

The Roles We Play

Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty



There have been many stories about people living in poverty in the media recently but, by and large, they have been negative stories that demonise and represent ‘the poor’ as ‘other’. The effect can be to distance the viewer or reader and make them less sympathetic to the policies needed to tackle poverty. Indeed, as the free churches argued in a letter to the Prime Minister last year, the myths about poverty perpetuated by the media and politicians “are convenient because they allow the poor to be blamed for their poverty and the rest of society to avoid taking any responsibility”. Even supportive stories about people living in poverty can sometimes represent a form of ‘sympathetic othering’ by representing them as somehow different and as passive victims, lacking agency. Insofar as their voices are heard, the story has been framed by someone else.

This is why *The Roles We Play* is so important. It allows people with experience of poverty to tell their own stories in the way that they want to tell them. In doing so, people who have not experienced poverty can better understand that, just like them, people in poverty exercise agency in their everyday lives but do so within much greater constraints. They exercise agency in the struggle to get by, in the ways they support family members, friends, neighbours and other members of their local communities and in their attempts to create better lives and conditions. In doing so, they contribute to society in important ways even if they do not happen to be in paid work.

Fifteen years ago, I had the privilege to sit on the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, half of whose members had experience of poverty. That experience helped to deepen my own understanding of poverty and had a huge influence on the book I went on to write about the concept of poverty. I learned just how important it is that people in poverty are treated with respect and are listened to. Such recognition has been identified as a basic human need. *The Roles We Play* recognises, listens to and values people living in poverty and, for that reason alone, I hope it will reach a wide audience.

Ruth Lister

Member of the House of Lords,
Emeritus Professor, Loughborough University,
and author of *Poverty* (Polity Press)

**The Roles We Play:
Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty**

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and other resources, please visit:
www.therolesweplay.co.uk
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INTRODUCTION

Before evolving into a participatory film project and now this book, *The Roles We Play* began life as a photo exhibition in the summer of 2009.

It grew out of an idea for a journal project to be undertaken with the community of individuals and families at ATD Fourth World. The original concept was to portray each person in two settings, at ATD Fourth World and in a location of their choice, and to accompany these images with a written self-portrait to give people the opportunity to define and present themselves on their own terms.

Our aim, the same then as it is today, was to counter stereotypes about people living in poverty and social exclusion by presenting honest, personal accounts of daily life and personal aspiration.

Those involved in the project then invested their time and energy in touring the exhibition around the UK and across Europe. The extended time frame between the start of the project and the publication of this book has allowed time for myself and the participants to get to know each other and build relationships of trust, allowing for more intimate and revealing representations to come through in the photographs. It has also allowed for an ongoing and evolving consideration of a person's sense of self so that individuals could be re-photographed if they felt the original photographs no longer represented them. This has allowed the participants to fully embrace the aim of the project and to rightfully claim ownership of it.

Ongoing discussions with the participants were instrumental in the development of the concept as well as the content. As an artist working predominantly in participatory practice, I often contemplate the roles being played in such a collaboration; my own role and those of the other participants actively engaged in the creative process. I am interested in the interdependence and interconnectedness of such a process, the value we all bring and also the nature of the work and how it confers different positions on us all. I want to thank all those involved in this project for opening their lives to me and re-affirm that this book is a testament to the creativity and energy of those our society so often overlooks and leaves behind.

Eva Sajovic
Artist Photographer

Prejudice [prɛdʒʊdɪs]

Origin:

From the Latin praejudicium, from prae 'in advance' and iudicium 'judgement' – to judge beforehand or prejudgement.

Definition:

An unfair, preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

The inspiration for *The Roles We Play* came from a desire to shed light on what ordinary people do to combat poverty and social exclusion in their everyday lives. It is through celebrating these efforts and achievements that this project offers an alternative perspective on, and provides the viewer the space to reflect on, a very human, yet corrosive, societal issue.

In attempting to tackle the prejudice so often shouldered by the most vulnerable members of our society, this book seeks to show that it is only through reciprocal efforts rooted in empathy, not pity or charity, that we can endeavour to develop our human capacity for change.

Each participant has been involved in all aspects of the project, both in front of and behind the camera. All those featured in this book have worked extremely hard to tell their stories in their own words and have made the brave decision to put themselves in the public spotlight.

We hope you agree that the following pages stand as a challenge to the prevailing negative stereotypes of people who experience poverty in the UK. Only when we focus on the positive actions of individuals and communities can we move away from blaming people for their situation and instead involve them in finding solutions. It is our hope that all of the material produced as part of this project can now be used as a resource for a more inclusive and constructive debate about overcoming poverty in this country.

Dann Kenningham

Project Coordinator
ATD Fourth World

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“A human being’s greatest misfortune is not to be hungry, to be unable to read nor even to be jobless. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored.”

Joseph Wresinski

Founder of ATD Fourth World



Alison
Truth Seeker

I look after an old man. He's 77 and getting on a bit. He lives alone and needs a bit of help with shopping but mostly what he needs is someone to sort out his papers and make phone calls for him. He can read but he just gets anxiety about paperwork and dealing with the council for rent and things like that and because he's not very good on the phone.

I don't know if I would call them roles but I'm a mother and a nan. I look after my grandchild because my daughter recently started work again. I'm very happy to do that; it's not a burden or anything. In the past, I've been a child-minder and fostered a teenager who was a bit wayward. Well, according to her parents, but she was fine with me. I didn't even get paid for that. I just got something like £8 a day that was supposed to be for food. You do it without even thinking about it, without a second thought, because it's part of life and that's how it should be.

I've done a lot of work, lots of different things, and I've always been a part of the community in various different things. Basically, I'm just a normal person but I try to help other people when I can.



I think this project, *The Roles We Play*, is important because it gives people a different perspective from the generally accepted opinion that comes through the media.

I'm sure I could speak for lots of people that they have lost confidence in their lives. A lot of people are so low on confidence inside themselves that it becomes a way of life for them, even though they put on a show.

This is a platform for ordinary people – people who live fulfilling lives, valuable lives, whether they're on benefits or not or whether they're disabled or they've got children, people who have incomparable struggle in their lives – to tell it in their own words instead of being labelled by people who don't really know but who cast a negative judgment on people who they believe aren't contributing to the economy. That is true democracy.

*I am not a chav.
Yes, I've lived on a council estate
And, yes, I've claimed benefits.
Yes, I've got mixed race kids,
some of them from different dads
And, yes, I've worn Nike and Adidas
and hoodies, smoked cigarettes
and had a can or two and a spliff.
No, I wasn't born
with a silver spoon in my mouth,
I didn't have a posh education
And most of what I've learned
has been off the web,
woven of conspiracy theory and fact.
But I am a truth seeker
and I never taught my kids to lie
and I never taught my kids to believe lies.
Given the choice,
I would rather be an honest beggar
than a deceptive thief.*





Kathy
Human Rights Activist

I am a mum and a carer. I love reading books and cooking and, now my sons are older, I have the time to do these things.

When you live in long-term poverty, you have to depend on services that are delivered with suspicion and disdain. They make you feel humiliated. The media and politicians speak about the poor in derogatory ways when they use terms like 'lazy', 'scroungers', 'feckless parents' and 'underclass'. The stereotyping of all poor people dehumanises them in the eyes of others.

Last year, when times were tough, I went to the church-led food bank when nobody could tell me where the local authority-run one was. I felt wretched and ashamed about going there but they were lovely. The food bank is a county-wide church initiative, based in a local community church and café, and also has funding for someone based in the café to give advice on debt, benefits and housing.

I asked if I could do something there because I liked the atmosphere and the people. Despite health issues, I volunteer there when I can. I can't do much but I help serve the food or do the coffees and teas; others help cook the food and heat it all. It's a lovely place to get a simple meal.

It's just a comfortable place to be and people use the cafe as somewhere to sit and wait for the food bank to open so I have been able to have a word with people and offer advice to them. I hope I can use my life experience to give moral support and encouragement along the way. It's a focal point for a deprived area; I love it.

It's so peaceful and non-threatening. To mix with other people there and be involved, even if it's only in a small way, is something for me to look forward to. It gives me a sense of being and has also renewed my interest in cooking.



This project is very important to me because it means I am not invisible anymore; I am recognised as a human being with thoughts, feelings and aspirations. I feel respected. It helps me define myself more positively and feel I have a valuable part to play in society.

I enjoy doing something positive because it helps me deal with the negativity of the media. The things they say on TV about people on benefits are so toxic. It's not nice to have my life degraded, devalued and blamed for all the ills of society. I can measure myself in different terms.

The only thing that seems to be valuable to society at the moment is paid work; what we earn is who we are and that's wrong. There's more to life than that. We have to take a fresh look at society's values.



Thomas Analyst

I like to look at the whole picture before coming to a decision.

I'm a carer for my son who has special needs. He goes to school so you may wonder why I don't go out to work when he's at school but even at school he is still in need of my help at times. I have to go into school to calm him down or even teach him as he won't go into lessons.

Like many, I'm a father and husband but, because I have a low income, being a father and husband is a lot harder. I don't have money to spare for little treats like the cinema and a meal out.

I was last working when my eldest daughter was born. She was sick, though, and spent so much time in hospital that I had to take a lot of time off work. That started to cause problems so I ended up having to stop work and go onto carer's allowance. I'd love to go back to work as soon as the children are old enough. That's when I'll be straight down the job centre and finding myself work to go back into.

The importance of this project is getting a variety of opinions out into the world from a variety of people who have lived the life they talk about.

That, to me, means an unbiased look at real life rather than a biased, one-sided opinion like in many papers. A lot of the time they perceive you as lazy and not wanting to do anything but it's not a case of not wanting to.

You have to understand that people in poverty aren't there through choice; it's just through a set amount of things that happen. One day you can be on top of the world and two days later at the bottom.







Tammy Proud Mother

I'm a mother, wife, carer, activist and a volunteer. I am caring, strong, a fighter and partly disabled.

I have made a difference in my community. I think I'm quite a good friend as well.

I have a friend who was homeless. I've known her for six years. She had nowhere to go so we took her in until she got back on her feet. When she texted me and said that she was at rock bottom basically and that she didn't want to live anymore, we just went to pick her up the next day.

She's got issues with going out and can't handle going outside; she's agoraphobic. It's slowly trying to get her to eat as well, which is another hard one.

I think I did it because I've been there and I've done that and lived in that situation. I've been there when we had nowhere to live and there was nobody to help us. The big thing for us was just to get her safe, get her housed and get her the medical help that she needed. She's safe now, she's got a house and she's getting the help from the mental health now that she wasn't getting before but it was also very hard work as well, not having the space in the house.

A lot of my friends say I'm a big support to them but I'm just me.



Being involved in this project means a lot to me because I can get my point and voice across and be part of a bigger picture on what poverty really is.

We rent our house from the council, we're on benefits and we get the stigma that goes with that. It's really annoying because it's not a case of us wanting to be on benefits; it's circumstances that caused us to be on benefits. My husband was working when we started having children. We have to work out every single bit of money that's coming in. We struggle with food and we have to use food banks. We've had a lot of health problems.

It's important to be able to help people understand what it's like and to know the truth.



Robert Handyman

I came to London forty years ago. I used to work in a brewery doing sixteen hour days driving fork lift trucks. Now I do manual work and handyman jobs for others.

I like being part of the community by helping people, churches and charities. I don't believe in church but don't mind doing work for them. I've done plastering, decking, checked that electrics are not showing and made sure steps are not too high.

Not long ago, I put in new kitchen units, plastered and painted for a single parent family that was new to town and had no money. It took me three days. I do things to help people out, not to get paid.

People always say thank you. They appreciate it but I have a bad back and suffer for it all at night.

I'm a kind artist. Why not be kind? People are poor so you help them out. How often do others help out and do something for nothing? Even my daughter works in a charity shop. It's the way I was brought up; help people out who can't manage and show them some respect.

My dad was a builder, too. He taught me. Now I teach people and give them work experience, as long as hard work doesn't kill them! I've even taken people on from JobCentre Plus.



People on benefits often get a bad rep. The newspapers shouldn't be about people on benefits; it's not real news. That's when the trouble starts. We don't get treated right.



Gwen Poverty Defender

In my family, I play the role of being a carer for my dad as he's disabled. I've done this all my life.

Within the community, I'm doing a young leaders' course so that I can help lead the youth group I attend. I also volunteer two times a week with those who suffer with learning disabilities.

People know that they can come to me whenever they want because I'm not going to turn them away. I'll go to anyone who needs help. Even if I have other things going on, I'll drop everything just to help them because, at the end of the day, if they need help then that's something worth fighting for.

I will be starting university in September. Coming from a poverty family, a lot of society thinks that poor people won't get into university, won't get into education, and be just like their parents scamming the system again and again. By going to university and proving that I'm better than people think, I'm going to make my family proud. I want to go into nursing, hopefully, to help others again.

The public thinks that people who are on benefits and in poverty just use the system, abuse it and don't deserve to get the help and the money they do. But they do.

I value life and the things I have. I value the green grass and the happiness I get with my friends over money or benefits. At the end of the day, friends and family are worth it. You can't rely on money or benefits to make you happy; they won't be there when you're angry, upset or lost and confused. You rely on family and friends.





Pat Cook

I've always really liked cooking and I've always wanted to become a chef. If I have time, and people want any help cooking, I'm willing to go and help.

I'm qualified to cook for thirty people. I can do a nice hot pot, shepherd's pie, spaghetti bolognese or vegetarian lasagne. It's easy! I can teach anyone. I can do cakes and I can even make a nice bakewell tart that I invented with a special biscuit base, slices of banana and added chocolate powder. It's nice! I used to make bread pudding for a little local café.

I used to do catering and I've got all my certificates. I like to keep up with my food hygiene certificate, to try and keep remembering all the things you have to do. I do one-day food hygiene courses.

I can't do all my catering skills that much in my flat because I don't have much surface to work with. I mostly shop at a local supermarket. I like to look for a good bargain. I can do anything. I can make a Sunday roast, an omelette, anything!

I also write poetry. I get people to help me write. They're my ideas but they put it in the right order and then they read it out for me. Mostly my poems are about how I feel and what I've been through in the past.

When I was young, at school, I had lovely long, straight, dark brown hair. I could almost sit on it. I went home for holidays and told my mum that they'd been pulling and standing on my hair and pushing me against the stairs. And my mum just chopped it all off. Then when I went back to school they asked why I'd had my hair all chopped off and I said, "It was to stop you from pulling and standing on it. Now try pulling it!"



It's important that people understand and realise how other people feel.

We do projects like this to fight poverty and say no to poverty.





Moraene Anti-Poverty Campaigner

I'm a disabled mother of three adult children and I receive benefits. I can't get employment due to the amount of time I need to attend medical appointments and treatments but I have always been involved in community activities and done voluntary work.

This has varied from face-painting with a local playscheme and reading groups for children who were falling behind in school all the way through to being part of ATD Fourth World.

I try to offer support to others who struggle in life, often connecting them with services that can help them or even just having a listening ear.

I'm very proud of my children. They have overcome so many of the obstacles that poverty has put in their way; they were raised on a very low income on a rough housing estate in east London but were strong enough to stay away from the gangs, drugs and crime that so many young people become entangled in. They've always worked, both in employment and as volunteers, as well as sharing the responsibility of being my carers. We may live in a poor borough but it is full of brilliant people.

I was born into poverty, came out of it a bit through not very good but regular work, and fell back into poverty as a young mum when I got divorced. Economically, I'm still in poverty. For me, it's what I see, it's what I live and it's what I fight.



I am of value to my community and to society but I'm invisible to those who do not know me and stigmatised by the headlines they read.

Most of us are really involved with our neighbours, our families and our communities at some level or other. People may look at a single mum and judge her on her situation but they don't know who she babysits for, the neighbour she does the shopping for or that she helps out at her child's nursery. They don't know what her life is and yet they judge her.

Instead, celebrate our strengths, our resilience, the things that people in poverty contribute, the fight we have for our children and the fight we have for each other.





Bea Carer

My name is Brionne but everyone calls me Bea.

I've had lots of jobs and titles, both paid and voluntary. My health means I can't work full-time any more so, instead, I do as much as I can, when I can, for whoever I can. I love to keep busy, love to help and love to feel I've achieved a little something each day, even on my worst days.

I was raised by hardworking parents so volunteering, community work and helping friends and family were a given in our house; it was just something you did.

My mother is physically disabled and needs help to go to and from appointments and to do the basics like house work. With my two brothers, I've helped to look after and support her to continue working and living in her own home for years now. A lot of the time I'm just there for help and company but when her illnesses flare I do just about everything.

I hate that she needs me as she's a fiercely independent woman but, at the same time, I don't want a stranger looking after her. It can be hard and stressful being a carer but knowing that things are done the way she likes and that they're done for love, not money or obligation, brings me great satisfaction.

Growing up with no money, we spent hours in parks, nature reserves and canal walks. I love nature and I took the opportunity locally to sign up for an allotment scheme on my Mum's housing estate. We now have a small 2ft x 2ft plot that we use to grow a small amount of veg and edible flowers. Mum and I meet people in our community there and we all share our produce around.

I like that we get to spend so much time together, that we know one another and that we have a very strong bond of love and trust. My Mum gave up so much for me and my brothers when we were young. She sacrificed, scrimped, saved and went without to give us as happy a childhood as we could have. Being able to be there for her now, even in the littlest way, makes me happy.



I know what I do and why I do it. I know why it's important to those I help and support. What matters and what's important is that the people I know, trust and love can share our experiences and gain a better understanding of ourselves and the roles we play in our own and others' lives.

I feel attacked when I open a newspaper, watch TV or listen to the radio. I love looking after my family, and I'm needed to do it, but I hate the stigma, shame, insecurity and instability that come with being on benefits. I shouldn't have to feel ashamed.



Seamus Defender of Human Rights

I've been in and out of poverty myself but I have worked; I worked very hard when I did work. I used to look for jobs and do the best I could because I didn't want to be on the dole. There's no life on the dole.

I'm retired now but I do voluntary work. This does enable me to put what I have learned back into my community. It gives me strength to face any obstacles that I may face. I enjoy what I do as it helps others to make a better life for themselves.

I work to defend human rights, fight against poverty and help other families through difficult times. I have sat through court proceedings with families fighting for their rights. I supported one family when they were fighting for their kid in the courts. I did it because I'm a friend. I also did it because it was good to have someone else alongside me when I was in that same position.

When I'm representing ATD Fourth World, I dress with a collar and tie to show people that we might be poor but we can be respected at the same time. That's the reason I put a suit on. I know there are a lot of people that can't afford to buy a suit but I find the cheapest suit I can buy, whatever colour. You haven't got a choice, because if you're poor there's a lack of choices.

The United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty – 17 October – is a day that we come together to air our voices and be respected. It's a date we can call our own. It's one day in the year that we feel that we are dignified. It's a day that we are given a platform and may speak on behalf of another family or speak of our own experiences. It's a day that we recognise ourselves because we want to build bridges between both the rich and the poor, to bring us together so we understand each other. Being prejudiced or negative about other people is the wrong step; we can't be like that. We've got to be positive, not negative, because if we're positive about things, I'm sure we will get somewhere eventually.



When you're in poverty, you're frightened. You feel like you're a nobody.

But nobody should be discriminated against, whether you're poor or whether you're rich. People can say, "They're scroungers," "They don't want to work," or "They prefer to live on the state," but the thing is that a lot of these people have never experienced it. Until they do experience it themselves, they can't say what it's like to live when you've got no money.

This project is very important to me as it's another way to get poverty noticed. To get it on the map and get recognised as people, that we have a special role to play. It's also another way to look back on my memories, on what I have done and make me feel good about myself.

*Oh why, oh why aren't we heard
with our voices?
We cry aloud but we are not heard.
Oh why, oh why should we do as we are
told by people of authority but we are not
heard?
Oh why, oh why do they take our children
away from us?
Oh why, oh why do they put our children
into children's homes?
Oh why, oh why do they take our parenting
rights away from us?
Oh why, oh why do we suffer in silence?
Oh why, oh why do we feel ashamed,
as if we have committed a crime?
Oh why, oh why do we hide ourselves
from humanity?
Oh why, oh why aren't we heard
with our voices?
We cry aloud but we are not heard.
Oh why, oh why can't we unite
and let our voices be heard?*





Angela Ambassador

I am Angela, a mum of seven kids, and I live in east London with two of my grown-up daughters, a son with autism and two school-age daughters. I do all the day-to-day things that parents do.

I've lived in this area all my life. I went to school here; it was an easy place to grow up. I don't remember the crime or the violence that we live with now. You could leave the front door open. It was a safe place to live.

I've got lots of friends here, lots of them from when I was growing up. One friend I've known for forty years. My mum was born in Venezuela but moved to London as a little girl. She worked in a school as a dinner lady and also worked in the city cleaning office buildings. She's 83 now.

I like the market because there are so many different people there. The stallholders are very friendly. I like the culture, the people. All walks of life from all around the world. It's vibrant. You can get all the fruit and vegetables you want. The market is cheap compared with the supermarket and healthy. I go there every week, although maybe not as often as I should! I used to go to the market with my mum as a little girl and now I take my own girls there. Hopefully when my girls grow up they can take their own children there.

There has been talk of closing down the market to build new apartment blocks. I know housing is important but where else can we go for fresh produce? If the plans go ahead then the nearest market will be a bus ride away, not five minutes' walk, and that requires more funds to pay to get there. What choice will that leave us? The supermarkets are too expensive for fruit and veg. Other people need the market too, like the elderly, and they would have no way of getting to a market so much further away.

Last year I spoke in Parliament about food banks and how using them can leave you feeling humiliated and stigmatised but also how I'd have no choice if it was the only way to provide for my family. It was good to get my point across. It's important to have a voice. It was something I had always wanted to do.



This project gives people a voice and the chance to share the different stories that they have. The project tells people that each life tells a different story; we're people, we're not just a number.

I wouldn't have been able to do this a couple of years ago but being involved more and more has given me the confidence to speak out in front of people and in public. Everybody has a right to be heard.



iiChild

Community Development Project

I began running school holiday activities for children on estates in 2011 and then started regular after-school activities last year. I was driven by the observation that the young people needed somewhere to go, somewhere to hang out, to put forth their views, be listened to and be valued.

In addition to our regular activities, we also take the children to different places so they can see how people live, we talk about careers and they can begin to draw their own images of where they'd like to go in life and who they'd like to become. We're helping the children to grow by giving them opportunities to explore different activities in a safe and secure environment. By us taking them seriously, that's suggesting value which we believe in.

We also want to provide the older children with the opportunity to help look after the young ones and get work experience. But it's not just about providing work experience; it's about helping young people in their progression to adulthood. That's why we have mums on our team, graduates, young people that are in school and those who are at college. By building the peer support with the young people and the younger children, we find that that's a way of creating belonging because there's always someone you can relate to and that feeling of being together, being accepted, crosses many boundaries.

I love working with young people because you can see how much they want to be involved with something that's positive. They want people to know that they have something to offer.

Elaine



I have been working with my mother, Elaine, here on this estate for the past two years to create an after-school club with a family feel about it and to help the children in the community.

We have children here every day of the week during the half-term. We spend time interacting, playing various games, dancing, creating art and music. We also arrange trips and activities, for example, to laser quest and go-karting. The funding that my mother has managed to raise has been absolutely phenomenal.

Over time, I've built up a very good bond with quite a few of the under-11s. When I'm with them, I feel my role is to give them boundaries but also respect their space and what they would like to do. I'm able to communicate with the children and they often come and talk to me about any problems they are having with anyone else.

For me, the role we play at iiChild has become about more than just delivering these services; we're not just here to turn up, put something on and leave the children to their own devices. I see a bigger picture; it's about helping these children have the confidence and self-esteem to succeed in life. What we're doing, to help the children to have a good time but also to try and build a family-oriented environment for them, is something that is very rewarding to do.

Jonathan

I help the children with drawing because it's something I'm good at and something they want to do. So I'm teaching them but, at the same time, I'm learning and they're learning; it's about finding something they can have a passion for.

To me, community means everyone, of different walks of life, coming together. The programme that iiChild is running here should happen in more places. It can build confidence for the kids and, if they don't go out much, could be a way to make new friends.

Conor

I try to be a role model for the younger kids. I try to set rules and discipline and teach the kids about what it means to be respected or to be a respectful person to others. That's really what I do.

I really like working with kids and to be able to teach them new things. I like how adventurous kids are; they love to explore. I feel like I'm still a child at heart. I like to be free in my imagination and the way I act and so I just love encouraging the kids to be free and act free.

I feel like iiChild is the community giving something to the children. I never had anything like this as a child so, for me, it's really fun to see kids get the opportunities to go on trips and make new friends and socialise. I would have loved to have had this when I was younger.

This programme that iiChild has set up is really good because it keeps kids off the streets, keeps them out of crime and it gives them somewhere safe to stay. Their parents don't really have to worry about where they are or what they are doing; they know their children are in safe hands. And they know that by the end of the day they'll probably learn something new. It's something like school, but a fun alternative.

Trish



Paul Thinker

I like to think primarily about ways to improve conditions and quality of life for as many people as humanly possible. I have a blog dedicated to such ideas and try my best to refine my ideas through debate.

At the same time, I'm not terribly fond of people, particularly in large numbers. By blogging, I manage to find a comfortable balance between humanist and misanthrope, though I often find ways to get into actual real-world activity and find a lot of satisfaction from this.

On the net, my contribution of friendship and listening can be felt on an international scale. Just being there to share time with others who are isolated tremendously boosts their confidence. I spend most of my time discussing political and human rights issues in chatrooms. I am a strong supporter of the concept of a resource-based economy and have come to the decision that the first step towards this should be a universal basic income.

In the real world, I take part in my local tenants and residents' association and, as part of my activism with ATD Fourth World, have attended both the UK Parliament and the European Parliament in Brussels. It was exciting and has given me a taste for policy work and influencing government decisions across the board.



I know, and have experienced, that people in poverty generally tend to get disregarded. This project is important because it gives a voice to those without one. We become visible.

Everyone has skills no matter what position they're in, no matter how much money they earn. We have to step out from the shadows of statistics and come forward to present ourselves as more than just mere numbers.

Society has a responsibility to pull together to try and help people. We're all in this together. To me, the eradication of poverty and the universal fulfilment of all human rights is not a noble cause for a few noble people but the prime duty of all people from all backgrounds.





James Jack of All Trades

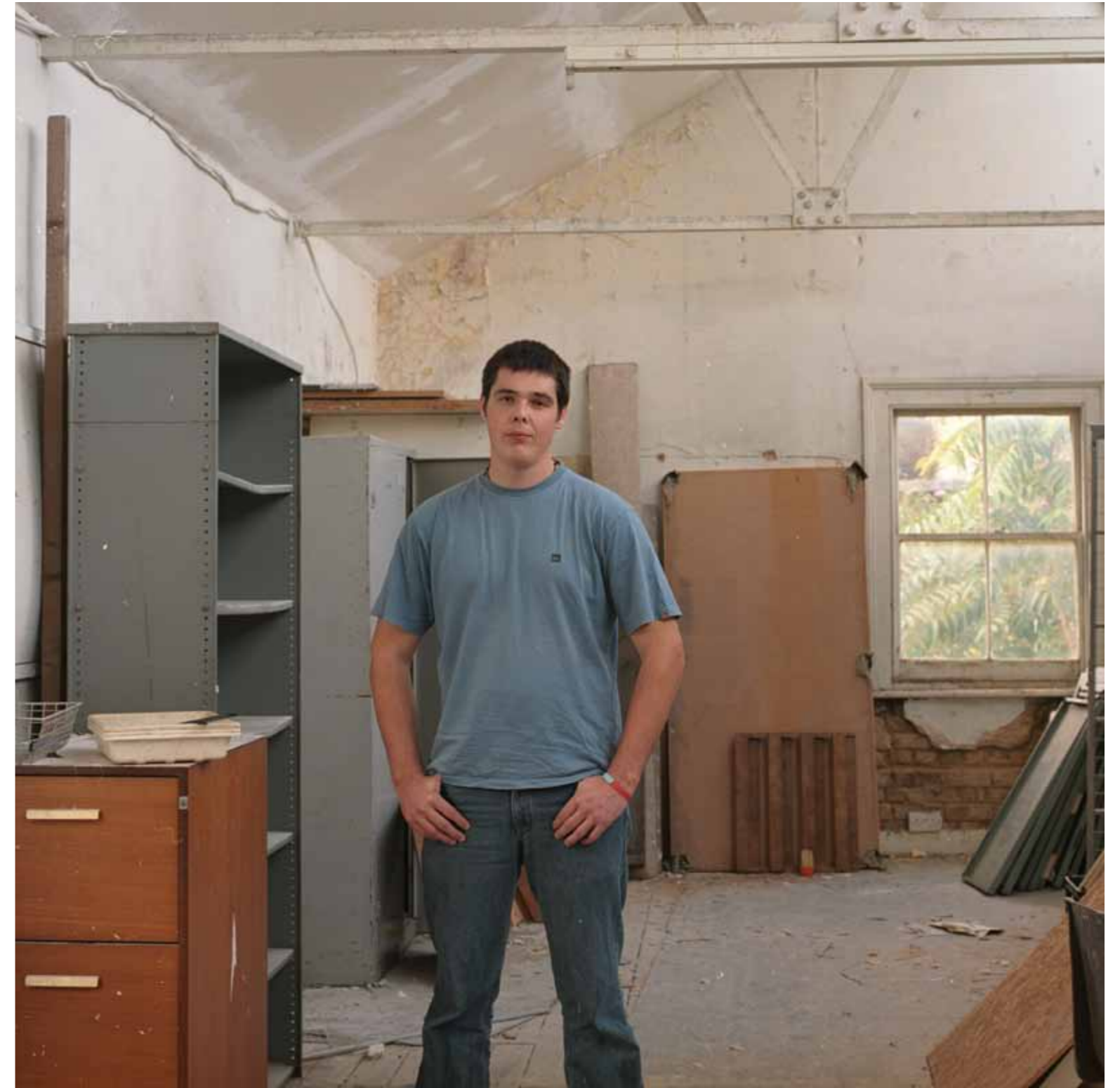
For the last ten years, I've been involved in the Skill-Sharing Workshops programme in and around the ATD Fourth World National Centre in London. I have learned so much and taken part in some fantastic maintenance projects, such as the kitchen renovation, extension and rebuild, as well as the attic conversion into bedrooms and a living room-cum-dining area.

I've gained skills in painting and decorating, plastering, tiling, basic carpentry, plumbing and electrical work. Hopefully these skills will help me hold on to my new job and provide for myself, my child and my other half.

Being given this chance allowed me to show what I could do, improve my skill set and gain more self-confidence. It means I can take what I have learned back into the community. When my friend Paul moved into his new flat, I helped him paint the walls, fit the carpet and generally clean the place. I also helped a guy from my local rugby club re-decorate his bathroom.

I live in west London and, until recently, was involved with the younger rugby players at the local rugby club. I've known most of them since they were babies, so they saw me as a big brother. If they needed anything, I gave them any advice I could. If I couldn't do that then I sent them to the appropriate body.

I have now taken on coaching the under-18s at another club. Having to coach some fiery tempered young guys, it's useful to be able to use some humour and some conflict management skills. It makes me feel I'm doing something worthwhile; it's nice to give something back.



We all bring something to our communities, be we unemployed or someone earning multi-millions. We all have something to give.

When you're in poverty, it's important to feel you're a valued member of the community. If you feel your opinions matter and your voice is important to someone out there, you will constantly grow and evolve.



Rita
Community Activist

Me and my husband were walking in the cemetery one day when he noticed an area where none of the graves were marked. The local vicar told us they were graves where the poor people were buried when their families couldn't afford to pay for a funeral.

They had their names taken from them, as though they'd never existed. Their families had nowhere to go to mourn or meet to remember them.

We worked with the vicar to get permission to put a headstone on these graves and asked a local stonemason to donate and carve the stone.

On the day the gravestone was unveiled, over one hundred people turned up to see the resting place of those they loved being recognised for the first time. It was a way to give them back their dignity as human beings, even in death.



Being an activist means you support each other in any way that you can. It means being a friend. It means doing anything in your power, whatever it takes, for the eradication of poverty.

People have a lot to do for their everyday life, day to day, wondering where the next penny is coming from. You worry about your family but you say, "I've had enough of this. I want to do something about changing the laws and the system."

We need to make changes and we need to change. What I see on TV brings a lump to my throat. Being an activist means fighting against this.



Amanda Philosopher

I grew up in Lincolnshire. It was rural. I used to spend time at my nan's during the holidays and my best friend lived across the way. I used to ride horses and ponies with her when I was younger. I used to help her take care of them, which meant anything from mucking out the stables to grooming, checking out all of the tack like the saddle, bridle and stirrups.

I do voluntary admin work at the ATD Fourth World offices most days, answering the telephone and ordering stationery stock. I make people feel welcome when they arrive and give them a drink of tea and coffee. I also support people that come and give advice on many different subjects.

I help my neighbours, too, if they have problems with housing or anything like that.

I often get asked to go to external meetings and conferences to represent ATD Fourth World and have been to France and Belgium to speak in public at the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. I have had the opportunity to meet some very important people in these places.

These have been chances to speak up myself and also on behalf of people who can't speak for themselves. I can be a voice for them that are in poverty and try and help them or coax them to do the same but if they don't feel they are able, because they feel demoralised or have no self-esteem, then I'd rather speak up and speak out for them. The point is to highlight the importance of poverty to people in higher-up positions and to ask them, in a polite way, to do something about it.



This project gives people a chance to see another side to me and it gives us a chance to bring poverty to the public eye, in a new way, and to bring it to the forefront of people's minds.

Poverty is rife in the UK. The government doesn't like to say that or acknowledge it but I see it.

A lot of people that are in poverty don't want to be in there; all they're asking for is a bit of help or support whereby they can better themselves and get themselves out of it. They don't ask to be put in this position. They just want to be treated as equals, as human beings.





Patricia Helper

I can't see the ones I love suffer through their difficult times; they can trust and rely on me. I've been caring for my dearest friends and trying to pass on my strength to them. Helping others has made me feel my own self-worth.

For more than two years, I looked after my friend Rita when she had cancer. I would go around to her flat and do a bit of shopping for her. I would stay with her all week and go home come the weekend but I always made sure she had enough food and milk to last her until the next time we went shopping. I used to end up aching from sleeping in the armchair. I would often go with her to the hospital or the GP because she didn't like to go alone and push her in her wheelchair when she found walking very difficult.

I also support my daughter Amanda. When she had her son, I spent a lot of time with her in the assessment centre. It was a big test; I had to spend two weeks showing professionals how I could support her. I did this even if it was hard having someone younger than me telling me how to feed, change and wash my grandson. Now I pick him up from school and look after him at his home if his mum has somewhere to go.

The reason I help people is because they don't really have anyone else and I hope what I do makes them more comfortable. Also, I would've liked more support myself when I went through tough times. I think it's nice for them to have a friend be there for them and I don't mind being the person to do that.



This project is important because it lets people know that we might be in poverty but we are human beings; we've got lives, we get on with things and we still help each other.

We want our voices to be heard and we want to be respected and not to be washed away.





Amanda
Kids' Club Worker

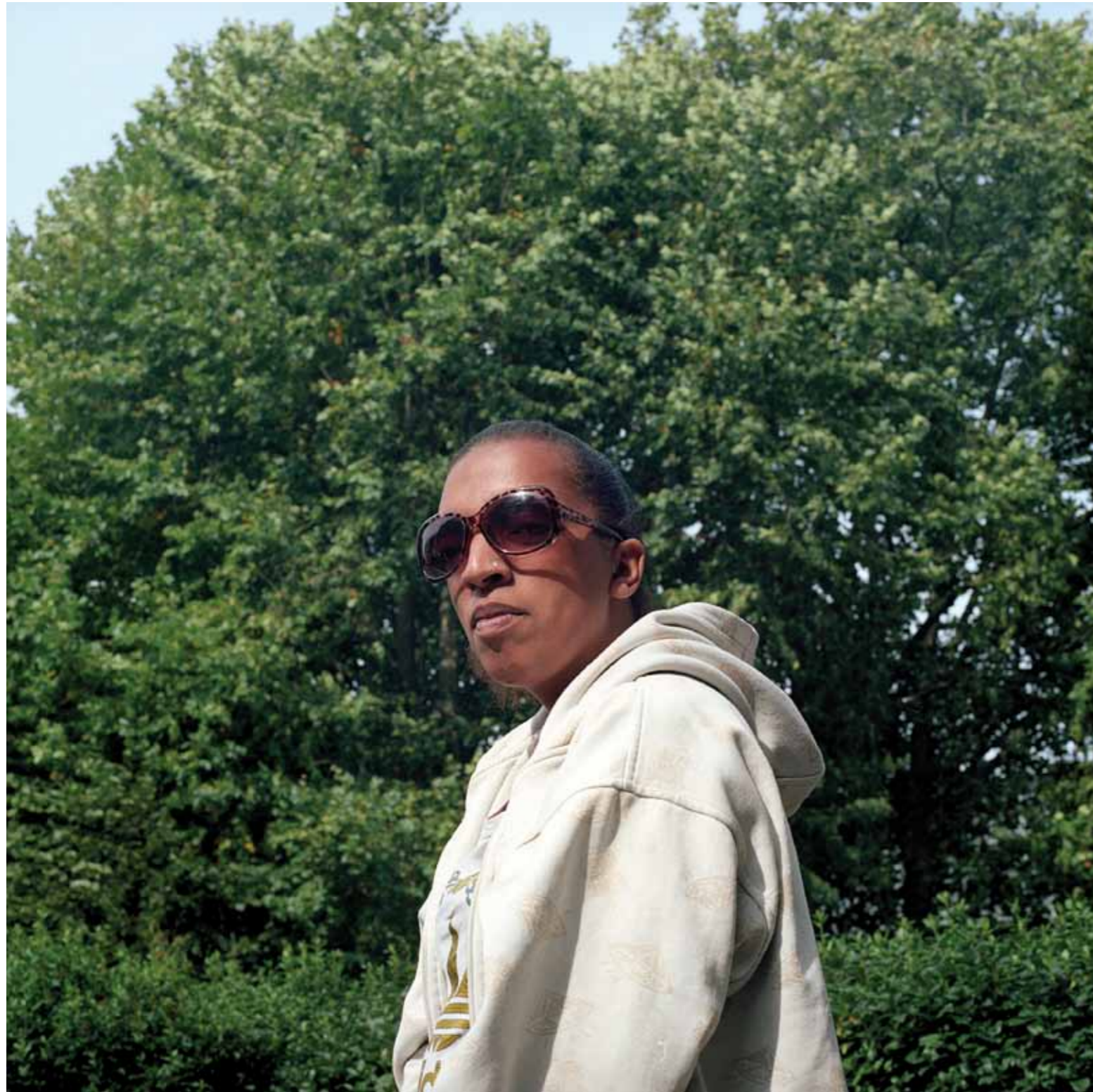
I volunteer at a local after-school club, half-term club and Easter club. I absolutely love being around the kids; it's so much fun.

I play with them or, if any of the kids are crying or have hurt themselves, I try to comfort them. I also help serve out the food and wash up.

It can be exhausting but we know exactly what we are doing. I try to help the manager soak up the stress of dealing with seventy kids. Just being there gives the club a boost and gives me a boost.

I want to go into childcare so this is a great role for me to gain experience of working with children and just generally learn more and more about the kids every single day. I love it!

I also raise my son, take him to school and do what I have to do for my family and my community.



The project has given me the confidence to be more open with people. It's a chance for me to put my view across and tell people what we do.

Lots of people want to make an effort in their community but that depends on people having the confidence to be able to go out and try it. So we have to try talking to people more; people need the kind of step-by-step support like the kind that helped me open up.



Eric Freedom Fighter

I believe in putting others before myself. I like to help other people. I'm quite happy to help but I hate asking for help.

Most of my badges come from, and were purchased in support of, the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association. It's a charity that was set up after the first Gulf War in 1990-1991. Lots of us who were called to serve in that conflict, and there were thousands of us, suffer from debilitating health conditions which we feel are attributed to this service. We were the idiots who signed up to serve our country at the time; our children born later had no say in it but have suffered the effects of our service as well.

I used to be involved in a number of disability organisations but I found they were going along a different track to where I wanted to go. They were going more political and I prefer to work with people.

I've been involved with the Disability Discrimination Acts, the protection of vulnerable adults, general discussions about how to improve the day-to-day lives of disabled people and ways of making money go further on a limited budget.

For a while, I ran a disability group but I had to stop because I couldn't get the volunteers to help me. I ended up doing the whole thing myself. I was doing so much that it took over my life all together. I gave it up when one of my daughters became ill. I found I had to concentrate more on family because, obviously, family is all important.

There are a lot of people out there, living day-to-day and hand to mouth, who think they are the only people doing it. Now I'm involved in a group bringing together people who live in poverty to talk and discuss ways of helping each other out so we can get them to realise that they're not alone.



Poverty has no voice.

The government always promises to help those on low income, on disability, the elderly and kids but those same four groups are the first people they attack the moment they want to save money.

We're not scroungers! The majority of us just want to have a chance to live.

*I wear my badges with pride,
In memoriam and remembrance of
Those both known and not known to me.
Those heroes who have fallen
To give us our freedom.*





Diane Baroness

I recently looked into my family history and in my family there was a Baron. I could be a Baroness myself, but one without money and penniless.

In my day, many of us left school without GCSEs and O levels and I was one of them. I went into factory work, doing screen-printing and then I left there straight away to another job, plastic welting.

Some people are too ill to work, like me. They're not scroungers; they're too ill to go to work.

I see myself as a voice for different people who are struggling. I've introduced people and families to Frimhurst Family House. I bump into people and acquaintances and get to talk with them, find out that they are struggling and then invite them to Frimhurst so that they have some support to help them have a break and keep the family together.

It's a struggle to bring up children on benefits, especially when they've got to find clothing and shoes. It's even harder when you've got a big family.

I go to a mental health centre where I play pool. I was the champion last year. I got a trophy and that cup comes up next month! So I'm going to defend my title. It's very hard. In the centre they call me 'the black widow' because, once I get them in my sights, that's it, they've had it.



I think it's very important that the public sees the roles that people in poverty play. It proves to the ones that have got plenty of money how people have to struggle in life on the benefits system.

And they know where their money, their taxpayers' money, goes to. It's not all fun living on benefits, living the poverty life; it's a struggle.





Hazel Voluntary Worker

Every Thursday, I go to help in the canteen of a weekly lunch club linked to a local church. Two years I've been going there.

We all muck in together and help out. I help lay the tables and do the washing up. Lots of different people come from the parish, from the nearby estate, some from outside and older people, too.

I'm on my own at home so getting out is important to me; I make a habit of it. I'm trying to work out if I could do more.

I like meeting new people and getting on with them. I get on with everybody there; the people I work with and the people who go there.

I found out about it when I was looking for work. I got used to doing voluntary work when I was working in a local charity shop so I asked for help to make it happen. I just like it and would love to be able to do more.



Lots of people just don't know what poverty means, what it's like or what it's all about. They just don't know.





Joel Music Man

I've been on this estate forever. I was one of the kids here and I still play outside. The kids here know me and I know them. I'm not hard to miss when I'm walking around the estate; I'm very recognisable. I've lived here all my life so I think I'm a very good person to be working with them at the local after-school club.

One of the things I do is to run music workshops. I've done music for a while as my own thing and I really like it. I come here and teach the kids and they really enjoy it. I started bringing my guitar, then I brought hand drums and then we started beat-boxing. In fact, it all really began with beat-boxing. I was doing it once and the children were all like, "Woah, what is that?" After a while, I started to notice they were beat-boxing on their own! Now I bring a drum kit up here too.

Today I found one boy who drums naturally and noticed one girl who plays guitar better than the others. There's another kid who often can't concentrate but when he finds something he likes can be so focused.

It means a lot to me; it's something I really do enjoy.



People in poverty definitely are discriminated against but it's not outright, it's more behind the scenes. When people know you're from a certain area, they instantly look at you differently. It's never necessarily about how you look or what you have, it's just where you're from.





Susan Community Enabler

I'm a single mother of four, on a low income, living on a housing estate in south London.

I'm on the local tenants and residents' association and I've held the positions of secretary and vice-secretary. I've been coming to meetings for ten years and on the committee for five. It's all about learning what gets done and how, like going to forums, getting involved in the paperwork and meeting the community police.

The reason I joined was because nobody came to meetings and I wondered why. A friend said that if I didn't come and have a say then nobody would have a say. Now it's active and that's different from before. There's stuff going on and things on offer. People talk to each other now.

I like the idea of being part of the community and contributing something to it. I don't have family or school friends here so I like to get involved and take part; this is my family.

My role in the local after-school club is undefined. I buy bread, make sandwiches for packed lunches and, during the school holidays, do the cooked lunch on a Thursday. We do photocopying and admin bits and pieces from my house. I help wherever I can, doing anything from designing posters for events and attending planning meetings to asking other charities for funding or support. It fills up my life.

I believe in 99% effort, 1% luck.

I think people in poverty are discriminated against, made to feel that they are scroungers and made to feel less of a human being.

I like to celebrate people making an effort, giving their time and getting involved. People don't always see it but it goes on, it happens. People are people. It's a wonderful world, really. We need to appreciate and not judge; we all have something special.





Derek Entertainer

People say life begins at 40, not 65 like it did for me. I'm a pensioner with a young wife who is now in a wheelchair. Being a lifetime carer, I need to enable her to be happy and independent, especially when I'm not there or when I am busy taking part in ATD Fourth World projects.

ATD Fourth World helps people participate in the community in spite of the drawback of poverty. Through them, I had a personal chat with the Dalai Lama on behalf of other excluded families. I was impressed at how he also overcame exclusion in a really big way! It made me realise that if he can, and I can, then you can, too!

I also sing my emotion and love by busking for a local hospice. Several friends have died there, and it raises hundreds of pounds for them when they count up the boxes. I love singing Frank and Bing and the old favourites from a bygone age.

A big supermarket wanted to make our home into a car park. They wanted to move us away and take away our home but we stood up for our rights. We wanted an acceptable housing replacement.

After a seven year-long legal struggle we succeeded and a new block of flats was built for us and the other residents. My wife cut the ribbon to open the new flats. Together, we achieved something special and were no longer excluded, but proud of our new-found dignity. Out of exclusion and into dignity.



The thing about *The Roles We Play* is that it says everybody should be treated with dignity and everyone should have respect for each other. I believe that we've got to practice it, not just say it and put it down on paper. It's so important.

No matter whether people look poor or whether people look sad, you have to give them a smile and make them feel that they are wanted and that they matter to each other. It's about people like us caring about each other.



Anne-Marie Friend

I'm trying to look for work but nothing's happening. I keep applying; when my daughter is in school I keep applying and applying. I've been applying for anything; it's hard.

I enjoy helping people out because it gives me the satisfaction of knowing that I've tried and I've done my best to help that person, even if it's just helping out with their kids for a couple of hours or cleaning their house. I like to help people in need because I've been through it before. I think, "If I was in their position, would they help me?" I think they would.

I know what crisis is. When me, my partner and young daughter were made homeless, we got put on an emergency housing list. Then we were placed in a hostel where we stayed for the next seven months. We had lost our flat in August, just before my daughter was about to start school. So when we moved to the hostel I tried to enrol her in schools in the area. It took six months to get her enrolled in a school. From August, when we lost our flat, to March, she lost six months of her first year of school.

What was hard was the uncertainty. It's not fun being in that situation when you have a kid; good advice and support can make all the difference in the world.

That's why I babysit a friend's son every Thursday. That's why I cook every day for my partner's mum and why I go to the hospital with an elderly neighbour. I also try to get families of kids who go to my daughter's school motivated to do stuff, even if it's just a picnic at the park. I want to do this because our kids are at that school and they play together so it would be nice to get to know each other and to mingle.

I will help someone out if I can; I don't give up. When my friend's child was born, I stayed on the benches there in A&E for four days because there was no one else with her. I did it just for support, to show her that I'd be there no matter what happened; I couldn't help with the situation but I could just be there for her.

A lot of people my age get a bit of stick; “Oh, the generation of today” and that kind of thing. People need to realise that we’re not all standing around on street corners smoking and robbing grannies. I know I’m young but I still want to set an example for my daughter by going out to work and taking responsibilities.

It’s good that others see how people want to help each other. I want people to know that they should never be afraid to ask for help. If people don’t ask for help then nobody will know they’re struggling. They need to know that they are not alone.





Georgina Poet

I like to write poems because I can express all my thoughts easier than speaking them.

I write poetry for weddings, funerals, birthdays and at Easter and Christmas time. I wrote a poem recently for a supermarket and it was put up on the wall. One of my poems was read out at the House of Commons. I give my poems to people and I hope it makes them happy.

Words can be hurtful; you have to be careful. I like to take the time to read over what I have written, ask people what they think and then add to it.

I feel joy and I feel happy when I write but then, after I've finished, I feel sad and I'm not sure if it's good enough or what people might say.

When I'm with people I wonder what they see in me. But there's one thing they can't see and that is the loneliness in me.

The hardest time is Christmas time. You watch people going in and out of the shops, laughing and saying what they are going to buy for their family and you're just sitting there with no family. It gets very lonely. So what do I do? I can't tell people the way I feel so I walk and walk until I find a tree and get some decorations and put them on it.

But one day somebody came and sat next to me. She asked if I was hungry and, when I said I was, she gave me some money. I thought I'd go to a café and get a cup of tea but, before I went in, I turned my coat inside-out so it didn't look too old. I went into the café and asked for a cup of tea and the woman said, "Would you like anything else?" I said, "I haven't got enough money to buy food." Then she went away and came back, with my tea and a plate of food, and said to me, "The man over there paid for it." I looked around but he was gone for me to say thank you. I was so hungry. I wanted to gobble it down but I had to remember to be like royalty and eat slowly, like a lady.



Poverty, to me, means not being able to walk around with your head up high because you feel ashamed for being in poverty. People look at you as if you're an outcast on the street.

I think it doesn't matter if you're in poverty or out of poverty, we all should be treated the same. After all, we're all human beings, aren't we?

All I can think of is that we all should help each other. If everybody helps each other, that's the only way poverty can end; everybody's got to get together and work together

*Behind my smile is sadness
 And behind my sadness is sorrow,
 As I am all alone,
 Thinking of the mother
 I have never known.
 Mother, why did you leave me all alone
 to be brought up in a children's home?
 Did I have a brother, a sister or a twin
 that looked like me?
 Oh mother, mother, I never knew when
 you might be drinking your tea at night.
 Do you ever think of me?
 Even when I left the home,
 then I was all alone.
 Oh mother, mother of mine,
 why did you leave me so far behind?*



KATHY KELLY INTERVIEW WITH FRAN BENNETT

Kathy: When I first heard of the title *The Roles We Play*, I had a job to relate to it because, to me, the wording created some imagery of having decision, choice and control. Then I thought, “Well, what decision, choice and control have we got?” So I’d like to ask you what it means to you.

Fran: I think that’s really interesting. We shouldn’t assume that people in poverty have the kind of choice and control that other people have. I think *The Roles We Play* represents something that ATD Fourth World does but which other organisations don’t necessarily do – and this is partly based on people’s right to a voice – and that is emphasising that people in poverty are active; they’re not passive.

Kathy: That’s interesting.

Fran: They contribute to society in a positive way and they do things like everybody else. You said earlier today that *The Roles We Play* was about showing people in poverty as human. We might like to think that wasn’t necessary but, actually, I think it is. In particular, it makes people in poverty look as though they have the same concerns as everyone else as opposed to being different from other people and being a drain on society, which is often what other representations of people living in poverty suggest.

Kathy: Indeed, thank you for that, because it’s quite dehumanising and demoralising how we are portrayed. Today, when I was listening to Eva, she explained that the project is a celebration of who we are. I thought that was really lovely and helped me to understand. I think it’s important to be ourselves and not be ashamed of who we are. I think, as well, with contemporary politics and attitudes being as damning as they are, we have to live with a lot of very bad attitudes that seriously affect how people are perceived and treated by those in positions of authority.

Fran: Yes.

Kathy: And that can also lead to people being denied their human rights. I’ve noticed that whenever I say it gets a very strong reaction. People don’t believe that human rights can be denied in the UK.

Fran: I agree. I think that the way that ATD Fourth World sees poverty as a denial of human rights is very closely connected to what *The Roles We Play* is trying to do. When you think about it, human rights are for everybody; there is no distinction between people in poverty and everybody else. If there’s a denial of human rights, there’s a responsibility on the people who guarantee those rights to give them to us all.

Kathy: That’s crucial because the people in key positions – whether they are in the fields of medicine, education or politics and decision-making – can view us as less than human. People in poverty can have so much to deal with on an everyday basis that they get very worn down; that’s the point at which the attitudes of others can close doors on so many different avenues and different interests.

Fran: Exactly. I think it’s really difficult to recognise that poverty does things to people; it hurts people and they bleed. It affects people psychologically as well as materially. I also want to say that people in poverty are just incredible in the way that they survive and endure, look after their children, build up their confidence and just keep going.

Kathy: That reminds me of my own situation. We do spend our time building up and giving confidence to young people only to have it destroyed time and again by the system.

Fran: You are right to link the images of people in poverty in the media, and what politicians say about people in poverty, and how that may affect those delivering services to people in poverty. The people who deliver services are part of the general public just like everybody else; they’re going to be affected by the kinds of attitudes that abound and we know, unfortunately, that attitudes amongst the public towards people in poverty, particularly those on benefits, have been getting more negative.

Kathy: Those attitudes are getting much harder and nastier. It makes me worry for future generations, for our children and grandchildren, and what sort of life they’re going to have. We all share a common humanity; it’s just ridiculous.

Fran: The stereotyping, I think, does have an impact on the attitudes of people who are dealing with those in poverty. It also has an impact on the people in poverty using those services because they’re not treated with the dignity and respect which are due to everybody. At the same time, we must be careful not to demonise the people who delivering

those services. The increasing inequality in society means that people in poverty are simply less visible to others because we live apart more than we used to. There are some people who, I think, do not know what poverty is or what life in poverty is like; there's a lack of knowledge and understanding. One thing that *The Roles We Play* can do is open a window onto life in poverty and what people's real lives are like.

Kathy: Well, I hope that does happen. "People are just doing their job." I've heard that phrase a lot but, for me, doing their job means talking to us properly, on an equal footing, so that then a level of rapport and understanding can begin to grow.

Fran: Another ATD Fourth World project is the Social Worker Training Programme, and the *Getting the Right Trainers* book based on it, which tries to convey to social work students what the lives of families in poverty are like. Maybe we should also be doing that for trainee journalists.

Kathy: We have to constantly re-think how that training is delivered because I worry that people switch off, too. I feel that people don't know enough about the mental, psychological and emotional toll of years of poverty and the impact that can have on you. It's almost as if people are expected people to move on from that within a couple of weeks; in reality, the emotional effect lingers on and on and they need space to recover emotionally as well.

Fran: None of us can reverse this tide of an increasing lack of sympathy towards people in poverty by ourselves. Society needs people – people who know more about what life in poverty is like – who can stand up and act as intermediaries. The more information people have, the more we can change minds. For example, one organisation recently found that many people did not realise that child poverty fell significantly under the last government; once they knew that, they were able to see poverty as something that was no longer inevitable but something you could do something about.

Kathy: I think that within a lot of organisations people are paid to do a job and then they go home. They simply do not live the realities and live with poverty the way we do. There's a tendency to talk about us, but not to us. It's part of a culture of having everything done to us; we're not part of anything. We have to challenge that; have a right of reply somehow and challenge how we are being talked to.

Fran: I think I'm right in saying that recent evidence points to attitudes beginning to change in a positive direction again; they had been getting worse over the last decade or so. We need to think, and know, that things can change; it is possible and it can happen.

Kathy: I accept what you are saying but it can take a long time to work its way down. Throughout history, and down through the the ages, it has taken hundreds and hundreds of people experiencing something for the reality of that to be accepted and validated. Prior to the recession, many people were struggling with poverty and it just wasn't recognised. It takes a vast number of people suffering for it to be accepted; that, to me, is a sad reflection on human nature.

Fran: It shouldn't have to be that way.

Kathy: Yes, I mean, I'm glad that there are signs of positive change but I think there's a long way to go yet. That's where *The Roles We Play* comes in; all we've got left now is who we are. We can hold onto being ourselves, hold onto our own cultures and our own identity. I think it's important that we get together and enjoy them because these are the things that can help us cope.

Fran: I find it amazing that ATD Fourth World has always said that people in poverty have the right to culture, beauty, fun and the like, as well as the right to enough income, and I think that's also really important.

Kathy: Definitely.

**Kathy is a long-term activist with ATD Fourth World
Fran Bennett is a senior research and teaching fellow
at Oxford University**

COMMENTS OF SUPPORT

Too often, people living in poverty are not given a say, a chance to tell their story, and that is why projects like this are so important. *The Roles We Play* is a great way to recognise the lives, experiences and stories of people living in poverty, to celebrate their voices, understand their struggles and share in their joys. We can see the human faces behind the stereotypes and statistics. I would love to see more projects like this to educate, inform, inspire and counteract the poisonous discourse about shirkers and scroungers that we increasingly see in the media and in politics.

Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona
United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights 2008-2014

The UK is one of the richest countries in the world and yet, across the country, many families face the reality of a life of poverty. It is important that the voices and experiences of these families are shared far and wide. *The Roles We Play* shows the real picture of families living in poverty: the strength of community, remarkable resilience and amazing creativity in the face of severe financial hardship.

Ade Sofola
Strategic Manager, 4in10

Not in living memory, not since the last war, has there been such a concerted public attack on people living in poverty. Anyone drawing or seeking any kind of benefit has become a target for contempt. While there was always an official determination to try to separate the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving', even that distinction is being lost. Those with illnesses or disabilities used to be singled out as being in special need of care and kindness but no longer. To be poor has become shameful, regardless of the reason why, and that shames us all. *The Roles We Play* lets people speak for

themselves and how good it is to see people step forward and talk in parliament and Europe not just about what they need but also about what they can do given the chance. For those with little cash but a lot to contribute to their communities and to one another, being and feeling worthwhile in a society that only values money was never more important.

Polly Toynbee
Guardian columnist

The Roles We Play is an invitation to see people the way they are: as dignified human beings. It removes the stereotypes and the stigma of individuals going through financial hardship and uncovers the invaluable contribution they make, which often goes unrecognised. It is an inspiring example of the significance of empowering, and hearing, the authentic voices of those who are let down by society.

Nazek Ramadan
Director and Anne Stoltenberg Project Development Manager,
Migrant Voice

Social work and other social care professionals are not immune from the effects of the negative discourse about people living in poverty. Both poverty and poor parenting are regarded as being a failing of the individual and, in the process, their strengths and individuality can be denied. Many parents who live in poverty and have experienced the child protection system speak of not being treated as a human being with emotions, relationships and rights like others in our society. It is extremely important to challenge these stereotypes, views and practices. *The Roles We Play* makes an important contribution by highlighting the positive roles that they play in the lives of others.

Anna Gupta
Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Royal Holloway, University of London

There is under way, as Professor Kate Morris recently commented, “a worrying shift from dislike of poverty to distaste of the poor”. As a result, responsibility for disadvantage and inequalities is increasingly being placed on individuals and parents. *The Roles We Play* is so welcome precisely because it challenges such assumptions, including the dehumanisation of marginalised families. Instead, it recognises the dignity and ingenuity of many impoverished families and, in so doing, reflects many of the experiences of families who contact the Family Rights Group and those involved in the Struggling Families Alliance.

Cathy Ashley
Chief Executive, Family Rights Group

Working with colleagues in China, India, Norway, Pakistan, South Korea and Uganda, we have recently completed research which found that shame is as much an important part of the experience of poverty in these countries as it is in the UK. People feel ashamed because they are unable to live up to their own or others’ expectations due to a lack of income and other resources. *The Roles We Play* is a vitally important body of work because it so clearly demonstrates the vital contributions that individuals living in poverty make to their families, to their surrounding communities and to wider civil society. This flies in the face of the negative images and stereotypes of people on low incomes which ignore the multi-dimensionality of people’s lives.

Elaine Chase and Robert Walker
Oxford Institute of Social Policy, University of Oxford

To learn more about the Poverty and Shame research visit:
povertyshamedignity.spi.ox.ac.uk

Since the 2008 financial crisis began, those already in poverty have seen their impoverishment worsen, child poverty in the UK has risen and millions more have become more vulnerable as a direct result of falling incomes, increased unemployment and cuts to social security and public services.

At the same time, there is lack of space accessible to poor, disadvantaged and socially excluded people to actually participate and contribute to the social dialogue in the UK as equal members of society. The United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, celebrated on 17 October each year, provides and protects such spaces where people living in poverty can come together with others in dignity and equality. *The Roles We Play* clearly embodies and promotes the same spirit by presenting a unique insight into the lives, aspirations and contributions of people living in poverty, the vulnerable and the socially excluded.

Donald Lee
President of the International Committee for 17 October,
United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Over a quarter of people in London live in poverty and yet realities like these are all too often missed out in mainstream media coverage. *The Roles We Play* shows how individuals living in poverty are using their skills and helping to tackle issues facing them and their communities. Projects like this are an essential part of increasing real understanding about poverty and remind us that people are just people, no matter how much money they might have.

Bharat Mehta OBE
Chief Executive, Trust for London

THE MAKING OF THE ROLES WE PLAY



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Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the success of this project, especially all of the people who have shared their time, energy, stories and portraits.

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Project Coordinator: Dann Kenningham

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Lastly, a special heartfelt thank you to all our friends and supporters, not least Fran Bennett, for their comments, contributions, advice and encouragement.

ATD Fourth World is a registered charity working to tackle inequality and promote social justice in the UK.



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ATD Fourth World, in partnership with artist and photographer **Eva Sajovic**, is proud to present **The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty**. This new collection of photographic portraits explores the roles played by those living in poverty within their families, communities and society at large. The aim is to highlight their efforts, validate their achievements and challenge the negative attitudes often held towards vulnerable and excluded families in the UK. To accompany the portraits, project participants have written short texts to explain their lives, their hopes and their place in society as seen through their own eyes.

Working with colleagues in China, India, Norway, Pakistan, South Korea and Uganda, we have recently completed research which found that shame is as much an important part of the experience of poverty in these countries as it is in the UK. People feel ashamed because they are unable to live up to their own or others' expectations due to a lack of income and other resources. *The Roles We Play* is a vitally important body of work because it so clearly demonstrates the vital contributions that individuals living in poverty make to their families, to their surrounding communities and to wider civil society. This flies in the face of the negative images and stereotypes of people on low incomes which ignore the multi-dimensionality of people's lives.

Elaine Chase and Robert Walker
Oxford Institute of Social Policy, University of Oxford

Too often, people living in poverty are not given a say, a chance to tell their story, and that is why projects like this are so important. *The Roles We Play* is a great way to recognise the lives, experiences and stories of people living in poverty, to celebrate their voices, understand their struggles and share in their joys. We can see the human faces behind the stereotypes and statistics. I would love to see more projects like this to educate, inform, inspire and counteract the poisonous discourse about shirkers and scroungers that we increasingly see in the media and in politics.

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Polly Toynbee
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