



Gekko Kids



In February 2017, Together for Better Days and Iliaktida AMKE combined their strengths to create 'Gekko Kids.' Our journey began with critical discernment, experience sharing and responsible self-reflection. In this project, our energy has gone to designing a *safe* environment for learning, curiosity and play. Gekko Kids was launched in Lesvos on August 25, 2017 with the aim to provide alternative education to vulnerable youth and create a standard that should be held for all students, regardless of social status or contexts.

This is the education approach we hope for children all over the world.

Gekko Kids is both the space as well as the students, the teachers, and anyone who shares our vision and ethos of this project. It gets its name because geckos, small, colorful lizards, are found all over the world, in over 1000 patterns and sizes. They have resilient and adaptive characteristics, something our own Gekko Kids exhibit.

This is a place of healing, opportunity and exploration. Gekko Kids is an education space that promotes alternative teaching methodologies, engages students in creative, collaborative and



challenging courses, and provides a learning environment that welcomes analytical and abstract thinking. We believe this makes learning more fruitful, compassionate, and sustainable; whether that is exploring a new culture in Global Studies or making tetrahedrons in Geometry, our goal is to prepare our Gekko Kids for their next steps in life and to give these young minds a positive educational experience, as well as creative outlets, and a safe place to explore, play and learn.



Founding Partners and Sponsors

Gekko Kids is a project implemented and managed jointly by two Greek non-profit organizations: Better Days Greece and Iliaktida AMKE on Lesbos, Greece. From June to August 2017, Better Days Greece designed and prepared the Gekko Kids space. It took less than seven weeks to set up and deliver this fully equipped educational center with the capacity to welcome up to 200 students. Better Days also invested in the training of the teachers and the promotion and branding of the concept. Students' transportation and recruitment of

educational staff were solely handled by Iliaktida AMKE, who today employs eight Greek teachers, the heart and soul of Gekko Kids. The project is mainly funded by AMIF for educational staff and supplies. The set-up cost, operational expenses, and additional staff is almost exclusively funded by a private Swiss school, Institut Le Rosey.



Gekko Kids employs eleven Greek Teachers, an Office Administrator and a Program Director. Gekko Kids' teaching capacity is boosted by the ongoing support of Connect by Music and Refugee Education and Learning (REAL) International, both non-profit organizations. All new inputs, both physical and programmatic, are now designed and administered by the Gekko Kids Coordination

ABOUT THE PROJECT FOUNDERS

BETTER DAYS

Better Days Greece was established in early 2016 in response to the influx of refugees arriving on Lesbos, Greece. It is the implementing partner of Together for Better Days, a Swiss NGO. Together we have supported over 21 projects in Greece since 2015. We are an international team united by a fierce determination to bring humanity and compassion into the delivery of humanitarian aid. Whether we are doing emergency response, legal support or education, we continue to emphasize the importance of participatory practices, supporting and collaborating with local efforts, and fostering agency among our beneficiaries.



Iliaktida AMKE is a civil society actor (Civil Non-Profit Company) that was created through the needs of the local community in Lesbos to combat social exclusion through employment and personalized counseling of People with Disabilities and vulnerable population groups in 1997. Iliaktida became an official UNHCR Accommodation and Protection Partner in February 2016 and a Child Protection Partner in April 2016. In August 2016 Iliaktida became a UNICEF Child Protection Partner. In Lesbos they operate over 9 safe shelter facilities exclusively for UASC and over 80 shelters for vulnerable refugee families across Greece.

ILIAKTIDA AMKE

Team, headed by Elena Moustaka (Better Days' Programme Director) & Magda Veloutsou (Iliaktida's Head Educational Coordinator). Our partnership has fostered a creative, inspiring space focused on interaction, curiosity, and exploration through alternative teaching methodologies and a shared vision. To this day, Iliaktida AMKE and Better Days Greece manage the project and collaborate on the implementation as well as the financial commitment to its success.

Why UASC?

At the outset of the project there were around 164 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) on the island of Lesbos, a number which is constantly fluctuating due to arrivals and departures. Most of those are housed by Iliaktida who provides accommodation, food, protection, medical care, psychosocial support and education. As most UASC do not yet attend public schools, there is a critical gap in their education. As a result, other pivotal skills are underdeveloped, such as communication, social skills and goal setting.



Additionally, since most UASC are in the age range 12-17, many of the older teenagers will never re-enter the educational system, missing out on learning and these crucial skills development. Following several months of assessment, Together for Better Days decided to support Iliaktida's work by setting up an educational space for Iliaktida's unaccompanied minors.

Classrooms & Curriculum



“Let’s inspire everyone who walks in the door. Let’s create energy, discussions and curiosity.”

Our classrooms are thematic, as we encourage our students and teachers to be flexible and diverse in their learning techniques. Each classroom is named after an inspirational person that valued learning, risk-taking and humanity: Einstein, Sappho, Gandhi, Malala and Madiba (Nelson Mandela). Some of these individuals have been refugees themselves and they all have exemplified how to rise above oppression and achieve greatness in their respective fields.

Our classrooms have been designed to cater to different teaching styles, whether that is more traditional, group oriented or flexible. For example, the Malala classroom is set up in the World Cafe style, where students sit at circular tables to foster teamwork, discussions, and group projects. It also affords the opportunity to teach different levels in the same space. And throughout the building there are creative aspects - a mural, maps that represent different world perspectives, a custom-made library, hidden painted geckos - to inspire everyone who steps into the Gekko Kids space.



Gekko Kids Curriculum

The curriculum is based on Core Classes and Elective Classes. Together with the teachers, the project team determined the Core Classes to be: Greek, English, Math, IT and Art/Music. Additionally, Elective Classes are offered on a regular basis, with a rotating curriculum of courses, to explore other subjects such as: Physics, Mythology, Art History, Geometry, Theatre, etc.



Capacity Building

Iliaktida AMKE has employed eight wonderful teachers to manage our students' linguistic learning at Gekko Kids. Iliaktida AMKE trusted in Better Days' innovative approach to training, programming and space design.

Gekko Kids has been very fortunate to have such dedicated, passionate supporters. Without their generous support, the Gekko Kids space would not be what it is today.

Initially the teachers were exposed to alternative teaching methodologies through intensive workshops customized specifically for the team. Following these workshops, Better Days took the lead in drafting the Gekko Kids procedures to include alternative assessment methodologies, data collection methods and software, and design of the new curriculum and resources. Other Gekko-specific trainings were organized in Child Protection and Protection in Education Mainstreaming by Save the Children and OXFAM, respectively. Gekko Kids signed its first partnership agreement with a US-based association called the Refugee Education and Learning (REAL) International in October 2017. Ms. Cecelia Wambach, Head Volunteer Coordinator, vets and coordinates volunteer teachers -

retired headmasters, professors and teachers - from the US to assist our permanent teaching team and complement our curriculum with additional Elective Courses.







Assessment

Following registration, the students are assessed in Math, English and Greek. At present there are five levels for English: Foundation/Beginners and Levels A, B and C. These assessments have been customized and adapted to the students' abilities.

Where is the dog?

Name: _____ Class: _____ Fill in the blanks with the prepositions below.

under, on, next to, behind, in front of, in

1  The dog is _____ the table.	2  The dog is _____ the box.
3  The dog is _____ the table.	4  The dog is _____ the table.
5  The dog is _____ the table.	6  The dog is _____ the table.

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Today Iliaktida's teachers and the REAL teachers are in a position to offer over 15 different thematic lessons, collaboratively host classes, and cover Gekko Kids' needs at the blink of an eye. The Gekko Kids teaching team is structured to take on the sudden fluctuations in the number of students, as well as respond to the individual needs of our students. We are now working towards personalizing our curriculum to meet the needs and reflect the skills of each individual student. Iliaktida's vision is to be able to register as many UASC as possible to

public schools and continue to offer supportive classes and tutoring to the Gekko Kids who already attend public education, high school, night school, and technical school. The Gekko Kids partners have synchronized their efforts towards creating an example of an informal educational center that exceeds minimum or basic standards, and cares and caters for the specific needs of our student body which represents over 20 different ethnicities and 17 different languages.

