CasArcobaleno, a beacon of hope and opportunity for children and young people in the peripheries of Naples (Italy)



Since the 1980s, on the northern outskirts of the city of Naples in southern Italy, *Scampia* has emerged as one of the most densely populated suburbs. “A population of Neapolitans population, but also Roma; **a vulnerable population where the presence of the Camorra has truly scared the lives of many people**, not only through crime – leading them to commit unlawful acts – but also through its system of violence, oppression, power and the pursuit of money at any cost”, says Enrico Muller, a Brother of the Christian Schools.

“As for the Roma”, continues the Italian religious, “we are talking about **a population of migrants who fled the war in Yugoslavia** in the late 1990s, who founded themselves here in Naples, and who live practically in shanty towns”.

It is against this backdrop that the story of *CasArcobaleno* unfolds, a bold educational initiative by the Italian De La Salle Brothers, which has become **a beacon of hope and opportunity for the most impoverished and marginalised in society**.

A home for everyone

Like a small oasis amidst the buildings, the first thing that catches the eye upon arriving at *CasArcobaleno* is, precisely, the colourful letters that stand out on one of its murals at the entrance, as if it were a rainbow — which is exactly what the Italian word *arcobaleno* means. **“This**



home of ours – **because we really do like to call it home** – **has so many colours precisely because our neighbourhood was grey**, and so we thought it was important to bring colour and beauty to these people who already have so much colour and beauty within them, but who don't realise it, and we want to help them bring it out, to share it, because the community is the true resource for changing the world".

Living in community, experiencing the joy of being brothers and sisters, is one of the principles that has shaped the lives of those who have discovered in *CasArcobaleno* their vocation to service, and to **educational service for the most impoverished**.

This is the case of Giuseppe Ferrante, president of the *Occhi aperti* (Open Eyes) cooperative, who has been running *CasArcobaleno's* projects for 18 years. "In 2010 I moved house because I got married and was therefore looking for a new home. I magically came across ***CasArcobaleno,* which over time has welcomed me like a brother, like a son**; and I began to walk with the Lasallians, in the footsteps of the Founder's work and, striving ever more to follow in his footsteps", recalls the Italian educator.

Educating to open windows onto the world



For Giuseppe, **the smiles of the children and young people who find, through the educational process, multiple windows through which to project themselves into the world, are worth it all**. "*CasArcobaleno* caters for pupils of various levels. The Year 9 class has just 15 pupils, because there are 15 pupils with special needs who have not been to school for one, two or three years… In the afternoon, at the community centre, we have around 30 children attending: from Year 1 primary to Year 8 (6-11 years) […]. Then we also have a small group of teenagers, boys from Year 8 to Years 10 and 11 (aged 13-15), who attend the workshops a little later in the day, as they are older, and there are another fifteen or so of them".

The joy and vitality that permeate *CasArcobaleno* are also reflected in the sporting and artistic activities, which form part of the educational programme and are evident throughout the house, where the students' artwork is on display.

“Every year we hold the International Art Symposium, where artists from all over the world stay here for a week, creating works of art alongside local children, teenagers and mothers”, explains Giuseppe.

International Volunteer Ministry

All in all, **“the volunteers who come from all over the world are the most beautiful colour that helps transform the hearts of those who visit and those who live here**”, says Brother Enrico, who is in charge of hospitality and solidarity at the centre.

“I came here for the first time between 2019 and 2020 to do a year of volunteering”, says Margot Lemaire, a young French woman who has since returned to *CasArcobaleno* on several occasions. “Here I am again today, aged 24, to do a few months of volunteering. I’ve only just arrived, but the truth is I already know this place well”, she says.

In this remote part of Scampia, which is now part of her life, there are **“all those people I want to take with me and all those values they have taught me**: to share, to welcome others, to value difference, to communicate in a different way… and also humility”.

In Mariangela Capuozzo’s case, her experience has made her feel “right at home from the very start”. In fact, she says, **“I now consider *CasArcobaleno* my true second home**. I’ve really found a family, in every sense. It wasn’t easy at first because, although I’m from the neighbourhood, I always grew up in a more isolated world”.

Discovering God in the other

“I started as a volunteer here in Scampia, but I liked this project so much and got so involved in it that I decided to apply for a year of civil service here,” admits Alessandro Testa, for whom this experience has represented “a journey”: “it is **about discovering who I am, but also discovering where God resides in others**. And thus, living God in the presence of others”.

Living in Scampia has meant a radical change for him. “I went from living all over the world, from going from one place to another, to being present here, in a reality that at first glance may seem poor, modest, and full of money, but which gave me another kind of wealth: **the warmth of my heart, guided and enriched by experiences, people and the presence of God**”.

***CasArcobaleno* is much more than a school: it is a home, a community that transforms, which, through education and an experience of deep fraternity, creates opportunities and builds bridges to overcome the gaps of inequality and exclusion.**

We invite you to find out more about this fascinating story:

CasArcobaleno is part of the 1LaSalle Solidarity projects. *We invite you to support this solidarity initiative through our non-profit organisation,* the *La Salle Foundation.*

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