



ATD FOURTH WORLD

DIGITAL HUMAN CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

4thworldmovement.org
ATDFourthWorldUSA
atd4thworld.us
atd4thworld.us

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PO Box 1787
Gallup, NM 87305 USA

ATD FOURTH WORLD 

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
GALLUP NM
PERMIT NO. 9



Dear friends,

We have been together in this pandemic for more than a year. Today, the light at the end of the tunnel might be in sight. What can we learn from this difficult experience? As an organization whose vitality comes from a sense of togetherness and community with and among people with a direct experience of poverty, this pandemic could have stopped us. It did not.

Building a community that is always open, always growing, is at the core of who we are. What was the impact of the pandemic on who we are? Because of the lack of physical interaction and despite many efforts to meet in responsible ways, being together had to evolve. Together, we started national Community Calls. Our response to the forced isolation caused by Covid-19 was to extend our connections and to open the horizons of who we are together as a community. One year later, it seems that it was useful:

"The Community Calls gave me a heads up as to what to expect before Covid hit here in Virginia," Jarvis said recently. "It hit New York and you could watch it move. And we knew what to expect. It gave us a way to prepare before it even hit."

For many of us, building a bigger, more solid digital community was one response to the pandemic. But that did not work for everyone. Sometimes our links are too fragile and life is too hard. Because of this, now is the time to be even more present to those who cannot join our digital community. Many ATD Fourth World initiatives are designed with this need in mind. Actions like in New Orleans where a Volunteer Cops member is patiently sending postcards to the many people she knows in the community; and in New York City where weekly visits in Brownsville assure no one is forgotten; and in New Mexico where a new project, Story Garden on Wheels, was started to reach families in the most remote areas.

Today we are all aware that our ATD Fourth World community is locally rooted in places where life is difficult, and that our community also promises a wider horizon. That's one thing we have learned through this pandemic: belonging to ATD Fourth World is about bonds without the boundaries of class, race, or where we live. It is about this community where each person can be themselves, grow and learn, regardless of where we are. Our digital community ends up adding to the physical one, reinforcing it without being a substitute for it - it just brings more connections!

Please, talk about ATD Fourth World around you, invite people to join us, share our newsletters and the gift of this global community you belong to!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Charvon'.

Guillaume Charvon
National Director

PS: Check out *Singing on the Porch*, an illustrated digital book based on stories that emerged from ATD Fourth World Community Calls: 4thworldmovement.org/singing-on-the-porch/

In the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to stay connected we were forced to rely, in ways we didn't before, on our digital devices. We have been wondering about the impact of this experience on different people:

- How did you maintain connections digitally? Did connecting digitally open new doors to you? Are you grateful for any digital connections you made that you would not have made before the pandemic?
- When technology was missing, were you able to maintain your connections? If so, how?
- Have you found that our work in ATD Fourth World and our ATD Fourth World community require connections that can never be made digitally, even if everyone has the necessary technology to do so? If so, which connections require us to be in person and why? Were you able to maintain those connections? If so, how?

What has been *your* experience? Please send us your answers to these questions!
communications@4thworldmovement.org

We spoke with these four people who shared their experiences with digital connections throughout this last year:

- **Jarvis** - stays connected with ATD Fourth World after helping with renovations at the Learning Co-op in Clintwood, Virginia
- **Patrick** - works on the Participatory Education for Social Professionals team and other projects in New York City
- **Laura** - teaches ESL to adults in Albuquerque, New Mexico
- **Nathalie** - facilitates the Story Garden in Gallup, New Mexico

KEEPING AND MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

Digital connections opened doors for some people and kept doors open for others.

Jarvis and Patrick both learned new ways to stay connected digitally and meet new people. As Guillaume mentions in his message (back page), Jarvis exchanged ways to prepare for and cope with the pandemic with people from other parts of the country and Patrick did as well, including our own ATD Fourth World Community Calls. The need to be connected digitally brought more social media apps to Jarvis' attention which led to making new friends all over the world and connecting with old ones. Jarvis says, *"I didn't care that much for social media. I turned to social media as a way to cope and help myself get through the pandemic."*

Through Jarvis' social media connections, people shared simple ways to help each other get by, practical ways of saving money or getting supplies, for example. And they also helped each other survive:

"I have Complex PTSD. ... Having to be as restricted as we were, if it wasn't for social media and being blessed to have the internet, the forms of communication that were available to us through social media and the whole digital world, I don't believe I would have made it. And there were some who didn't. I prevented four from suicide through social media."

For Jarvis, it wasn't just about making human connections, but about **saving human lives through digital connections.**

Patrick also found it was important to use digital technology for people to not feel abandoned, isolated and lonely, leading to health problems.

*"So that's amazing what it can do, **we can see and listen to each other, we can work with each other, we can have questions, we can have answers... we can feel close to each other, we can communicate the information, what we know, what we can do.**"*

But without a computer and WiFi, Patrick had to stay connected through his phone, which was limiting but he made work. He had to figure out on his own how to use different applications he knew nothing about but needed for meetings and other connections. *"Because if nobody is with you, who's going to show you what you need to do?"*

In her teaching, Laura was faced with how to stay connected with low literacies of all kinds. The digital divide is not just about having the devices:

"I was in the middle of teaching a low-level ESL class when suddenly we had to stay at home. The majority of my students were struggling with English, many of them were here alone or just with minimal family members. Suddenly they had to stay home, they didn't have a lot of connections in this county, they didn't feel very comfortable at all speaking the language and the primary connection was going to be digitally in a language they didn't necessarily understand very well."

She used personal emails, phone calls to stay in touch.

*"The whole process became more meaningful and creative because of the added struggle of language and for some literacy. So for example, they would make videos and send them to me. And I would ask them questions that would enable them to engage in English and practice things we would have been doing in the class, but in ways that were fun and creative. I would have them describe their house to me and take pictures of it and then send me photos or videos and give me a description of it. Or sometimes they'd tell me about their kids and show me pictures of their kids. ... Mostly we had what seemed to me **visual poems that they would send to me every day of their life during the pandemic.** It became so important to all of us."*

*"My philosophy was: **Stay connected, let people know you care about them, they are not alone. There is plenty of language and culture that gets taught that way.**"*

Laura found that through this work her students developed courage to speak with their neighbors, for example. And there were other opportunities for language learning through navigating the social service situations that the pandemic created.

This led to significantly greater retention of students at the beginning of the pandemic than in classes that stuck to the textbook. But this creativity was not sustainable when the classes shifted to online learning platforms and many students dropped out to wait for in-person learning to start again.

In our work in Gallup, Nathalie finds that digital connections are good for maintaining relationships but not so good for making new ones:

"There is a pre-existing respect that tends to make connections almost pre-existent in ATD Fourth World. So I'm not sure that [digital technology] opened new connections, maybe it helped develop them or maintain them. ...

*There is a pre-existing respect [in ATD Fourth World] but there is also a common ability to listen to one other. There is a thirst of wanting to get to know one another. **This is why I say pre-existing connections because the respect and listening and wanting to get to know each other is there.** Digital technologies are tools, good tools. I wouldn't call them the starting point, but I would call them the instrument to help develop the connections."*

CONNECTIONS WITHOUT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Laura and Nathalie used both phones and the U.S. Postal Service to stay connected to the people they work with. Laura sent her students things like recipes, cards and books. Many of the families Nathalie works with in Gallup

do not have the tools for digital meetings, for example, but also don't have the practice to use technology for more than social media. *"So we used some phone calls, and some packages that we sent by post mail, arts and crafts packages."*

As Laura found with her students, Nathalie also found sharing life events was a way to stay connected. The families she works with shared good news, using their phones to send photos of holidays and special meals, for example. One grandma sent photos of all the newborns in her family. Sharing photos of the art the children made showed how it brought the family together.

Patrick experienced the limitations of having only a phone, with its small screen and the difficulty to multitask on it. But he did manage. He says, *"We do what we can, but most important is to stay connected with each other. ATD Fourth World was amazing for what we did."*

CONNECTIONS THAT HAPPEN ONLY IN PERSON

Nathalie finds that showing up in person with all the risks involved with being physically present and sharing one's space, even without a pandemic, can show you care.

"What happens when we are in person is that we show one another not only that we care about one another but also there is an element of trust that is more tangible if we see one another in person. Maybe just the fact that we are willing to take risks for one another is something stronger than what we can exchange from the comfort of our own home through a text message, when we can decide when we text, what we text, have time to read over it, etc."

Patrick misses the ability to greet people as he arrives at a meeting, to chat, to find out how people are doing that day, and to react with affection.

"Participation is most powerful when you're in person, because you feel the different atmosphere. ... When you're by yourself it makes you lonely. When you're in a Zoom meeting you may not be lonely but when you shut down the phone you're going back to lonely. But when you're coming to New York in Manhattan, especially to ATD Fourth World, you don't feel lonely at all. You feel you have your family with you."

Laura says that after all the amazing work that was done at her last job, when she had to move away one of her students said, in tears, *"But who is going to hug us?"* That is a connection she can't make with online learning.