

**Pat Capponi – Voices From the Street**  
**April 14, 2008**

Those of us who've lived in poverty understand well that it's not simply about an absence of money. It's about the weight of anxiety, the rumble of hunger, the fear of the landlord's knock on the door, the depression over the sameness of days and days of endless struggle just to make it through, it's about the burden of hopelessness and the sting of shame.

It's about aching for your children and what you cannot give them, it's about waking up exhausted and filled with dread, it's about the loss of all that might have been, of dreams turned to nightmares.

It's having others define you, malign you, resent you, fear you, blame you. It's about being a recipient, a client, a user, it's about being infantilized or criminalized, anything but humanized by those we're forced to turn to. Above all, it's about powerlessness. Powerlessness.

Look around. Feel the strength in this room. And know that beyond these walls, the woman who's sleeping on the pavement, the family who are just being evicted from their apartment, the fellow who's been turned away from a food bank, the woman who's learning she'd dying as a consequence of a lifetime of poverty diets, none of them know about what's happening here today. They don't know that anyone gives a damn about their needs. The notion that this many people, many of whom share their experience, are here to fight for ourselves and for them, would be joyful news indeed.

There are so many potential fighters out there, who are dying for a chance to remake themselves: from life long victim to a fighter for change. We are the privileged few. Understand It's a huge responsibility we're undertaking here today and in the coming months. Like me, you may be experiencing a number of conflicting emotions: impatience, weariness, suspicion, anger, all of which are valid and real. I've felt all that and more as I've attended meeting after meeting after meeting with experts and policy wonks and campaign heads and agency staff: not easy when we've been kept out of these discussions so long, and when issues of class and representation are always just below the surface, and yet, and yet...I believe that we're moving in the right direction, I believe that there is goodwill and a desire to understand, to be inclusive, to listen, I believe we are going to make real gains for real people and that is what 25 in 5 is about, that's why everyone involved has invested so much time and energy, and that is why you're here.

We've all been feeling powerless for over a decade, those of us who know poverty first hand and those of you who work around poverty issues. We've become jaded and cynical, we've retreated behind the walls of our agencies and our groups and kept our heads down for fear that we'd lose even more if we made noise. But this is not the time for cynicism or jadedness, it's not the time for my community first, my agency first, my needs first. We need everyone who's even remotely associated with poverty to stand up and say it's way past time to work together for the common good, to leave behind the

provincialism that is the bane of agencies and organizations. It's way past time we learned to see the inner worth of people we work with, way past time to elevate the client to equal status with the worker, way past time to understand that empowerment and disempowerment start in social services, way past time to give weight to direct experience over credentialism, way past time to join together and raise our voices in harmony till we reach a critical mass that no government and no politician can afford to ignore. We can and we will put an end to poverty in Ontario. It starts with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Capponi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat Capponi