



Non-formal education at a facility for unaccompanied asylum seeker minors

by Constance Griffe

Every day of the week, except weekends, volunteers go to the village of Asparggeloi where 40 young asylum seekers live in a facility for unaccompanied minors in the region of Epirus.

The accommodation facility, thanks to the numerous workers, accompanies these young asylum seekers in all aspects by providing them accommodation, food, hygiene, medical care, translation service, psycho-social support service, legal support, financial assistance, access to education with schooling including learning English and Greek and also access to non-formal educational activities. Regarding this last aspect, the volunteers are present and try to bring something to the young people of the center. We can say that they are an important help throughout the week. Thanks to their different backgrounds, cultures, skills and personalities, they can bring new diverse ideas for non-formal education activities. These activities can be sports, outdoor activities, arts and crafts, learning English, board games and more. For example: football, dodgeball, board games (cards, dominoes...), DIY bracelets, origami, paper lanterns, magic tricks, science experiments, memory games, English language games, movies, etc. After each activity, a review is done to find out how to improve the activity for next time.

The intervention of volunteers is therefore beneficial in terms of proposing activities. Indeed, the young people can have a lighter and different contact with the volunteers because they are there for a moment of happiness and carefreeness and do not manage all the difficult aspects, unlike the workers who have to educate the young people and help them with the difficulties they encounter.

In the same way, the volunteers are often quite young and are generally in their twenties, which is similar to the age of young people up to the age of 17, so the volunteers are a bit like peers.

Moreover, the fact that young people come from different backgrounds, with different cultures and languages such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Somalia and others, and even volunteers from outside Greece, who do not speak Greek and have a good command of English, can be comforting for young people who are not alone in the unknown and cannot communicate well. Obviously, the situation of volunteers and adolescents is far from being the same.

The frequent exposure to new volunteers, as the volunteering period can be from 1 month to 6 months, can stimulate the curiosity of the young people and expose them to new people who are there to meet them if they wish. Thus the young people come out of their cocoon more when they are at the center, they remain less closed in on themselves, among themselves, this pushes them to socialise with unknown people who are totally different from them, with another culture, another language, as we said earlier.

The volunteers are therefore there to bring a moment of lightness and good humor in the middle of their daily lives, which can sometimes be complicated, even though they are very well supervised by the workers to help them move towards a stable adult life as easily and calmly as possible.

Every day they can do a playful activity, which stimulates their mind, their curiosity and their creativity, which is part of non-formal education.

This type of education is designed through activities related to leisure time in part. The needs and specificities of each child, such as their age or language barrier, are taken into account at the Youth Center of Epirus. It has a very good pedagogical effectiveness, allowing young people to open up to the world outside the formal educational curriculum. Young people can improve their skills and competences in different areas. Its interest is the opening towards others, with a voluntary participation without fear of evaluation, it is not a race. The well-being and personal development of the young person are at the center of the considerations with, above all, the constant valorisation of the young person. They are encouraged to participate, to dare, to try. Benevolence is the watchword in non-formal education, particularly in the relationship between the young people themselves.

Thus, with the help of volunteers, young people can take part in daily educational activities that contribute to their equilibrium through improved behaviour and a positive attitude. Indeed, the positive leads to the positive.



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