s mobile science exhibits at [newmexico@4thworldmovement.org](mailto:newmexico@4thworldmovement.org).***