



# PSS REPORT

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2020

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## SITUATION OVERVIEW

In the months of March, April and May, Covid-19 dramatically affected the operations of many NGOs on the island. Better Days was no exception. Because of the lockdown, Gekko remained closed and the majority of our staff was still in Athens. While Covid-travel restrictions kept the team apart, Moria was put under quarantine with thousand of people living in deplorable and unhygienic conditions. The management of the camp, stopped any non essential activities and access to the camp was regulated. The Better Days team on Lesvos continued to work closely with the Minors Office supporting with outreach and case management. Witnessing concerning gaps in hygiene and Covid-19 protective equipment, we met the UAM Section's needs for PPE and Vitamin C,, performed DNA tests and communicated with the children regarding updates. Meanwhile our legal program Themida expanded to take on another 40 reunification cases in need of critical legal aid. The Unaccompanied Minors Clinic, run by HPF, grew steadily to cover serious medical gaps in both emergency and primary care as well as in providing health promotion about Covid-19. Being two of the few actors allowed to work on the ground (providing essential services to UAMs) we worked closely together.

With the knowledge that things would return to normal after the pandemic, our PSS team in Athens, used this time to plan a new kind of intervention. This time our programs were designed to be implemented in Moria and not Gekko, a tough but practical reality following the outbreak. In June 2020, with the whole PSS team back on Lesvos, we performed our first needs assessment. Our pilot population were UAMs from 'Section A' (a protected area for unaccompanied children from ages 12 to 18) and the unaccompanied minors still living in the olive groves of Moria. During the months of June and July, individual sessions took place with the children who were previously attending Gekko Kids (active PSS cases). We worked with the Coordinator of 'Section A' to perform interventions with difficult children, give consultations and submit individual assessment reports when necessary to support a child's case. Our team continued to do case management, and address gaps in protection and basic services.

Additionally, the Better Days' art teacher refurbished and painted the school space within 'Section A', (see cover page); transforming it into a safe space for experimentation and learning for all 178 children living in the Section. The space was not only used by Better Days for PSS sessions and Socrates team but also by the Covid-19 awareness workshops by CMA and MSF, education classes by A Drop in the Ocean, SGBV sessions by Diotima, music lessons by Connect by Music, and legal sessions by the Better Days & DCI team (Themida).

In August, our PSS program was launched (a psycho-education program designed for teenagers living in Moria camp). This PSS program was designed for 60 vulnerable, unaccompanied children in 'Section A'. All of them attended a four-hour-a-week program which focused in social education, psycho-motor therapy, and arts. Building a sense of safety and belonging is necessary to create a community. Meanwhile Gekko's Redesign Committee had come together to address the challenges faced by educational actors. The question of providing quality education in a safe manner in Moria and enabling the continuity of our students growth and learning was a difficult question to answer. None the less with hard work and dedication, and the valuable guidance and dedication of REAL, we finally designed a semi-only educational proposal which complimented our PSS component, and in principle still met the pedagogical principles of Gekko. Permission were granted by the Commander of Moria to pilot the program in September.

## DESIGNING A PSS-PROGRAM IN MORIA FOR GEKKO KIDS

Better Days' spaces and activities aim to instill the feeling of comfort, which magnifies the impact of our sessions. The primary objectives of the project was for each child to get a general sense of well-being, learn emotional and social skills from themselves and each other. Social educational and artistic activities have proven to relieve people suffering from all kinds of psychological conditions. This kind of activities equip us with tools for self-regulation. Our first step was to transform our classroom into a comfortable and positive space. The program director concluded on the list of 60 participants, in their majority Gekko Kids and some urgent PSS referrals from the Section's Coordinator, EODY & HPF.

### i. REFERRAL PATHWAY

Cases were referred to the PSS team by the RIC Coordinator in 'Section A', the Minor Office, Better Days Legal Officer, HPF doctors, and the EODY (public health institution) psychologists. EuroRelief, and the Better Days MIRE officers referred cases identified during outreach exercises. The referral was done through an online form designed specifically for the needs of the program. To start, the participants were notified and brought in for an informative session with the PSS team to help them understand the activities offered and explain the nature of the project.

### ii. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our session plan was inspired by the critical pedagogy by Paulo Freire, the Culture of Peace (promoted by UNESCO, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela...) and the free schools' vision by Ferrer Guardia, Neil, Makarenko. Remnants of Fritz Perls and Rudolf Steiner philosophies were mixed in as well as the Buddhist Psychology. All of these theories represent an integrative approach of Social Emotional Learning Methodologies, Free Schools Pedagogy, and Culture of Peace, sometimes with a tacit presence of psycho-social support. Better Days' psycho pedagogical principles with which we base our social educational programs on are: freedom, autonomy and empowerment, creativity, integration, communication, cooperation and solidarity, boundaries, coexistence and equity, respect, positivity, active and experiential learning, and resilience.



### iii. THE ACTIVITIES

Better Days' Psycho-education program in Moria was based on four group activities. We believe working in groups provides peer support and human connection, which become healing and empowering:

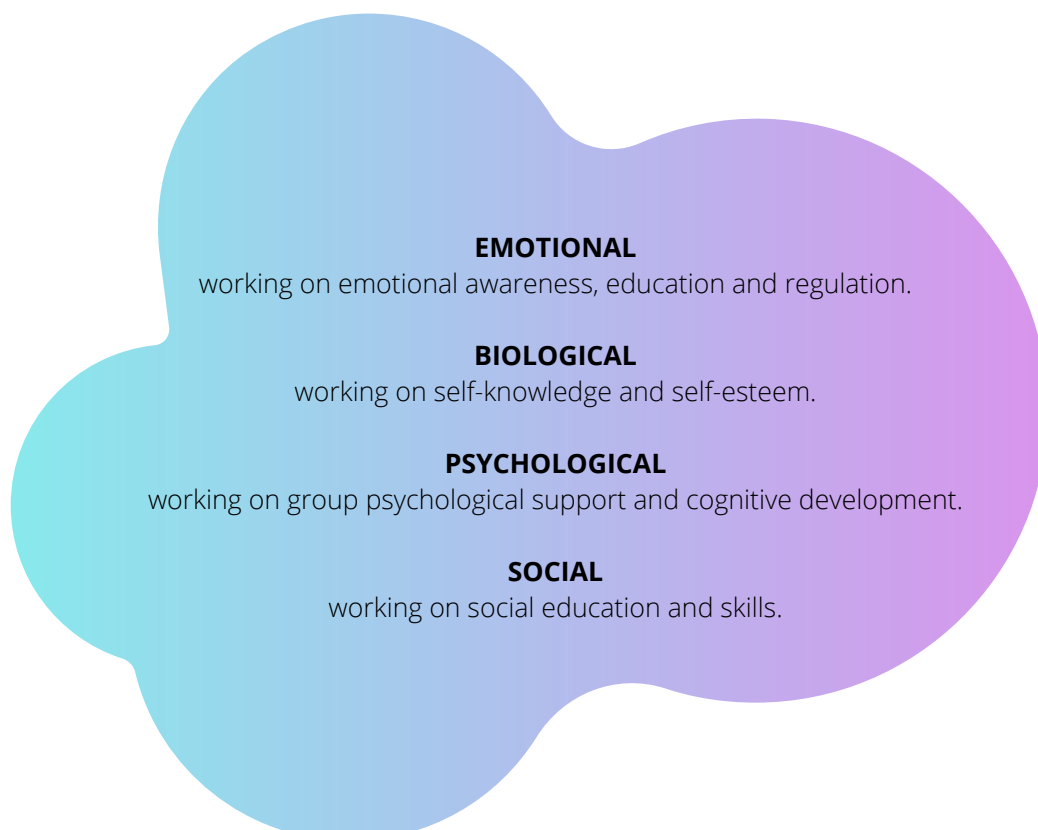
**Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** During SEL activities, the UAM will explore, connect, understand and integrate social and emotional skills.

**Assembly:** This activity offers a space of healthy debate on sensitive topics of interest for the participants. The UAM will learn basic social rules to improve their communication skills in order to discuss ideas, feelings, news, and concepts without using conflict, resulting in productive outcomes for all parties. This is a space with freedom of speech. We all learn from each other here.

**Psychomotor Therapy (PMT):** Will give a space for the students to experience, to feel, to try and to reconnect with themselves as well with others via physical activities. During the session a student will be challenged to focus on body-awareness, the connection between their mind and body and its effects, as well as their psychological and physical strength. All aspects will support the students to be resilient and in control of themselves in daily life situations.

**Arts:** This activity will not include a therapeutic component, it will be a bonus for the program's beneficiaries, a way to experiment and enjoy arts didactically. The activity is not working within the same parameters as the psycho-education and PMT sessions.

The structure of the program follows four main areas used to develop a multidimensional approach:



#### iv. OBJECTIVES

Living in a refugee camp is not incredibly challenging physically and mentally, even for UAMs residing in the protected areas. They are still lonely children, without their family, childhood friends, or any structural support. The main objective of the Psycho-education program was to provide some sanity in times of despair. UAMs would find structure, guided activities, a team to trust and a group of friends to (re)discover. Children should be able to explore themselves and others, in safe environments of trust where they do not have to worry about surviving, but can actually develop themselves; create, recover, learn, and build. During these sessions, UAMs were able to increase their emotional intelligence and social skills while doing activities that provide stress-relief.

*Experience inclusion, acceptance,  
being valued and ability to be  
yourself in the group.*

*Improve ability to control them self through  
knowledge about the relation between bio-  
psycho-social processes.*

*Become aware about personal  
boundaries, physically, mentally  
as well as socially.*

Some of the specific objectives of our sessions were:

- Reduce the levels of stress, nervousness or anxiety by providing an attractive, structured activity that promotes participation.
- Acquire social skills for relation, communication, behavior, and resilience.
- Working on empowerment by actively making choices and promoting self-awareness of their good qualities.
- Generate self-conception by defining their characteristics, positive or less positive.
- Increase the levels of self-control and attention as well as building self-esteem.
- Work on active listening.
- Promote group cohesion, equality, and sense of belonging.
- Develop mutual knowledge, empathy, and otherness.
- Develop coping strategies to deal with their emotionally traumatic background.
- Increase the levels of emotional awareness and management.
- Foster self-expression in a safe environment.
- Promote self-regulation and self-awareness.



## PSS SNAPSHOT IN NUMBERS

84 internal referrals  
35 individual counseling sessions  
10 accompaniments to psychiatrist and crisis units.  
26 hours of support to Section A  
5 hours of PSS sessions to the staff  
9 SEL sessions  
9 Psycho-motor Therapy sessions  
9 Art sessions  
9 Assemblies







*"Let everything happen to you.  
Beauty and terror.  
Just keep going.  
No feeling in final."*

*-Rainer Maria Rilke*



## **v. SOCRATES CLOSURE**

Socrates Sports & Development Program phase II was cancelled due to the violent incidents in Lesvos in January and February 2020. During the month of August, our Socrates team was able to proceed with four workshops where former Socrates participants were able to debrief their experience and reflect on Socrates learnings.

During these sessions, which took place in Section A in Moria camp, in the newly refurbished school area of RIC, the coaches and the students were able to conclude the module and address concepts they had been working on before the lockdown. This enabled a safe and conscious closure for all involved parties, the teachers and the students alike which were still struggling to cope with the suspension of Gekko.



## **vi. SEMI-ONLINE EDUCATION PROGRAM**

The Semi-Online Education Program brought together 8 professionals from Better Days and REAL to assess, brainstorm and conclude on how to effectively provide quality education to UAMs living in Moria (under quarantine/lockdown), with limited access to IT equipment and internet. How to we take Gekko to Moria? A new Child Safeguarding Policy was drafted to ensure best practices at on-line level and three fully developed proposals were submitted for debate. A semi online edu-platform was finally approved and prepared for launching on the 11th of September.



## **vii. CHALLENGES**

Working behind the fences of Moria and within the Section's premises was certainly very different than working in the structured, safe, and dignifying space of Gekko Kids. Even though Better Days refurbished the space in an attempt to bring normality to the camp, Moria's living conditions remain deplorable which made our work even more challenging. Our program launched five months into Moria's lock down. During this time the children were under complete or partial lockdown in the Sections. Due to the conditions in Moria, the extended lockdown created a spiral of violence (including stabbings, thefts, sexual assaults) and abuse of alcohol and drugs. The lack of clarity provided for relocation and family reunification procedures by legal actors, brought significant pathological frustration to the unaccompanied minors whose futures were hanging by a thread. Unaccompanied minors were in poor psychological state from the abhorred violent acts, frustration, and institutional abandonment they sustained. This was compounded by unending concerns about their futures.

Subsequently, that dynamic helped shape the program: the unaccompanied minors found it quite difficult to wake up in the mornings (this was often because they were not able to sleep at night due to the copious number of incidents that would occur coupled with the lack of a structured schedule). Children would have massive frustration, depression, and sometimes panic attacks, so one of the side officers would always need to be ready to intervene. Children lost their appetite from the psychological impact the situation, and would often come to the sessions dehydrated and without having eaten breakfast. They had difficulties concentrating and articulating their thoughts and opinions. They were genuinely tired in all senses of the word.

## **viii. SUCCESSES**

Despite the fact that children struggled to wake up in the morning, we built a core group of students who stuck to the Psycho-education program and consistently attended. The team was able to create sense of belonging through active teamwork during the activities. Social and emotional skills were effectively practiced and explored during the sessions. The children who participated found a space to decompress, talk about their frustrations and worries, and have positive feedback and support in return. In Arts, they had a space to honor and enjoy the silence they never had while practicing standard (sometimes challenging) art techniques. These art sessions served to provide healthy stress-relief. During PMT sessions, they explored their bodies and minds and understood the dynamics between the two. In SEL and Assembly they talked about several PSS-sensitive topics and focused on perceiving reality from other perspectives.

It was not easy to teach them how to follow their intuition and decide for their actions, instead of making them follow instructions. When the ball of power fell in their hands and they had the power to speak, they found it challenging to verbalize their opinions, thoughts, and feelings. Following several sessions, we noticed positive changes in their behavior. We worked on focus and fostered a safe space where sharing opinions, supporting each other, and challenging our own thinking was part of the daily structure. Once they understood the model, they opened up and shared many positive skills and thoughts.

The unaccompanied minors who were part of the program were extremely thankful to be able to attend the Psycho-education program in Moria, in a moment when Gekko was closed and not many services were provided to the minors. The Psycho-education was all they had and we our registration (waiting) list expanded disproportionately.

We are comfortable saying that the team did everything it could to support these children and our student through this difficult times. We were happy to witness an impressive display of resilience from our beneficiaries, who, despite it all, kept striving for the best; dreaming big and hoping for a better future.