

## **Our voice will have to be heard!**

My name is Noleen. I am a mother of five. I was homeless with my first child when I was 20 years old. I had to go to a hostel where I shared a room with six other people. We had to leave the hostel early every morning and return by 7.30 pm in the evening. If we were late, we were locked out for the night and had to spend the night on the streets. It was very hard to live under these conditions. I spent 4 months living like this. I was depressed and lost self-confidence. My pride was hurt.

It has been many years since then. I now have somewhere to live but I am still on welfare, I am still living in poverty...

I have done courses, I went to FAS, I have done CE Schemes... I have done a lot... but at the end of each of the trainings, there was a black hole.

My partner and I are struggling and we are finding it very hard. By the time Saturday or Sunday comes, we are worried about how to get through to the next pay day.

When you are stressing... barely able to manage... when you are stretching your money to feed your family for the week, then you know it's a struggle, especially if you want to get things that are not only eatable but healthy...

People living in socially disadvantaged areas are not unwilling people or lazy people, many of them are more than willing to go into work but the Government hasn't made it possible in any kind of way...

If my partner was starting work tomorrow, we would be poorer than what we are on social welfare! He would not be qualified enough in one particular job to earn enough. Still our rent would go up and our benefits down.

What's the most frustrating is that we feel absolutely no empowerment to fix things in our own lives.

Persistent poverty is the world we were born into. It's a hard feeling not to be able to climb up the ladder little by little. It's hard to feel trapped and dependent! We are human beings. We have pride and dignity!

What keeps me going day after day? I suppose it's what is inside really, it's self-pride, it's inner strength, it's knowing that one day our voice will have to be heard.

In November 2010, I took part in a conference organized by ATD Fourth World and the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels.

The theme was: "With young people let's build a Europe free of poverty"

That experience absolutely gave me strength.

It doesn't matter how small you think you are, **your voice can be very big if you want it to be big!**

I remember having a conversation with my daughter not too long ago because she felt that people that live in wealthier areas were better than her but I told her: you are the same as everybody and don't you let people make you think different, never!