

Marc Sidhom: “I stopped thinking about myself to serve the children”

Before embarking on his Lasallian International Volunteer Ministry experience at *CasArcobaleno*, in the Scampia district of Naples (Italy), Marc Sidhom lived in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. There, “I was studying, doing Translation and Interpretation, and felt very lucky because I was living with my aunt, so I had family, even though I was far from my parents”, he says. **“I received so much, so I wanted to do my bit, to dedicate a little of my time to others”**.

“You learn as you go along”

With this motivation, he set off to embrace the mission that awaited him in southern Italy: “I was really looking forward to it, but perhaps I was a bit daunted by the fact that I’d never had much experience leading youth groups”, he recalls. Moreover, Marc admits that at that time he was still “too self-centred”. However, he soon realised that “you learn as you go”, and **“once I focused on the children and on how to be of service to them, everything just fell into place”**.

“Even though it wasn’t perfect, I’m quite proud of having stopped thinking about myself and seeing what I could do for those children,” he says with conviction, as he recalls that first encounter with the Roma camp—the Gypsy community—from which the children and young people who take part in *CasArcobaleno*’s educational programmes every day come. **“It was truly striking and, at the same time, very heart-warming to share that experience with the group I was with: playing with the children from the camp and helping them have a good time despite the difficulties they faced**. It was truly a very different and difficult reality, and I was very glad to learn that such a reality existed. It was important to realise that there are people who live like that”, Marc asserts.

Guardian angels of the children

Gradually, he came to understand the complex reality of life in Scampia. **“When I listened to the stories of the children we were working with, we realised that behind those innocent faces lay horrific stories that no one should ever have to experience”**, he says. “I remember one day there was a girl in a drawing session who had drawn an angel, and a colleague said to me: ‘That’s her

father, who has passed away'. And I realised that we were trying to help them remain children despite the horrors they had experienced". Three centuries ago, Saint John Baptist de La Salle used to remind the first Brothers of the Christian Schools of their vocation to be "guardian angels" to the children God entrusted to them at school.

Marc's experience with Lasallian International Volunteer Ministry was also marked by the experience of fraternity within the community of the Brothers. There he met Brother Enrico Müller. "**He was always there to accompany and encourage us** (...). And with his kind smile, he always made us feel that we were doing something useful".

Since returning to Brussels, where he is continuing his studies and remains involved with the Brothers' community in Molenbeek, Marc cherishes every experience he had during his volunteer ministry experience. "I'm proud that I dared to speak Italian. I dared to speak to the people there, but also dared to approach the children and try to organise activities". "I think there are times when I need a little push of courage to do something, to approach someone. And **when I need that courage, I remember the experience I had in Scampia**".

What advice would Marc give to someone considering the possibility of taking part in a Lasallian International Volunteer Ministry experience? Without hesitation, he replies: "Just go for it, quite simply, and don't overthink it. **Volunteer Ministry is truly for everyone; especially within the Lasallian network, everyone is welcome.** And it's really wonderful. You go in thinking you're going to give of yourself, and in fact you receive so much", he concludes.

*At La Salle, there are many opportunities to take part in volunteering experiences in different parts of the world. We invite you to explore the **International Volunteer Ministry Directory**. If you would like further information, please contact Mourad Barsoum by email: mbarsoum@lasalle.org.*