

# WHAT'S NEW AT MWL'S ASCs THROUGHOUT ALBANIA

## Newsletter

January - April 2020

### Introduction

Since November 2019, MWL has been evolving into a new structure and way of working. I have been watching on the side-line and feel very proud of this amazing Foundation which has leapt into new life with the six Advice and Service Centres scattered across Albania and two central teams overseeing the whole. These 8 self-managing teams are still emerging and finding themselves with new ways of working and being. We are very aware that as a result of the Covid 19 virus moving the country into lockdown since March, these teams will need to be renewed and made strong again, away from virtual reality into a new world which will emerge from the devastating impact of Covid 19. I have been so moved in these recent times by the dedication of the MWL staff to those who are the most vulnerable in Albanian society today. Every means has been taken, both on and off line, to ensure that the most vulnerable are served with food, hygiene and solace. The staff have kept safe and at the same time have been very brave. The collaborative approach with the local municipality and Food Bank Albania has been powerful. These are the unsung, hidden heroes. Meantime I have also been inspired with the care taken by the Executive leadership team to keep close contact with all of the emergency work and development work still continuing. The new methodology necessary in these times, with zoom and prior to this with skype meetings, has been embraced as a norm on a very regular basis. The overall care has been a deep bonding influence through these difficult times. The newsletter also captures the pre Covid 19 times and you will be inspired by the action in the field and the new projects being developed. Now, I can see the perspective is broadening and MWL is linking with the outside world with webinars, networking meetings and trainings. Life goes on despite Covid 19 and new dreams can be explored in this very difficult work of combatting Human Trafficking. Planning for the way ahead, post Covid 19, is the task in hand. MWL staff go forward with courage and strength. Thank you to all of them for this courage.

**Imelda Poole (President MWL)**



**Mary Ward Loreto is planting hope with a human rights approach to combating modern day slavery. This challenging mission is implemented through works of justice, education, grass roots action and systemic change. The aim is to eradicate poverty, the prime cause for human trafficking.**

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## How do the MWL self – management teams function?

MWL Foundation, from November 2019, reorganized the structures of the Foundation and began a new approach toward the transformation of the organization's operating style from Green into Teal based on the model of "RE-inventing Organizations" by Frederick Laloux. This model has been evolving in the framework of the mission and emerging mission of MWL. The training for the building of a renewed Foundation with this model was begun by Imelda Poole IBVM, the President of MWL and will continue this year at the staff training week in the autumn.

The overall management and unfolding of the action plan of the MWL Foundation is led by the Executive Leadership Team based in Tirana. It consists of four staff members. All of these people have been in key leadership roles in MWL for over 6 years.

A new status of the organization has been updated and registered in the Court.

This Executive Team meets every week for a briefing and planning session. The respective roles of the executive team are:

Executive leader – CEO – Ana Stakaj

Finance Leader - Artan Toska

Programme Leader – Gazmir Memaj

Social Business and Events Leader – Pjeter Tanushaj.

They report to The MWL Board every 3 months with finance and written reports. The CEO consults members of The Board of Directors regularly. If in case there is a need for a fifth person to bring the decision into a unanimous stage, the President of the Foundation is brought in to the executive team meeting. This has not been needed! Also, another key team, is the Development Team. The function of this team is tightly connected with fund raising and economic prosperity of the foundation to back up the activities with the necessary resources and for the MWL Foundation financial sustainability.

The operating staff consist of psychologists, social workers, youth workers and a social operator. The staff operates in 6 areas of Albania with an outreach of 13 Municipality Units. In each of the areas, a MWL Advice and Service Centre has been established. These centres offer advice, counselling and services to people who are vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation in the social, law, emotional and economic aspect, in each given area. They provide rescue and referral systems and services for victims of trafficking and exploitation through in-centre services, through the National Referral Mechanism and the Coalition of Shelters in Albania. Each Centre and project has a team of advisors and each group of beneficiaries in the field have chosen local leaders. At every level of the work of this Foundation, all staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders participate in the outcomes and outputs of the Foundation as participators in the development of the whole.

All the teams are in constant interaction, listening and sharing expertise with the purpose of effectively responding to the needs and challenges we meet and face in our daily work. We aim to be as a living structure which evolves in response to real needs, and implenting these needs after careful reflection and discernment together. It is a dynamic process that is impacting our way of proceeding and drawing us closer together.

We sense that this methodology, is succeeding so far. The leadership is shared, there is no heirarchy in the decision making, but the decisions are being made in dialogue and reflection within the team leading the decision-making, and in communication with the other teams. The transparency and the open communication amongst the staff has stimulated a sense of belonging and ownership of the organization. The staff do not consider themselves anymore as just employees of an NGO, but as crucial persons committed to fulfil the goals that are not just work related. These goals are perceived by staff as living their values as human beings to be close to those who are most in need.

## MWL Social Business – Life changing products.



"Mary Ward Social Business" is intended for people or individuals involved in the project, taking into account their skills in crafts and opportunities offered by their employment areas, to have a professional job engagement and an increase in professional skills. Economic problems in such areas are notable and employment opportunities are few. Business will also contribute to increasing local employment. This business will help the economic development of some of the area's families that will be involved in the production of the products.

The 2 main areas where this initiative is being evolved are Kallmet (Lezha district) and Tropoja.

In Lezha there is a tailoring shop, where there are 5 women employed part time and in Tropoja we own a shop, where a seasonal seller is employed by MWSB and 20 women of the area, sell their products in this shop. In the Tropoja shop, we sell also hand crafts produced in Kallmet or other areas where we are present.

In the Kallmet tailoring workshop, we have been focusing in the training of women to improve the quality of products and to gain knowledge on the reduction of costs considering the work capacity in this tailoring. The women are very grateful for the capacity building that has been given to them through very professional trainings. The impact has been noticeable because women work more willingly and are very responsible and demanding of themselves.

During this time, thanks to the Mary Ward Spain, we bought a three-headed sewing machine, an ironing board, and a professional embroidery machine. Mary Ward Spain has sponsored the training of women in cutting and making new models for all workshop products, also training has been conducted to use sewing machine which will be a great help for these women in Kallmet.

We have established new clients for new orders. But the situation that Albania and the whole world is going through covid19, blocked every challenging the whole our efforts for sustainability and growth of our business. However, we hope and we believe that we will come up stronger after the end of this situation.

At least, the women of Kallmet have been able to profit from the state assistance after we applied for. They are supported with 2 months of minimum salary due to the Covid19 lockdown.

Tropoja women has been working to increase the quality of crafts products under the project: Creating Living Traditional Communities "funded by GIZ and implemented by Competitive Center Skills in collaboration with MWL Foundation.

Thanks to an excellent cooperation from MWL Foundation and the Municipality of Tropoja, it has become possible to move the kiosk in Valbona to be placed in a better place, as part of the cooperation the municipality has given MWL a very good and free place.

During this period a good and reliable relationship has been established with existing customers, new contacts have also been established for potential new customers.

Now, we are looking forward to re-open the shop and to start selling with the slogan:

***"OUR PRODUCTS CHANGE LIVES"***





## **Anti-bullying training in schools**

Bullying and other forms of psychological and physical violence are among some of the most pressing challenges facing students, teachers and staff at schools across Albania. For that reason, it is not uncommon for the MWL ASC in Tropoje to receive referrals involving incidents of bullying in schools.

With the goal of rebuilding relationships between students, the MWL social worker and school psychologist conducted an interactive session with students at the school "Beselidhja e Malesise". One of the main goals of the session was to identify and understand the many different forms that prejudice and bullying takes within the school context. Students also received instruction in the causes and consequences of this phenomenon through innovative and interactive games and presentations. The training allowed students to understand that each of us needs to work to develop deeper feelings of empathy and have the humility to seek help if we find ourselves the victim of bullying or prejudices.



## **Empowering Girl Leaders to animate for Change and their Future**

Two Advice and Service Centres (ASC) in Tropoje and Saranda are having a significant impact in reducing the vulnerability and the risk of human trafficking through Socio-cultural activities with the girls. Through their intensive outreach work with community members over the last 6 years, MWL staff have extensively documented the youths' expressed needs for socio-psychological services and better skills training.

The goal of this project is to empower 50 adolescent girls from these two areas and create a corps of motivated young women who can act as an engine for changing their communities and their region.

We have reached 54 adolescent girls, aged 13-18, from small rural communities in Tropoja and Saranda, by providing them with trainings and tools necessary to lead both emotionally and physically healthy lives, animate change in their communities and support local development by bridging divides between their communities.



## **Commemorating the Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking**

On the occasion of the sixth World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking a moment of prayer and reflection was held at the Cathedral of Tirana by MWL, in cooperation with the URAT network. A group of youth from Rrëshen and Lushnja, who were a part of the MWL youth program last year, made a special appearance at the event. Animating the prayer with various thought-provoking messages, their participation contributed to the depth and meaningfulness of the moment. Together we can combat human trafficking!

## Youth employment programme

Mary Ward Loreto Foundation has launched a new round of this programme. There are 3 MWL ASCs (ASC Lezha is implementing the programme in Rreshen area; ASC Shkodra in the suburbs of the town and ASC Lushnja in the villages around Lushnja district) working with 30 young people 18 – 25 years old (15 boys and 15 girls).

The programme includes:

- ▶ Orientation and realization of Vocational Training courses according to each young person's choice;
- ▶ Intermediation with businesses and work experience;
- ▶ tool kits for those who will graduate;
- ▶ Education through community actions proposed by youth;
- ▶ Training on job search and Entrepreneurship;
- ▶ Socializing activities;
- ▶ Vacancy advice and follow up towards employment.
- ▶ Human development trainings focused on prevention and fighting human trafficking and against any form of discrimination;
- ▶ Involvement and organizing Human Anti-trafficking Campaigns.

The vocational training centres are now closed due to the pandemic restrictive measures and their courses are interrupted and the foreseen activities can not be implemented as they have been planned, but we remain in hope to restart soon the implementation of this programme. As this programme contributed to the employment of approx. 60% of the youth involved each year since 2015.



## Youth reintegration through vocational training



Four youth from the town of Rrëshen have begun a vocational training program in the hotel and hospitality sector. All four youth have been beneficiaries of MWL services in the past and now profit from MWL's close cooperation with DIMAK, which facilitates with trainings. A further four youth referred by MWL are currently on the waiting list and anxiously anticipating the chance to begin with their education when the next training cycle starts. The vocational program offers young adults the opportunity to acquire new skills leading to greater employability in the important tourism sector of the Albanian economy.

## Lezhe's Cultural and Touristic Pride



Lasting social change starts at the grassroots and local community level. The truism was again on display at the conclusion of a special project in Lezhe on January 29. The day marks the end of a pilot project to create a strategic plan in regard to local festivals and cultural events. A strategic plan for such events was finalized and submitted to the Director of Tourism. As a part of the initiative, Oda e Zadrimes, a museum for local culture and tradition, will provide community members, youth and visitors the opportunity to learn more about Lezhe's unique culture in the hopes of helping preserve their beautiful traditions and customs. This program was financed by the EU Delegation in Albania, the UNDP managed RELOAD program, as well as through funds provided by the EU and Municipality of Lezhe.

## Rays of hope in the darkness of a global pandemic

On 09 March 2020 Albanian officials announced the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. The severe COVID-19 pandemic, which had been tightening its grip around the world, had finally arrived. Despite the many measures taken by the Albanian government to stop its spread, the number of infected people continues to rise throughout the country and, along with that, an increase in the number of fatalities.

As in so many other countries around the world, every aspect of our daily lives has been impacted in some way as the country enters quarantine and all socio-economic activities come to a halt. Social distancing policies and guidelines mean that an unprecedented number of individuals now find themselves isolated at home, without the opportunity to find work, earn money or secure a livelihood for themselves and their families. The closure of schools, kindergartens and all other educational institutions has also led to the physical isolation of children in the hope of preventing the spread of the virus. As always, it is the most vulnerable groups in society who are at the greatest risk and in

danger of losing the most. Poor families with little to no income, elderly individuals without family and living alone and those falling into unemployment as a result of the economic shutdown all need assistance now more than ever.

In response to the very real hardships facing so many families at the moment, the MWL Foundation has teamed up with local churches,

food banks, municipalities and other key actors in the areas MWL services to provide emergency assistance in the form of food and other basic goods. To date, the MWL Foundation has assisted over 142 families in 6 regions of the country with the aim of helping them maintain their health and safety.



## International Women's Day



The Mary Ward Loreto Advice and Service Centre in Saranda joined the Civil Society for the Rights of Girls and Women to jointly celebrate International Women's Day on March 8 this year. This annual event is organized by the Jona As sociation and other local NGOs which are working in the field of gender equality and women's rights. Data from official studies highlight the extent of the problem of domestic violence against women in Albania. According to these studies, half of all women report having been the victim of some form of domestic violence. Fatalities are not uncommon; five women have been killed in Albania in the first months of 2020 alone. In light of such high rates of incidents, it is all the more important that we take an active stance against all forms of gender-based violence. In Lezhe, a march was organized by the MWL Advice and Service Centre which was attended by children, teachers and parents of Beslidhja School. This march drew attention to women's rights and the need to combat domestic and gender-based violence at all levels of our society. Participants were addressed on the contributions a person can make to help achieve greater gender equality. As a continuation of the day's events, MWL staff joined other members of civil society organizations in Tirana on a march for the defence of women's rights and human dignity.

## Service Learning Methodology

Mary Ward Loreto Foundation conducted a training in service learning methodology at the Matosh Uka school in Tropoje. This methodology aims to bring together school officials, community members and local stakeholders to address a wide array of issues that are of common concern in the community. The project aims to empower students to become active members within their school and community by building their self-esteem and self-confidence as agents for positive change. This initiative, is a new venture for MWL ASC Tropoja and one of the three components of the Education Project. The project is being implemented in Tropoja and Lezha and the other 2 components are:



1. The research on the perceived causes behind corruption and lack of Ethics in the Albanian Education system. The research is based on the previous one, (Ethics in the Education System in Albania) and will be prepared by ACER (Albanian Centre for Economic Research), contracted by MWL for both studies, considering the success and the impact of the first research.

2. Training of Trainers in Ethics. The project aims to train especially teachers on ethics. The trained teacher are going to train their colleagues and students. The project aims to extend its impact in 40 schools all over Albania.

Due to covid19 restrictions and the closing of schools, this project couldn't be executed according to the planned schedule, however in the three components there is still a lot of preparatory work to be done hoping that soon we can start doing our activities and meetings face to face again.



## The story of a woman in Shkodër

- Domestic violence is widespread in Shkodër. Most cases go unreported because victims see domestic violence as a purely private matter and want to avoid public attention. However, some victims overcome this way of thinking and seek help. Recently, a young lady, a divorced mother with a 5-year old child, arrived at the MWL Advice and Service Centre seeking assistance. Despite two protection orders, she claims to have been brutally raped by her ex-husband at her work place. Escorted by MWL staff, the woman was taken to the police and the local prosecutors office to push local officials on the status of the investigation. At the prosecutor's office, the woman and MWL case workers were assured by her lawyer that her case had been sent to the courts. It is only a matter of time before her ex-husband is brought to justice.

## Psychological support during the COVID-19 pandemic

- During this time of nationwide quarantine, we remain committed to our mission and continue supporting our beneficiaries from our homes to theirs. The MWL ASC Tirana continues to run our psychological services during this period as people protect themselves and others by staying home. Respecting social distancing strategies, all the centre's sessions have transitioned to online platforms so we can continue to provide individuals with the support they need.
- In addition to our regular counselling services, we are now also offering online emergency psychological support for individuals throughout all regions of Albania. Both ASC Tirana psychologists remain available online, and anyone can receive professional psychological service by contacting us online or by phone.
- In order to maintain both good physical and mental health during this difficult period of time, we recommend everyone to follow WHO guidelines, limit continued exposure to sensationalist and negative media reporting, spend productive time with family and children, do the things you enjoy most at home, stay positive and, of course, immediately seek medical and psychological help if you feel unwell.
- **MWL wishes you a safe and healthy period of shelter in place!**

# Thank You

We cannot close our newsletter without a big thank you for all of the people who have believed us.

As MWL Executive team and all the MWL staff, we want to thank our donors for their generosity and trust. We thank them and show our gratitude for their comprehension of the emergencies that Albania has faced in November from the earthquake and the emergency response towards Covid19 pandemic. They have been with us in all our efforts, with a deep understanding of the importance of staying near to the most vulnerable persons, and by enabling us to touch and answer the greatest needs.

We thank all the volunteers and the ASCs self-management teams, for their contribution to the discerning dialogue and just by their deepest satisfaction and effective giving of time and ideas. They have stayed with us near to the people in distress. We thank them for sharing our vision, being with us in our mission and living with us our values which bring light and hope to those who need to know that we care even more than they need food. We also thank our stakeholders, NGOs and statutory institutions with whom we joined our forces and shared our resources. We know that the only way to succeed is by being together. And we thank them for having showed that they have the same conviction, too.



**THANK YOU TO ALL THE PEOPLE WHO PRAY FOR US, WHO ADVISE US AND HELP US!  
MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU AND KEEP YOU SAFE FROM ANY HARM.**