

Dear Agnes,

I'm Emanuela, the teacher who visited your Children's Shelter on the 23rd of August 2012.

I feel the need to write down the emotions experienced in the short time spent with you, your colleagues and especially the children. I imagine that those who preceded me also gave you their praises. This is for a good reason: make others comprehend the importance of the work you do.

Given my specialization, a PhD in Paediatrics (Special Education and Teaching) and being a teacher both at Primary School and University, I can assess what I saw from a professional stand-point.

The overt behaviour of the children - the way they interact with peers and adults - denote an attitude of total trust, relaxation and of feeling welcome. Their non-verbal language, proxemics and kinaesthetic, indicate that the children behave as such, feeling safe. Anxiety and distress are left outside the Shelter and the children spend the day in a healthy and positive environment.

The way they relate with strangers like me, reveals that their Emotional Brain - the one in the stomach, the atavistic defence in the mind of the children, especially the smallest ones - sends them positive signals, discarding distrust and fears.

The Mammadù Shelter represents for this children a "safe space": a controlled setting where psychologists evaluate the life experiences that form constructively the children's identity and impact positively, over time, on the social structure itself.

It also make me think of the concept of "ecosystem" or "microcosm": at the beginning, a combination of delicate balances; as time goes by, a whole system - exceeding its initial boundaries - with its strengths and raison d'être.

I presume you must deal daily with many difficulties: I remember discussing with you how to attain educational goals in a situation so devoid of learning resources and training tools. Nevertheless I believe - and I want to emphasize it - you have reached a huge achievement: giving the children an environment that leads to the healthy development of the person and the personality; a real chance to improve their lives in adulthood.

I wish to thank you and express my sincere admiration, for the work you have done and keep doing. I'm always available to support your teacher with any additional training he may feel the need for.

A bit of Africa has taken over my heart; the most beautiful memories are the cheerful and welcoming smiles of the children and their little fingers doing braids of my "yellow" hair. Another great gift life gave me.

An affectionate kiss to all the children. A special hug to you, with deep appreciation and the hope to meet again some day. You can always count on me!

Sincerely yours,

Emanuela Cren
Teaching Professor at the University of Trieste, Italy