



A House for Minors in Difficulty

REGGIO CALABRIA, Italy - *"Casa di Benedetta" represents the biggest dream come true of the Abakhi Association. The project started exclusively with the concession of the Montfort Fathers of Reggio Calabria, of a building within their property, located at the heart of the city.*

With a free loan, since 2017 the work began with the full involvement of volunteers and groups. From this moment, the ambitious idea of being able to offer a home and a family, stimulating a healthy environment to children and adolescents in difficulty, was born and began to take shape. A place where minors, estranged from their family of origin due to various problems (socio-educational-economic), can undertake a path of growth according to their abilities and potential, an evolutionary path that gives them new perspectives.

Since October 5, 2020, "Casa di Benedetta" has opened its doors by welcoming a maximum of twelve minors in precarious situations and entrusted by social services. The community is managed by the Solidarity Center of the City of Reggio Calabria.

The purpose of this house is not limited only to the desire to provide a roof, a hot meal and a bed to sleep in, but also to be the place where dreams come true, thanks to the commitment of the members, Montfort Fathers, foundations, associations, volunteers and ordinary citizens. Sometimes, difficult living conditions and situations of marginalization deprive children even of dreams, of this ability to hover among fantasies to imagine a better future. It is for them that the members of the Abakhi Association, supported by the Montfort Fathers are committed daily by making available all the forces and energies so that, step by step, we can achieve a new dimension rich in humanity, solidarity and fraternity, without barriers or harmful conditions.

"Casa di Benedetta" is a point of reference for many realities of the city and is configured in the social landscape of Reggio as a symbol of acceptance of the fragilities and dedication on the part of the volunteers who support the educational team in the daily activities. In an increasingly varied and difficult context, we work every day with joy for each objective which, day after day, always makes tangible and concrete, the realization of health and rehabilitative paths for the minors hosting the structure.

Thanks to the enthusiasm, the sharing of the project and its emotional, symbolic but also revolutionary scope in terms of action. Groups of volunteers who are coming from all over Italy, wanted to meet the association in order to hear its story: the project idea, the experiences and make a contribution through, for example, a little maintenance and care of the vegetable garden. In fact, the house is equipped with large indoor and outdoor spaces for recreational and training workshops such as:

- Art workshop, in which minors under the direction of artist Roberta Cuzzola created two murals and a mosaic along the interior walls of the structure.
- Gardening workshop, in which the minors, with the support of the expert Paolo Palamara, cultivated, cared for and harvested fruits and vegetables.
- Pizzaiolo training workshop, activity in which minors supervised by a master pizzaiolo will learn the techniques and secrets of this ancient trade.
- Another important formative moment is that of the ice cream course which takes place outside the structure and in particular in a renowned ice cream and pastry laboratory in the heart of the city.

Furthermore, a fundamental element for the present and future life of minors is undoubtedly education. In fact, the children have been inserted into the context. The minors are being supervised on a daily basis in their cultural training by the educational team and the volunteers of the Civil Service.

The structure, aware of the educational and social value, has also promoted activities according to personal inclinations by inserting them into associative groups, such as scout groups and sports clubs. In this dimension, the symbolic and the operational plan are mixed and the project is a sign of change but above all, of love for the boys. This is precisely the reason why the structure bears the name from Benedetta, a very young girl from Reggio Calabria who died a few years ago from leukemia and the parents founded in memory of her, the "*Benedetta sia la Vita*" which decided to invest in the project of the Abakhi Association in an indescribable and extraordinary way.

"Casa di Benedetta" is our way of preserving humanity, of welcoming humanity, the most fragile, the most defenseless, and of saving ourselves together. A house to welcome children and young people in difficult situations, to begin training and integration paths with them, giving them hope for a better future. A house that reflects the world we want to live in: full of life, open to the plurality of everyone.

Alessandro Cartisano
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