Fourth World People’s University convened on September 23, 2017 from 3 pm to 7 pm to present their findings to our guests on the theme, Back to School—What does it mean for you? We also enjoyed a community pot luck supper afterwards. Fourth World People’s University we created a dialogue with our guest, Ms. Aaliyah Ingram from NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and, the peer groups of activist, allies and volunteers. Invited guest, Vylmary Bennet, Parent Coordinator, NYC Department of Education was not able to join us because of family emergency.

1/ Presentation of Ms. Aaliyah Ingram: Ms. Ingram brought literature and book bags for the families and shared her personal experiences in the dialogue.

Ms. Ingram: “Hi everyone. DYCD is in schools and afterschool programs. With our website, Youth Connect, people can go online to find resources, and apply with the DYCD website.”

Ms. Ingram: “(after hearing the peer groups’ presentations) It was really enlightening the information and perspectives of people represented here, sharing closely about living day to day.”

Question to the guest: How do you design DYCD programs for the community?

Ms. Ingram: “As a parent and being in DYCD, and experiencing how they come together, DYCD tries to stay as close to the community voice as possible. We have a unit dedicated for planning research and program development. We also have a program in planning and evaluation, on the research end, including those who want to go into youth services. If you wanted to delve more, reach out to us. An organization like yourselves... if you are funded by us, you would have a program manager that would basically support you in managing your program as far as the budget and making sure you have support in training and professional support to continue your vision.”

2/ Before the presentations from the peer groups (activists, allies and volunteers) we introduced ourselves and named our favorite teacher. A few highlights are captured here:
Getting Ready: On September 15, ATD Fourth World members prepared for People’s University in peer groups.

We first reflected on the question “What does back to school mean to me?” and wrote our meanings on a poster. Then, the participants put in a pencil case “what support do I need…”

We ended the preparation meeting watching the movie, On the Way to School, by Pascal Plisson.

3/ Presentations: During the People’s University of September 23, we presented both our posters from the preparation meeting and pencil cases to our guest Ms. Ingram and followed with a dialogue.

Each peer group member wrote one line about what they need to be successful during Back to School time, we passed the pencil cases and took turns reading aloud the suggestions.

Exchanges from the pencil case that stood out:

- It says, mirror? Who put the mirror in the pencil case? Besides the word mirror, it says: teaching yourself, reflections for your friends? In what way?
- Well, I didn’t write it, but I can analyze it: For a new start, a mirror, you start by trusting yourself, the chance to be reflective to yourself by looking at yourself and your friends. It’s a very powerful tool. Empathy, sympathy and compassion for those dearest to you, very powerful...
- That’s exactly what I meant! I wrote that. Well done!
- Need a place to live where I can have peace to study. So I think you want a place to concentrate, not a lot of noise, focus, and clean. I like nature so I would go to a park, that’s what I would do to concentrate on something.
- I came into the FWM in 1978 and have been in the movement ever since then. I learned to communicate with one person and then, the whole world.
4/ Dialogue: Peer groups read their meeting summaries for the guest followed by discussion. Several themes came up (giving dignity to my kids, how do deal with stress, time management, change, helping dreams come alive, what support we have or need) which are highlighted in the excerpts from the dialogue below.

Giving dignity to my kids

Participant: “In one case, the concept of the uniforms was created so all children have same attire, (to avoid comparing) one child has 100 dollar sneakers and another has 10 dollar shoes. So the person who wrote that expense of the uniforms was a barrier-- it also played a role in child dignity by all having the same thing. But the uniforms are very costly.”

Time Management, Support and Self direction:

Participant: “Back to school was a hectic time for myself. My son has autism and he transferred out for special needs school, Board of Ed School. It’s very hectic because the teacher and the kids don’t know each other well and how to talk with him or how to tell him to back off, have a seat. For my youngest child you have to be repetitive, so he gets it. He gets nervous.”

Participant: “I noticed the ideas (in the posters) are very similar. The key component is (finding) support to match the anxiety. Partnership (is important) so that the agency is aware of the constant needs that are evolving in the community and that the people inside the community identify where the support is, e.g. babysitting, to get to work on time, (programs) throughout the city, when and where to go, when to register your children, who to speak to when you have a problem. It’s very important to have open space for dialogue.”

Ms. Ingram: “As a community member, I experience many stresses on my own, as a black woman, in today’s time. My husband eases my nervousness when I come to these events. Whatever happens, he encourages me. I have a 5 year old daughter and I want to be a part of the change that aids her future, when she grows to adult and has to make decisions for her family and just live in this world.”

Question to the guest: You mentioned something about balancing work and family time, and, that came up in the posters too, the ideas of deadlines, the anxiety and urgency of back to school?

Ms. Ingram: For me as a parent, as far as time management goes, not stretching myself too thin. In DYCD, I am accountable for representing my community. I strive to stay in the moment and take it one by one.

Participant: “My time management is having everything together in my life. My baby goes in Manhattan, NYU, Mondays Wednesdays and Thursdays to the doctor. I drop the kids off to school down the block, make sure the kids are OK then jump on the train and the bus to Manhattan, and then get back in time to meet the kids from school on time. Do homework for 3 hours, spend time together--at least fifteen minutes outside. Most important, after everything is said and done, is to not only focus on academic.”

Question: Could share with us how when something obstructs your schedule?

Participant: “I just sit there, put my headphones at least fifteen to get time before I have to get my kids so that I am not overstressed and transfer it to my kids. When I get there I say, ‘Here there, how you all doing?’ Not to be fake, but to show, Mommy got this! To make sure I am all right, you know?”

Participant: “For me I learn to be a creative member to get everything I need, as low cost as possible. I have a natural gift for finding free things. I have children with special needs from autism, attention deficit, you name it. I knock on doors to learn, found community resources, and, then I have a good relationship with people. I utilized professional people that do that work.”
Dreams and Dreams Change:

**Question to guest and participants:** When you read the posters (from the peer groups) you can see that some of them say ‘in my life I wondered what can I do with my life? I (also) ask myself is my life really what I want to do? If you want a new start for your life, what kind of support do you have around you for these questions?

**Ms. Ingram:** “My friend, Charlotte her daughter has sickle cell syndrome; she’s been through it! Every Monday she goes inside her mind, that’s what’s important, what’s in her mind. She goes through questioning herself and writes poetry. Then, she speaks to me. I have my husband to talk to. Sometimes we are up, down, but, we are safe for a moment. For me I know that love is always going to come; the good times are always not. What we say when we had a tough day is, what did we do to get through this day, and then (acknowledge), we made it!”

**Participant:** “My job is very superficial; we sell clothes that most people can’t afford. I questioned myself how is this helping the world, what impact was it making? Is this doing any good for anyone? In January I started looking for volunteer opportunities. I love kids. Through working with the kids in Brownsville, I got inspired to change my life and do something more meaningful. Right now I am starting grad school and hopefully will become an early childhood teacher. Once I passed the thing in my head, it’s easy to say this is what I want to do and how do I go about it. I have a very supportive husband who helps and encourages.”

**Participant:** “(one of my teachers) always said, you don’t owe anybody anything, and they don’t owe anything to you...If you want something, whatever you do, you have to get up and get it for yourself!”

**Participant:** “I want to react to what you said. I do understand, if you want something you have to get it; (however) this doesn’t take into the fact that some people need support. Some people don’t have the capacity; they need encouragement. We are all at different levels; we too often forget that! ATD Fourth World sees people coming together regardless of where they are from.”

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If you would like to listen to the entire transcript, please write us nycteam@4thworldmovement.org or call the office 212-228-1339 to set up a time. We welcome your feedback to People’s University.

**Save the dates for 2018--Fourth World People’s University:**

- **Preparation Peer Groups:** January 12 and 26 (Fridays) 5:30 to 7:30 pm
- **Winter People’s University:** February 10, (Saturday) 3 to 7 pm
- **Preparation Peer Groups:** April 20 and May 4 (Fridays) 5:30 to 7:30 pm
- **Spring People’s University:** May 19 (Saturday) 3 to 7 pm

Sincerely,

Fourth World People's University Prep Team
Christelle, Emma, Kiley, Marcia, Marie-Claire, Patrick and Virginie