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Report

Thank you Perspektiven für Kinder auf dem Westbalkan e.V for your continuing support for “Rreze Dielli” social centre in Peza, Albania. Together we have positively invested in many children and adults lives especially in post earthquake and the Covid-19 pandemic challenging time in Albania. This report provides an overview of our social activities during December 2020-March 2021. The lives of many children and families in need have improved through our work. Together we have made a difference and continue to makes differences in the lives of many vulnerable people in Albania.

1. Introduction

At the end of November 2019, Albania was hit by an earthquake. A total of 51 people were killed in the earthquake and its consequences are felt until today. In Peza and Ndroq around 150 houses are demolished. In March 2020 Covid-19 delivered another hit that led the country to a complete lockdown. Without recovering from the trauma of the earthquake, the fear of the invisible virus increased. Helping and caring for children with special needs and/or social problems and psycho-social trauma have become more necessary than ever.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the lifestyle in many aspects and upended family life around Albania. School closures, working remotely, physical distancing — it’s a lot of to deal with. In March 2020, the Government of Albania would join the ranks of countries which took a particularly severe restriction measures, including mediate school closure, complete home isolation and community lockdown, all of which have secondary impacts on the mental and physical health of populations, and education of children. Covid-19 not only created health crises, but economic, social and psychological ones, that have particularly impacted households with children in Albania.

The rural areas of Peza and surrounding villages are areas in which families live in poverty and most of them even in extreme poverty. This may lead to psychological depression and major social challenges. Especially children with



Visits and support in tents

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special needs in these areas encounter various difficulties. Rreze Dielli Center, an initiative of Swiss Foundation for Innovation, is the only one providing psychosocial care such as therapy, counselling, recreational program in these areas.

2. Social programmes in response to Covid-19 crisis management

During December 2020 - March 2021 we have support directly in our Rreze Dielli day care centre 30 vulnerable children from Peza and surrounding rural area. This target group includes children with special needs such as children with autism spectrum disorder, down syndrome and vulnerable children coming from families living in conditions of extreme poverty. Children are aged 4 to 15. Many of these children have experienced the post-earthquake traumas. With the Covid-19 pandemic the children suffered the second major trauma. The school closed in March 2020 and the children remained at home with their parents or grandparents. The parents of these children were in a great challenge of how to manage daily life and how to treat their children at home in the face of the very unknown and confusing situation of the pandemic. They needed practical methods on how to deal with children at home. The parents refer that they have experienced anxiety, inability to cope, and hopelessness due to the Covid-19 situation.

2.1 Therapy for children with special needs

During these 4 months we have continued with personal therapies for children with special needs and vulnerable children. Individual therapies were scheduled in 45-60 minutes sessions, three days per week per child. An individual treatment plan has been adapted for each child based on his/her needs. This plan was shared with school and the



children's parents, so that at home they can follow the same plan at home. To prevent the spread of Covid-19 we have worked in large halls with small groups of children as well as outdoor.

Rreze Dielli is the only center in the village and its surroundings, which offers the therapy and counseling services for children in need and their parents. There are some private centers in Tirana offering this service, but the fee of this service goes up to €200-250/month, which is the average salary of an Albanian citizen. A city family can barely afford to pay this fee of therapy service for their children and this only if the two parents are working. Payment for this service is unaffordable for parents of children who come to our program, who are mostly unemployed. Hence we offer free social services for such poor families in the villages.

Children in our center find a welcoming, warm and positive environment, where they can express their emotions, insecurity and fear due to the Covid-19 situation. We have encouraged them through games, drawings and dances to express their fear and negative emotions and then encouraged them to be filled with positive emotions. Thanks to our therapies and intensive work with specialized psychologist, social worker and educator for this service, children have acquired new skills and improved existing ones. Parents are very grateful and thankful as the lives of their children and that of their family have changed. Its worth mentioning that continuous therapy for children with autism, down syndrome and other mental health problems is necessary for children to integrate and conduct a better life within their capacity. In the absence of therapy these wonderful children can become more aggressive, distracted and create total dependence on parental care, which in the case of children coming to our center is the mother.

2.2. Celebration in physical social distancing of Covid-19 pandemic

In our Rreze Dielli Centre we celebrated Christmas with children with an adapted program due to Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately we were not able to have a common celebration for Christmas as we've done each year with more than 50 children. Due to the Albania government measurements of meeting with no more than 10 people at once (children and staff indoor and outdoor) we organized children into very small groups. We celebrated together



Christmas. Children perform poems and songs. This year the holiday was special and very significant as our friends for many years now, Mr. Ralph Rüdiger and Mr. Maximilian Schöpe came and visited us and celebrated with us during this challenging time. For us as center staff and for the children this visit was very meaningful. As even at this time of pandemic, our friends came and celebrated with us. Thanks to their donation, we bought personalized gift packages for each child. Taking into account the wishes and needs of each child we bought toys, school supplies and clothing. The children were so excited. Our friends from Germany brought chocolates and oranges for the children, as well as didactic tools such as puzzles, memory, brushes, etc. which we use during our daily programs with the children.

Mother's day - On 8th of March in Albania we celebrated Mother's Day. This year, on this special day, we organized a special program for mothers of children with special needs. We invited the mothers along with their children. Our



psychologist held an information session for mothers emphasizing once again the importance of parental care at home for children and adherence to hygienic measures. We donated a hygienic package with cream, soap, brush etc to the mothers. Also, we gave them a flower, as a sign of gratitude for them and the wonderful work they do as a mother. The kids and mom enjoyed the morning at our center a lot.

2.3 After school homework program

At Reze Dielli we pay huge attention to the children's education. Many of the parents and relatives of children struggle to even write down their own name in the



remote villages where we work. Due to many social problems and living in extreme poverty conditions, they did not have the opportunity to go to school. Education of children is a key factor for a better living in the future compared to that of their parents.

One for the programmes that we have been provided during these four months is after school homework programme for a group of 25 children. These children have been identified with a delayed development and they struggle a lot at school. We offer them a very lovely and hospitable environment. The staff welcomes them with lots of love, to prepare the way for children to be focused in the skills they need to learn. We have provided for children snacks, fruits, chocolates etc. So far, the school teacher's feedback has been very good and this group of children who attend the after school homework program have positive performance at school assignments. We will continue to work with the children, giving them the chance to enjoy the school and keep up with their peers in the learning process like all children their age. Due to the Covid-19 we have provided this program in small groups of children.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasised that 2020 and the beginning of 2021 have been and continue to be quite challenging for Albania. The earthquake aftermath and COVID-19 pandemic were two heavy blows, especially for the children and families in need. We are grateful that through your support and our work we are able to be close to people in need in spite of social distancing situation. Thank you on behalf of all the beneficiaries.

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Head of the Centre

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