



Thessaloniki

## “Amaro Magipé”: The younger generation is proud of its “own work”

Stories that break stereotypes.

In Romani – the language of the Roma, which has survived orally without its own lexicon for over 1,000 years – “**Amaro Magipé**” means **our work**.

The action is being implemented by SolidarityNow, in collaboration with “Faros tou Kosmou” (Lighthouse of the World) and the Cultural and Educational Association of Roma Women of Drosero Xanthi “ELPIDA”, and is supported by the Community Centres of Katerini and the municipalities of Ambelokipi-Menemeni and Pavlos Melas.

The goal is the empowerment and participation of Roma women and young people in actions and trainings aimed at skill development, information, violence prevention, psychosocial support and empowerment in general. In particular, the youth group aims to identify mentors who will work in their communities to highlight and solve chronic problems plaguing the Roma.

In Dendropotamos, the coordinated efforts of the municipality, teachers and the nearly 20-year presence of “Lighthouse of the World” – with dozens of actions for children – are getting results. Successive younger generations seem more determined to pursue their dreams, break stereotypes, and change their lives and the image non-Roma have of the Roma and their neighborhood.

### **Stories that break stereotypes**

**Stavros Giouvanis** is a 21-year-old student in the Economics Department of the University of Macedonia and has been working as a programme leader at “Lighthouse of the World” for the past year. What is striking about Stavros is that it was only a few years ago that he benefited from a variety of teen programmes, and today his love and determination have brought him back as a trainer of the younger generation of children, including siblings of his friends and his own brother and cousins. For all of them, Stavros is a positive role model.

*“From an early age, I was able to participate in various empowerment programmes, along with mentors who helped me learn and gain experience that I really liked a lot. I am Romani, and members of my community have long suffered the consequences of the stereotypes and prejudices that follow us. This is why I decided to do everything I can to help them and change the dominant narrative about the Roma. I believe that when you talk to a person you get something from them and they get something from you. My love for communication and challenges led me to educating young people.”*



In these decisions, Stavros was influenced by all those who offered him help whenever he needed it.



*"The main reason I am continuing as an instructor is the people who supported and guided me. I believe it is a great and heavy responsibility, and I accepted it because I realised that I also want to offer something without getting anything in return – at least nothing material. I tried it, and it is fulfilling to inspire the younger generation. I see in their faces – in the face of my brother, my sister – that there is development, passion, longing. I am one of the reasons for this, and that makes me feel very good."*

There is an increased need for guidance during adolescence, and even more so for the children of Dendropotamos, who feel very insecure, carry the stigma of the residents of an area that is known mainly for the wrong reasons, and they feel vulnerable to racism and bullying. And this is at a time when bullying in and outside of school seems to be increasing rampantly and becoming more extreme.

*"I felt these children wanted to express themselves, and they couldn't find the space, the way or the opportunity. They needed a group to trust in so they could express their feelings."*

Dendropotamos is an evolving neighbourhood that has experienced great changes over the years. Some things may stay the same; others change according to the dictates of the time.



*"Into all of this comes 'Amaro Magipé'. I am happy because this is the first project, I am participating in from conception of the idea through to its implementation. Youth mentoring was a dream, and what makes me happy is that it is being implemented"*

*correctly and getting results. It is no coincidence that kids are participating, the group is growing, and the children themselves have asked for more meeting days and more hours, and we'll do this. The children understand that they have abilities, they are strong and they can make their dreams come true. 'Amaro Magipé' empowers young people from Dendropotamos who are attending junior and senior high school, and we recently added children in the last years of primary school. In the context of the project, the children can attend a variety of interactive workshops, discuss things, express themselves, visit museums, carry out projects. We are trying to give a lot of support to young girls because, unfortunately – and even today – the position of Roma women is not the same as that of men, and many of the girls may have to abandon any dreams they have quite early because the mentality of the community distances them from education and studies. Our group will not stop meeting. It is already apparent that some of the older children have the desire and talent to take our places – and even higher positions. This group is the new driving force in the neighborhood that will impart momentum to the next generation. So, gradually, by taking these steps, we will see even more changes."*

The group is gathering and the children start talking to each other, laughing, telling each other their news. Both inside and outside the meeting hall, they express themselves, make suggestions, participate, wait for the workshops to begin. They are clearly enthusiastic when they're told they will be talking about the programme.

**Valantis** is 13 years old going to sixth grade, and his dream is to become a merchant marine engineer because he likes to travel. I ask him about school, and he says he would like it if there were more play, spaces with imagination and colour.



Amaro  
Magipé

ACTIONS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA WOMEN AND YOUTH

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*"I like school, especially Math and Gym. I came to the group out of curiosity and ended up coming every week. I like the mentoring, the guidance, our teamwork – everything we do together. We young people will change a lot of things in our neighbourhood."*

**Vicky** is in the first year of junior high school. When she grows up, she wants to be a criminologist. She saw her first TikTok video on criminology and was very enthusiastic.

*"I love photography, taking pictures. I didn't expect to like the programme so much and to keep coming, but it's great, and the fact that we are a team has kept me*

*coming. We don't do it because we have to show that we're a team. We really are a team, and we feel it. At Christmas we went to a hospital and sang carols to elderly people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to hear them. I really like that. I'd like us to do more things like that, take trips. There are things that adults cannot understand, but in the youth group we talk about these things, and it's great."*



**Konstantinos** is 11 years old and believes that school is useful for all children. His sister, who is 18 and is studying to be a nursery teacher, is a source of inspiration to him, and he wants to follow in her footsteps.

*"When I grow up, I want to be a prosecutor. I like to be fair, in line with the law. If people are fair, there can be justice. But there are also racists, misjudging people who are poor, who don't have clean clothes. I wanted to join the group because the kids told me they had fun here. Now that I've joined the group, I feel really good about the classes; we joke around and have a great time. Most kids, even now, find it difficult to go to school. They go to bed late and don't wake up, and their parents don't wake them up either. I wake up on time, on my own. I follow a schedule: I go to school, I come to the group, and then I'll go to bed. I want to say that it would be good for all the kids to go to school and finish their studies."*





**George** is 10 years old and in third grade at Menemeni primary school in Dendropotamos. He likes math, hanging out with friends, and he wants to be a car mechanic or an electrician because he has a talent for fixing things. He joined the Amaro Magipé youth group at the urging of his older brother, who set a good example that he decided to follow.

*“What I don’t like about the neighbourhood is that there is a lot of rubbish – people just dump stuff in the street. Together with the other kids, we want to change the neighborhood. I like everything we do – talking, going on excursions and having fun. When I grow up, I’d like to be able to help those younger than me.”*

**Rafaella** is 12 years old and is in the first year of junior high school. She likes facial treatment and self-care, and would like to be aesthetician.

*“I wanted to be part of this group because my friends were in it. The group is great, and we try to be together so we can do activities. I learn useful things, it empowers me, and what makes me want to come is that I have a great time with my friends. It bothers me when they say bad things about the neighbourhood, because it’s our neighbourhood, and it isn’t as bad as they say it is. I feel sad when they call us gypsies.”*

*Everyone has experienced this. I was out one day, and someone who wasn't Romani said some things he believed about us, but they weren't true."*



**Giorgos T.** is in fifth grade and his favourite subjects are language and music. He wants to become a singer, but if he doesn't make it, he wants to become a doctor because he likes to help people.

*"Everyone in my family is musical, including me. I sing, I play the piano, I play the guitar, I play the harmonium. I asked questions constantly. I wanted to learn music and my family helped me a lot. Children follow the example of their mom and dad. When parents do something wrong, their children will see it. I want to try very hard to change a few things in my neighbourhood, if I can. Stavros is my cousin, Father Athinagoras, is my godfather, and I started going to the Creative Activities Centre of Lighthouse of the World. From there, I joined the Amaro Magipé group because we get away from things here – we do activities, and we talk about really great things. The group dynamic is the best thing, and that we talk about everything: school, our problems. Because the kids in the youth group have helped me a lot, I, too, would like to be able to help and to become a positive example. So far, I haven't heard anyone say anything about me, but I know about a lot of instances of Roma be bullied. We will try to change these things."*





**Raphael** is 15 years old and in his first year at junior high school because he was left back for two years “due to poor life choices,” he said. Even though one of his junior high teachers came by his house to wake him up so he could sit for an exam, he never went because he didn’t take education seriously. But later he came to see education as the foundation of his life, he says.

*“Now I like school. I think we’re trying very hard this year, and our school has changed with the help of the teachers and the principal. I joined the group from day one; I expected it to be something more than school, something higher. I come here with my friends. We are comfortable doing what we want to do, we help each other, we play around, we learn about so many things. I liked Multilingualism Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day a lot. We participated, recited poems, and we talked about us, the Roma. I liked it that we talked about us, because non-Roma don’t know who we are. They just believe what they hear. At the camp, the children were afraid we would steal, swear, beat them, and when camp ended and it was time for us to leave, they realised that none of those things had happened and that we aren’t who they think we are.”*



**Thanos** is in the first year of junior high school and is pleased to be participating with teachers in changing his school, the third Junior and Senior High School of Ambelokipi Menemeni. Interactive whiteboards were put in classrooms recently, and his classmates are really excited!

*"We paint, make things at school, we opened the library. Ms. Eleni, our principal, is trying hard to change the school. Classes are more interesting, and I like it that some of the kids are trying to change. I like school. It's where my friends are, the people I hang out with. It's where I spend my time creatively. Over the past decade, more and more of us – young Roma – have been going to school, and some kids have gone on to technical schools and universities. From an early age, I wanted to do something involving medicine, and I want to follow through with that. Dendropotamos is my neighbourhood, and even though I go to Evosmos or the city centre, those areas seem strange to me. Around here, we all know each other. It's like a little village, and I like that. If something happens, if I need something, everyone knows who I am. I want to feel safe, even if the neighbourhood has its problems."*





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