

# ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2019 – DECEMBER 2020



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## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE LEADER

The year 2020 was a year of profound change unleashed by the spread of COVID-19 across the globe. A return to the pre-pandemic status quo seems almost unthinkable from our current perspective. The world we knew seems destined to never return.

Collectively facing challenges of immense proportion, it is the poor and marginalised among us who are disproportionately affected by shocks like this. Local economic hardship contributes to the increased vulnerability of certain groups for exploitation and enslavement. At the same time, travel restrictions and lockdowns compound the challenges we face in reaching exactly these at-risk groups.

Yet COVID-19 has also taught us a fundamental truth: we are all deeply connected. The outpouring of compassion, generosity and talent from everyday British and Spanish citizens and our partner NGOs in Europe, the USA and Albania have been simply overwhelming. This support allowed us to continue Mary Ward Loreto Foundation's efforts this year. To each person who invested their time, money and heart, I extend to you our collective heartfelt gratitude.

Now, more than ever, we are blessed by the guidance and leadership of our board of directors and president, Imelda Poole IBVM / MBE. I am honoured by the trust they have placed in me and my colleagues to lead this foundation and continue its mission.

As an NGO, our single driving motivation for greater efficiency is the ability to serve greater numbers of those in need. All the various MWL teams went the extra mile to help and support the needy and those most at risk this past year. Their unwavering commitment to our mission, despite many challenges, is inspiring and humbling.

The big question now is where do we go from here. The need for assistance among the least fortunate is now greater than ever before, and so a compelling rationale exists to expand our service offerings. This, however, can only be achieved through even greater engagement on the part of our supporters and friends. There is truly no worthier cause





than preventing a life led to slavery or assisting victims in rebuilding their lives in freedom. We can accomplish the greatest good at a cost we all can afford.

It has been an experience like none other to lead this remarkable organisation, side by side with my amazing colleagues during this turbulent year. Together we will overcome the present hardships and achieve even greater success in the years to come.

Sincerely Yours,

Ana Stakaj

Remarkable work was accomplished during this past year despite the many challenges and roadblocks resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. Meeting the formidable challenges posed by two unexpected crises was at the centre of our attention over this reporting period. These two events were the earthquake of 26 November 2019 and the ongoing consequences of the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown.

More than 13,069 people were supported by MWL activities and interventions this year.

The focal point of our response to both crises has been assistance distributed through our network of MWL Advice and Service Centres (ASCs). The ASCs have always constituted an essential component in the provision of support services by bridging the gap between communities and state and non-state institutions. Addressing community needs at the grass-root level positions us to better understand the issues people face at the local and community level. Thus, by jointly working with partner organisations and community members, we could make more informed decisions and find more sustainable solutions.

Working to ensure no one in need is left behind, MWL collaborated with fellow NGOs, communities of faith and local government officials to identify, refer and assist the most vulnerable families and individuals in need of aid and support. Because of this cooperation, MWL reached more than 13,000 people through its programmes during 2020.

Despite our focus on crisis response, the work of our other programmes was not neglected. For example, MWL actively pursued its ambitious goal of contributing to the elimination of corruption and unethical practice in the Albanian education system via its Education Project. A total of 326 teachers, parents and representatives of statutory services across 13 regions of Albania attended trainings on ethics in the education system, specially designed by the ethics and leadership expert, Mrs Edlira Gjoni. The goal of the project is to support the strengthening of the necessary value system and democratisation of education to stem corruption and unethical practices. To this end, research on the perceived causes of unethical behaviour and corruption in the education system in Albania was conducted and the results published.

Although it was not an ideal year to pilot a new organisational structure, MWL nevertheless took on the challenge of experimenting with the introduction of a TEAL organisational structure. Training sessions, strategies and learnings were conducted and recorded throughout the year. Although it will be an ongoing process and nowhere complete, a consensus has emerged that it is the right way for the organisation to move forward.

All this leads to the compelling vision of Mary Ward Loreto planting hope with a human rights approach to combating modern-day slavery. This challenging mission is implemented through our focus on justice, education, grassroots action and systemic change which is outlined in greater detail in this report.

## A. EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In the early morning of 26 November 2019, Albania was hit by an earthquake which resulted in the loss of 51 lives, countless injured and thousands of flats and houses rendered uninhabitable. In response to this natural disaster, our work immediately shifted to meeting the needs of the survivors. Thus, when more than 2,500 residents of Thumane, Kurbin and Lezha fled the area and sought shelter in neighbouring Shengjin, MWL Staff were immediately mobilised to provide emergency support to families and children.

### **Emergency Response:**

- MWL Foundation, in collaboration with Caritas, prepared food for 702 people.
- Personal hygiene products were made available to 130 people sheltered at the Frojd Hotel in Shengjin by the MWL ASC Shkoder.
- The MWL ASC Lezha stepped forward and provided notebooks and pens for children who were restarting school in Shengjin but who lacked basic school supplies.
- MWL staff organised volunteers and activated other NGOs for a donation drive to collect food and clothing in Shkoder. As a result, MWL was able to deliver food packages and clothes to more than 200 families directly affected by the earthquake in Durres, Thumane, Lac (Gjorm, Sanxhak), Marikaj, Lezha and Shengjin.
- MWL In Shkoder raised 2,869 EUR, which went largely for the purchase of medication and other medical supplies for affected individuals.

### **Transitional programme:**

Support from our partners was of central importance in our response strategy. The MWL ASC Tirana led a project financed by the Italian Bishop's Conference (CEI) through Caritas Albania for emergency support for families and individuals in Tirana who were affected by the earthquake. This project saw the distribution of food packages, the restoration of damaged buildings, access to healthcare and psychological support, community trainings for civil emergencies, trainings for service providers on civil emergency response and referrals to relevant services.

Furthermore, the MWL ASC Tirana worked in partnership with the Jesuit Fathers of a parish in the hard-hit region of Kombinat starting in April 2020. This allowed for the efficient and targeted delivery of services to those most in need. The identification of

## EARTHQUAKE AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY SUPPORT

490

families received emergency support in the form of food, clothes and personal care products.

144

children received school supplies.

225

families received personal care products.

702

people directly affected by the earthquake in Thumane received meals.

25

infrared thermometers were donated to preschools.

8008

individuals (7868 children and 140 staff members) from 28 preschool were provided personal care products and disinfectant to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

334

food packages were donated in collaboration with the Food Bank Albania and distributed to families most in need because of the earthquake and Covid-19 lockdown.



beneficiaries was also supported through the involvement of local municipality officials.

As a result:

- 48 cases/families in Tirana areas were identified and needs assessment for each case was conducted, and individuals were referred to relevant services. As a result:
  - o 9 clients were provided health examinations and medication
  - o 2 cases received 2 months of rent support
  - o 3 houses in need of restoration were identified and secured each family a new flat.
  - o 15 cases have/are receiving counselling and therapy at ASC. A group session was conducted with 19 participants, who shared their experiences of the earthquakes and learned various coping techniques to emotionally deal with the effects of natural disasters and unforeseen tragedy.
  - o 19 families received food support and documentation assistance for housing and sheltering
- 140 other families received food packages thanks to the support of Caritas, ARISE Foundation and the Food Bank Albania. Furthermore:
- 18 service providers at the municipality of Tirana and other municipality units were trained in managing emergencies. The two-session training was conducted online during a single day.



## B. COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

On 09 March 2020, Albanian officials announced the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. Despite many measures taken by the Albanian government to stop its spread, infection numbers have continued to rise throughout the country along with a corresponding increase in fatalities.

In response to the very real hardships faced so many families resulting from COVID-19, the MWL Foundation teamed up with benefactors, local churches, food banks, municipalities and other key actors in the areas MWL serves. Emergency assistance took the form of distributing food and other basic goods. In total, the foundation assisted over 142 families in 6 regions of the country to maintain their health and safety. The Arise Foundation, MW Spain and the ERTE foundation provided essential support to MWL's activities during this crisis.

During the nationwide quarantine, we remained committed to our mission and continued supporting our beneficiaries from our homes to theirs. The MWL ASC Tirana continued to run our psychological services during this period as people protected themselves and others by staying home. Respecting social distancing strategies, appointments at all MWL ASCs transitioned to an online format so we could continue to provide individuals with needed support.



From June 2020 onwards, we began supporting in-person visits to our centres while adhering too strictly enforced safety precautions. These measures include social distancing, sufficient ventilation of indoor spaces, the use of gloves and masks and hand sanitiser for all.

In addition to our regular counselling services, we offered online emergency psychological support for individuals throughout all regions of Albania. Both MWL ASC Tirana psychologists were available online, and anyone could receive professional psychological service by contacting the centre online or by phone. This move to providing services online was of great benefit to individuals outside of Tirana by allowing them access to general psychological support services.



## C. MWL PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT



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### C.1. ADVICE AND SERVICE CENTRES PROGRAMME

In each region serviced, the MWL ASCs forms the focal point of our service offerings and engagement with local communities. These centres offer advice, counselling and services to all individuals vulnerable to human trafficking and/or social, legal, emotional and/or economic exploitation. Standing in partnership with the National Referral Mechanism and the Coalition of Shelters in Albania, MWL ASCs provide a wide array of in-house services, such as rescue, referral and other services for victims of trafficking and exploitation. Each centre and program have a devoted team of advisors, while each group of beneficiaries of the centre chose a representational leader. In this way, all staff members, beneficiaries and other stakeholders actively play a role in shaping the outcome and outputs of the foundation's work.

During this year the programme was engaged in the following activities.

#### 1.1. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Supporting human development continues to be a central focus of the foundation as there remains an ever-present need among individuals and certain groups to increase their awareness of newly emerging forms and tactics of human trafficking. During this reporting period, 80 trainings were conducted, resulting in 1300 participants receiving customised human development support according to the needs of their specific cases and regions.

#### 1.2. AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES

Awareness-raising activities form a core component of our service offering through the ASCs. During this period, 1200 individuals attended over 36 awareness-raising activities organised through our 6 ASCs. Session topics included awareness-raising of various health issues, domestic violence, human anti-trafficking education and positive parenting.

In these sessions, we aimed to raise awareness among the following four target groups.

##### a) Professional Service Providers

- A training entitled "Identification and Referral of Victims of Domestic Violence in Health Institutions" was run with 11 medical staff members at the Lekbibaj Health Centre.
- A training entitled "Communication of Diagnosis to Patients Affected by Cancer"





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was delivered to 35 staff members at the municipal hospital of Bajram Curri. This training was organised in collaboration with the psycho-social service unit of QSUT.

- MWL was invited to speak at 2 International webinars surrounding the fifth anniversary of the publishing of “Laudato si!” and of the new encyclical “Fratelli tutti” on the Impact of Human Trafficking in Health – Trauma and Healing.
- Representatives of MWL were invited to speak about the national referral mechanisms (NRM) and its role and the importance in the Albanian context at a webinar organised by RENTATE on awareness-raising for human trafficking.

#### b) Young Adults and Students

- Anti-trafficking sessions were held in three schools in Lezha and the schools of “Kolin Gjoka” and “At’ Shtjefen Gjeçovi” in Kallmet. Additionally, similar training on the link between social media and human trafficking was conducted in Tropoja.

#### c) General Public

During this reporting period, MWL staff participated in three public marches. The first march was organised by the anti-trafficking national coordinator to raise awareness for the annual European Anti-Trafficking Day on 18 October. Local awareness-raising activities were organised by other ASCs to mark the day. Six MWL staff also participated in a march celebrating International Women’s Day. In Shkoder, Lezha and Rreshen our staff actively contributed to local activities as organizing committee members. MWL also participated as a member of URAT in the UN Gift Box Campaign organised in Shkoder and Korça. Finally, the International Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking was marked together with the URAT Network in commemoration of Saint Bakhita.

#### d) Women

- The training “Domestic Violence and the Role of Women in Fighting Against It” was offered at the MWL ASC Shkoder along with trainings on positive parenting in Tropoja.





### 1.3. HEALTH SUPPORT AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

Increasing access to medical treatment and support services remains an important aspect of the work conducted through the ASCs across the country. In total, 132 people benefited from these services and received health support and medical treatment. Of these, 4 individuals received life-saving surgical procedures. In Tropoja, 40 individuals received prescription glasses, while 88 others received support in securing prescription medication and medical examinations. MWL ASC staff play an essential role in this process by setting appointments, accompanying patients and providing emotional support throughout the treatment period and beyond.

### 1.4. COUNSELLING, THERAPY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

During this reporting period, a total of 96 people received psychological support services through the MWL ASCs. More than half of these cases were handled by the MWL ASC Tirana, which offered support services itself or referred cases to partnering institutions. As a result, 15 of the 96 individuals received online support services through our collaboration with the Medaille Trust in the UK.

The MWL ASC Tirana continued to provide psychological support for quarantined individuals and protect themselves and others by switching to an online format. This transition allowed the two resident psychologists of the ASC Tirana to provide online emergency psychological support to individuals in all areas of Albania. This support consists of tools and techniques to manage stress and anxiety related to the pandemic.

Although other ASCs are not currently staffed with resident psychologists, they nonetheless provided essential mental health services throughout the country. Next to referral services, they provide financial support for treatment for those in need. For example, the MWL ASC Shkoder referred 26 individuals for assessment during this period, while the MWL ASC Lezha referred 4 individuals and MWL ASC Tropoja referred 8 persons. As a result, 17 individuals received special treatment for mental health issues.

Psychological support arose as a need for the community after the earthquake of November 2019. A group session with community members was organised by the MWL ASC Tirana to deal with post-trauma and develop healthy coping mechanisms.





## ADVICE AND SERVICE CENTRES PROGRAMME



## 1.5. DIRECT ASSISTANCE FOR SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Direct assistance for survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence continued to be administered successfully through the network of MWL ASCs through the country. During this period, 73 cases of domestic violence were referred to our ASC centres resulting in individuals receiving the necessary care and follow up services. At the MWL ASC Tirana, 7 initial cases of victims or potential victims of trafficking were identified along with an additional 2 cases of re-trafficking. Members of the MWL ASC Tirana also produced 8 reports to support the asylum application process for 4 trafficking survivors in the UK. Throughout the country, 17 human trafficking cases were handled by MWL ASC members. Of these cases, 16 were registered in Tirana and a single case identified in Tropoja.

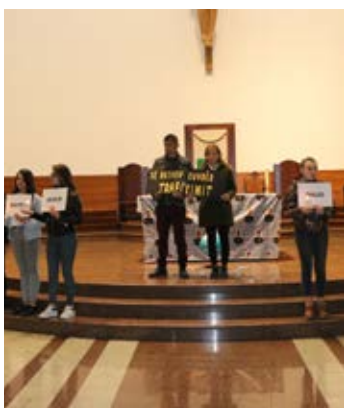
## 1.6. SHELTERING

During this reporting period, the foundation provided temporary sheltering for 45 people in extreme need. This service was provided to victims and potential victims of trafficking who could not be referred to shelters due to a lack of space or unwillingness of the persons in need to be housed in a shelter. Additionally, MWL facilitated shelter for people whose homes were rendered uninhabitable because of the earthquake and its aftershocks.

## 1.7. LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Through the MWL ASCs 42 individuals received free legal assistance and referrals to other partner organisations which also provide legal counsel free of charge. Cases are followed closely and supported by staff members in the MWL ASCs in Tirana, Lezha, Saranda, Tropoja and Shkoder.

## C.2. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME



## 2.1. EMPLOYMENT, REFERRAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING GUIDANCE

The youth programme targets 4 areas in the north of the country: Shkoder, Lushnja, Rreshen and Puka. In Shkoder the programme was made possible based on a joint donation from MWMF and SS Simon & Jude School. The Lushnja programme was sponsored through a donation from the Congregation of Jesus Charitable Trust. In Rreshen, financing was received by IBVM. Unfortunately, funding for the Puka programme could not be secured. However, thanks to the kindness of RENATE, a Christmas retreat for 15 youth who previously participated in the Puka programme was organised. We hope sponsoring for the Puka programme can be secured in 2021 through our ad hoc facilitator.

An invaluable component common to all 4 programmes is the reimbursement of transportation costs to training centres. This simple act allows youth to participate in vocational training which otherwise would be unavailable to them because of their socio-economic circumstances. Other aspects common to all the programmes include:

- Orientation and Regular Participation in Vocational Training Courses
  - o In Shkoder:
 

This programme was attended by 5 young men and 5 young women from surrounding villages. After individual and group meetings with an MWL ASC staff member, each youth chose one of two vocational training courses on offer. Five women along with one man decided to receive training as hairdressers, whereas the remaining 4 men chose to train as plumbers. All of them successfully finished their vocational training courses.
  - o In Lushnja:
 

This programme was attended by 5 young men and 5 young women. The 5 women chose to receive training as tailors and the boys received training as plumbers. All ten youth successfully finished their vocational training.
  - o In Rreshen:
 

Eleven youth joined this programme. Eight of the youth were able to start the course immediately after the lockdown and have already completed their training. Three of them however continue to attend their courses.



- Internships  
Through MWL's initiative and collaboration with vocational training centres in Shkoder, Tirana and Fier, every trainee could exercise their theoretical knowledge in a real work environment through participation in internships. In Rreshen, 8 youth have already completed their internships whereas the remaining three will have their chance after their initial training courses have been completed.
- Tool Kits  
The youth of Shkoder and Lushnja received kits providing the tools necessary to exercise their new professions and ease their transition to self-employment. The group in Rreshen will receive theirs in February 2021.
- Education through Community Actions Proposed by Youth
  - o In Shkoder:  
Youth receiving vocational training was part of the ASC's initiative to identify people in need as part of the earthquake emergency response. They were also active as volunteers in the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further volunteer activities include the UN GIFT Box Campaign in Shkoder and delivering leaflets in communities to raise awareness of human trafficking and existing referral systems.
  - o In Lushnja:  
Youth participating in the programme organised a food and personal hygiene item donation drive to provide for 3 families in need. They also assisted in the distribution of food and sanitary packages donated by the Food Bank Albania and Arise.
  - o In Rreshen:  
The young adults showed considerable initiative by identifying specific needs in their community and undertaking the following initiatives:
    - o Fundraised 330 EUR to supply a nursery school with toys that have long been absent in the institution.
    - o Assisted in the distribution of food and sanitary packages to families in need as an emergency response to the COVID-19 lockdown.
    - o Co-organised an anti-trafficking campaign at the public high school of Rreshen. Because of these actions and their visibility, we received an offer for rent-



free office space from the municipality of Rreshen, which leads the regional anti-trafficking committee.

- Job Search and Entrepreneurship Training  
The 3 groups had the opportunity to participate in two sessions covering the topics of job search skills and entrepreneurship. After understanding the importance and role of job interviews and receiving instructions, each participant drafted their CV in the European Europass format. Entrepreneurship training assisted them in drafting business plans and familiarised them with start-up funding opportunities offered by our partners, such as the UNDP and YUNUS Social Business.
- Socializing Activities  
Three socializing activities were organised to strengthen the bonds and friendships between participants while enjoying a time to relax and have fun.

On 14-15 December, a retreat was organised for the youth of Rreshen with the support of RENATE. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 who have participated in MWL's Youth Employment Programme within the last 3 years were invited to attend this retreat led by 2 psychologists. The two-day event was held in Razem, a peaceful and quiet location far removed from the attendees' everyday lives. The seclusion helped participants gain distance from their everyday thoughts and life circumstances and helped them focus on the content of the retreat.

Similarly, a second retreat on 23-24 December in Razem with youth from Puka was made possible through the generous support of RENATE. The presence of two professional psychologists leading the activities helped the youth to better understand the interconnected nature of thoughts, emotions and behaviours and how changes made to one link can positively affect the others. Understanding our emotional landscape and its management were the subjects of continued dialogue based on the youth's real-world experiences. Group sessions, exercises performed in nature and animation games made this retreat an effective time together.

Here is a small sampling of what the youth had to say about their participation in the retreats:

"I needed to rest and take some time for myself. Retreating to Razem was an ideal solution I had not even thought of. I felt very relaxed as I had the opportunity to





think calmly, unlike the routine of my daily work. I have committed to constantly find some time for myself". (V. Keqa)

"It was the first time for me to attend such meetings. As I am a bit of a closed-minded person, I prefer to avoid group meetings I'm not required to attend. Despite all my shyness, I felt free to talk to others. Dynamic group games helped me a lot to feel comfortable and free." (Z. Karroja)

"It was a great pleasure for me to participate. I want to thank those who gave us this opportunity to spend a wonderful day together. Thank you!" (R. Nikolli)

- Career Orientation and Follow Up Towards Employment  
To date, 14 youth (9 men and 5 women) out of 31 programme participants have secured employment. According to region, 5 have found employment from the Shkoder group, 7 from Lushnja and 2 from the Rreshen group. Targeted follow-ups with those still seeking employment will be conducted in 2021 to support their efforts. In Rreshen, an additional 9 youth, not directly participating in this programme, were referred to vocational trainings offered by DIMAK. Three of these individuals are now employed.
- Human Development Trainings Focused on the Prevention and Fight Against Human Trafficking and Discrimination
  - o In Shkoder:  
The youth of the Shkoder cohort participated in two training on the fight against human trafficking. The first session was organised by the group's coach, our MWL ASC worker, and the second by the NGO NISMA ARSIS. These trainings were held in preparation for the UN GIFT BOX Campaign in Shkoder. The youth participated in a further training entitled "Different Yet Equal", delivered by the MWL programme leader. The training raised awareness of various forms of discrimination and empowered youth to understand and accept the value of diversity.
  - o In Lushnja and Rreshen:  
The training on the fight against trafficking was delivered by the MWL programme leader.



Additionally, the training "Different Yet Equal" was conducted in Lushnja, whereas it is planned for February 2021 in Rreshen.

- MWL Certificate Award Ceremony  
In Shkoder and Lushnja, participating youth were awarded an MWL certificate recognizing and celebrating their journey towards employment. The activities and forms of engagement they participated in during their training period were highlighted on the certificate. A ceremony to award certificates will be held in Rreshen upon completion of the programme in March.

Other ASC's are also engaged in activities that target employment as an essential means for the economic and personal empowerment of the people they serve. To date, 139 individuals have been provided with employment and vocational training assistance through the active involvement of all our MSL ASCs operating throughout the country.

## 2.2. VEGETABLE SEEDS FOR RURAL FAMILIES IN NEED

In collaboration with the Food Bank Albania, the MWL ASCs of Saranda, Tirana, Shkoder and Tropoja distributed boxes of vegetable seeds to 60 families residing in remote rural areas. This initiative is a simple investment which yields high impacts by contributing to the food security of rural families. The assistance was well received by the families, and we hope these seeds bear many fruits in the future.

## 2.3. MWL SOCIAL BUSINESS

During this reporting period, the MWL Foundation was active in running two social businesses: one located in Kallmet and the second in Tropoja. These two small businesses were able to achieve the following amounts of revenue:

- Kallmet 19,200 EUR
- Valbona 1,650 EUR

The social business model in Kallmet takes the form of a tailor shop providing vocational and professional training to 5 part-time employed women. Training goals during this period focused on building women's expertise in improving product quality while reducing costs and production time. The attainment of this goal was greatly supported by the acquisition of a three-headed sewing machine, an ironing board



and a professional embroidery machine, all thanks to the enormous generosity and support of Mary Ward Spain. Additionally, Mary Ward Spain sponsored the women's training in professional cutting, sewing machine operation and new model crafting techniques. The results of this capacity building were immediately visible: the women's productivity increased considerably through the employment of improved techniques, greater personal ambition and higher expectations of their work performance.



In Tropoja 20 women market and sell their products in a store staffed by a seasonally employed saleswoman. Participating women received technical training to increase the quality of the traditional crafts they produce. Advancements were made, in part, through the close partnership between the MWL Foundation and the Competitive Skills Centre. Working together, the two organisations conducted trainings under the umbrella of the GIZ-funded project entitled “Creating Living Traditional Communities”. Moreover, a new location for the sales kiosk in Valbona was secured because of the excellent partnership between MWL and the Municipality of Tropoja. We are grateful to the municipality for generously donating a prime, rent-free location for the new sales point.

An important goal for both businesses before Covid-19 was to increase sales and revenue. This was to be achieved by expanding the volume of business with existing clients while securing new clients and customers. Securing new orders from existing customers proved to be a successful strategy. As a result, there was an increase in the number of orders for fleece by MW Spain. Other important business partners included: Mrizi I Zanave, which orders bags and other products from the workshop in Kallmet; uniforms for food workers and cooks via the “Rogacionistet” School in Lezha, as well as the “Shen Jozefi Punetor” School in Rreshen; and orders for school uniforms placed by the “Scuola Italiana a Tirana”.

International networking and new customer acquisition also played a role in achieving the goal of expanding the customer base for both businesses. An agreement was reached between the Kallmet workshop and the Secret Sisterhood, an Australian foundation led by Jacquie Love that supports women's empowerment. Selling jewellery and other products via their online store, the Secret Sisterhood has placed orders for reusable and environmentally friendly tote cotton bags to be produced by the business in Kallmet.

Despite these notable successes in the first quarter, the effects of the global COVID-19 outbreak posed significant challenges for MWL in growing and maintaining the operations of these two social businesses.

Except for MW Spain, both domestic and international clients were forced to cancel or downgrade their orders. Forced to cancel in-person tuition, the school in Rreshen did not place any orders for uniforms this year. Likewise, the Italian school reduced the number of their orders due to the transition to online instruction.



Finding new clients in Albania is extremely challenging in the best of times. The market offers cheaper prices for similar products, albeit of lower quality. Schools, private businesses and tourism services already have established relationships with partners and are often not open to new opportunities or supporting social justice projects. The location of the tailoring factory itself complicates matters as well. The lack of electricity, particularly common in rural areas during winter, creates a significant obstacle for general work processes and achieving objectives.

The Valbona Shop was first started as a project but then transformed into a small-scale social business to support the economic livelihood of rural women vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Although the Valbona shop enjoyed modest revenue in 2019, the business is currently in a fight for survival. Located in a remote mountainous area, the target market is almost exclusively tourists. For example, Albanian Kosovans constitute 90% of purchasing customers. Due to both border crossing restrictions between Kosovo and Albania in the first half of the touristic season and the COVID-19 lockdown, very few tourists visited the region in 2020. Sales consequently plummeted.

Annual revenue of approximately 7000 EUR is needed to cover all expenses and keep the business running. MWL has been supporting the shop in Valbona for 4 years by covering shortfalls and assisting with the day-to-day managing of the business. We have been encouraging the artisans to now create their social enterprise to become independent of MWL's direct management. However, some women resist this development due to difficulties in managing the workload balance between producing crafts and administrative responsibilities.

Despite these difficulties, we have managed to close the year off in a relatively solid position. We remain hopeful and optimistic that our operations will resume quickly once pandemic related restrictions have been eased. This period of forced closure allowed us to cultivate business relations with partners while exploring new possibilities for the future. As the success of the Secret Sisterhood shows, online sales and order is an attractive option moving forward.



## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

**139**

individuals actively participated and benefited from the employment, referral and vocational training guidance programme.

**26**

women benefited from employment through our 2 social businesses.

**115**

families received vegetable seeds donated by the Food Bank Albania.



### C.3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

80

human development trainings involved more than 1,300 participants. (The specific topics and trainings offered are named in the relevant sections of the report.)

awareness-raising activities were organised in six regions.

36

10

schools in the region of Lezha participated in various sporting activities and 29 students organised local celebrations for their communities.

A classroom in the local school in Gjader (Lezha region) was repurposed as a location for the community's newly established community centre.

1

5

local festivals throughout the region of Lezha were organised with the strong support of local government leaders and community members.

girls in Tropoja organised a march for the rights of women and girls.

40

55

girls received training about their basic human rights and learned how to become actors for change in their communities.

### 3.1. FOLK AND TOURISTIC PRIDE PROJECT IN LEZHA

This project was financed by the EU Delegation in Albania within the framework of the RELOAD Programme managed by the UNDP and implemented by MWL through the MWL ASC in Lezha. During the eight-month project between June 2019 and January 2020, three main project objectives were pursued.

The first goal was to increase citizen engagement in their communities by organising meetings and training sessions with students. In total, 10 schools participated in various sporting activities and 29 students organised local celebrations based on their ideas and hard work. These are now hoped to become local traditions in their respective communities.

As the second goal, a classroom in the local school of Gjader (Lezha region) was repurposed as a location for the community's newly established community centre. The centre is designed to be a place where local tradition and culture is displayed and preserved for future generations. Traditional clothing, local tools and household decorations donated by community members are now proudly on display.

As the final goal, 5 local festivals throughout the region of Lezha were organised with the strong support of local government leaders. Local festivals such as these are not only tourist products but also serve a vital role in strengthening a shared identity and sense of community among residents. Not only has a showcase for local traditions, such celebrations also helped foster an appreciation of the rich cultural heritage and diversity of Albania as a whole. By cultivating an appreciation of the wealth of experience in their communities, these activities are also considered a preventive measure against migration by creating a sense of hope and pride in living in their own country.



### 3.2. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY (YES) – SARANDA, DELVINA AND LEZHA

Adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 from rural communities in the far south and north of Albania are most at risk of being trafficked across borders. Therefore, the goal of this project is to empower 40 adolescents from Saranda, Delvina and Lezha and create a corps of motivated youth who can act as an engine for change in their communities and region. The project is co-funded in Saranda and Delvina by Healing Hands - Do Terra and in Lezha and Delvina by ARISE.

Launched in November 2020, this project provides youth with the necessary tools to achieve personal and economic growth and avoid the risk of human trafficking through pursuing the following components.

#### a. Training for Transformation and Effecting Change

From January to April 2021, MWL and NISMA – Arsis will develop the training modules. To realise the change in their communities and support local development by bridging divides within and between communities, the modules will address the following topics:

1. Leadership and Service Learning
2. Community Activism and Volunteerism





### 3. Healthy Relationships and Self-Realisation

4. E-learning methods (In this module, learners will be introduced to various online resources to assist their education while also becoming familiar with various way to avoid online distractions. Methods for protecting themselves from groomers and trafficking recruiters will also be addressed.)

After identifying and selecting youth to take part in this project, the MWL ASCs of Saranda and Lezha divided them into two groups per community. Additionally, MWL assisted the youth in establishing their youth clubs. To date, 6 meetings have been held with the participating youth. During the weekly meetings of the two clubs, various daily challenges they face as well as their dreams or desires for themselves and their communities have been discussed. Furthermore, sessions were held to help the youth acquire skills necessary for working in groups, effective communication and collective decision-making. Additionally, the youth have already begun the process of drafting their action plans on how to continue their activities after the completion of the project.

Given that preventing the spread of COVID-19 requires strict adherence to safety protocols, activities associated with this project are organised in a way which respects all current health and safety guidelines.

### b. Capacity Building for Local Authorities in Case Management Support and Victim Protection

Employing a trauma-oriented approach, this programme builds government agencies' ability to provide more professional support to P/VOTs of human trafficking. Currently, child protection units and state-employed social workers are untrained and lack the necessary skills to conduct proper SOP-driven determinations. They are also ill-equipped to provide effective case management support. Thus, the goal of this project is to train 20 state officials in delivering high-quality child protection services and primary services to P/VoTs. Topics of the training include:

- P/VOT identification and first assessment or referral
- Identifying and supporting P/VoTs during outreach interventions
- Referral to emergency services (psycho-social and medical support, casework) and shelters
- Activation of third-party service providers



- Drafting of both emergency and mid-term individual development plans
- Assessing the needs of families, creating files/plans for each individual or family, monitoring progress with families
- Collecting and entering data to the case management database of the project

The local municipality administrations of Saranda and Delvina, the office of the state prosecutor, the local branch of the ministry of education and various schools have all stated their support for this project. The project now moves to the stage of conducting a needs assessment to provide members of these various institutions with a tailored training program that considers their current abilities.





### 3.3. YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT IN SARANDA AND TROPOJA

“Empowering Girl Leaders to Animate for Change and their Future” is a project funded by Misesan Cara and implemented by MWL ASCs in Saranda and Tropoja. The goal of this project is to empower 50 adolescent girls from these two regions and create a corps of motivated young women who can act as initiators of change in their communities. The location of both project points is important as their remoteness and proximity to the border increases the risk of exploitation and trafficking. In total, 54 adolescent girls between the ages of 13 and 18 from rural communities in Saranda and Tropoja have been involved in this project to date.

Despite being the same project, its implementation diverged to best meet the local needs of the two very different regions in terms of history, culture and religion. Therefore, the project description below is split between the two project sites.

#### 3.3.1. Activities in Saranda:

A highly interactive series of trainings were offered through 3 modules with the intent of empowering 24 young women for collective community action. Trainings were conducted at the local school of Xarre and gathered together girls from 4 different communities in the region: Xarre, Vrine, Konispol and Shendelli.

The three modules of the training comprised the following topics:

- **Leadership and Service Learning**  
This block of trainings provided the young women with a toolkit of skills necessary for successfully collaborating with others and included the topics of leadership, collaboration, effective communication, negative to positive thinking, problem-solving and service-learning.
- **Community Activism and Volunteerism**  
To run their small-scale community projects in small working groups, the young women received training in methods of community organisation, PACA tools, goal setting and planning, activism in practice and creating a timeline and implementation plan.

- **Healthy Relationships and Self-Realisation**  
Participants were coached on life skills necessary to lead healthy and fulfilling lives, such as achieving self-realisation through positivity and personal values, thinking critically about gender stereotypes and myths, building self-esteem, identifying healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics and protecting oneself against human trafficking.

As a result of this project, two GLOW clubs (Girls Leading Our World) were brought into being. Participation levels and enthusiasm for activities and civic engagement among the very active corps of girls remains high. Two additional groups of girls are also interested in organizing projects which would improve the quality of life in their communities.

Moreover, the girls have developed skills necessary to analyse issues of concern on a personal and community level. The impact of the trainings can thus be witnessed by the initiatives they have taken up themselves. These include creating a COVID-19 awareness-raising video for their communities and a Christmas food and clothing donation drive for families in need.





### 3.3.2. Activities in Tropoja

This project entails the following four components.

- **Social Activities**  
The group of adolescent girls have had two opportunities to meet and socialise in a relaxed atmosphere while celebrating the holidays of Thanksgiving Day and Christmas.
- **Training**  
As part of the project, participating girls have received training in relevant topics of concern in their daily lives, which included social media and human trafficking, prejudices and discrimination, domestic violence and Albanian law, self-esteem, public speaking, suicide prevention, career counselling, social animation, self-defence and character-driven leadership.
- **Direct Participation in Initiatives**  
Two programmes specifically addressing the economic development and emotional wellbeing of the target group of young women were initiated. In the first, participants learned how to make bracelets and other handicraft items. Afterwards, they turned their attention to increasing production capabilities, methods for growing sales and generating revenue for their economic empowerment. The second initiative focused on their emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing psychosocial support through online sessions.
- **Co-organisation of Community Events**  
During the project, participants co-organised the following events with staff members of the local MWL ASC.
  - o On the opening day of the tourist season, 15 girls led a promotional activity highlighting tourist attractions and the natural beauty of the Valbona area through various forms of media and art pieces produced by the girls.
  - o Supported by MWL, 40 girls organised a march to lobby for the protection of children's lives and freedom from sexual violence.
  - o An art competition was held in celebration of the International Day of Children's Rights. Six out of the 20 participating girls received an award for their original artwork.



- o A Christmas donation drive for clothes, food and other items was held at their local school and communities for families in need.

### 3.4. Promoting the Right of Women and Girls to Access Services in Tropoja

This project was financed by the EU through the Social Centre “Hapat e Lehte” and a small grant scheme entitled “Women in Initiative”. It aims for the social transformation of women and girls, as well as the communities in which they live, through human and economic development programs, advocacy work, lobbying and networking. This is done to ensure that women and girls have access to resources, their rights are respected and opportunities provided for their personal development. A holistic approach is employed by creating a broad network of individuals promoting the education and inclusion of women, girls, men, local agencies and partner organisations.

Some of the project's highlights and outcomes include:

- 4 men participated in awareness-raising sessions addressing violence and human trafficking, 7 men participated in the training “Gender-Based Violence” and 20 men/boys were present at a march raising awareness of gender-based violence. In a strongly patriarchal area as Tropoja, the presence of men and boys at activities lobbying for gender equality is a significant positive development.
- 15 women completed vocational training as cooks. 4 women from this group are currently employed in restaurants.
- Increased awareness among children of their rights through a competition highlighting local art skills.
- 100 young women and girls gained a deeper understanding of topics identified by them as particularly relevant for their lives. These included effective communication, reproductive health and gynecologic issues, the importance of self-esteem in the psycho-social wellbeing of women, emotional Intelligence, public speaking, character-driven leadership and career orientation.
- 6 capacity building sessions were offered to 26 public service workers on the following topics:
  - o 2 sessions on the National Referral Mechanism for Domestic Violence
  - o 2 sessions on ethics in the workplace
  - o 1 session on emotional intelligence
  - o 1 session on career orientation and capacity building



- 15 girls were co-organisers of a march against gender-based violence under the banner “Against a Stolen Childhood”. Additionally, young women were active participants in a project for the development of tourist information points.

Respecting Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing practices, 70 youth were able to participate in an initiative entitled “Youth for the Community”. The youth were divided into three groups and received training in gender roles, stereotypes and social animation.

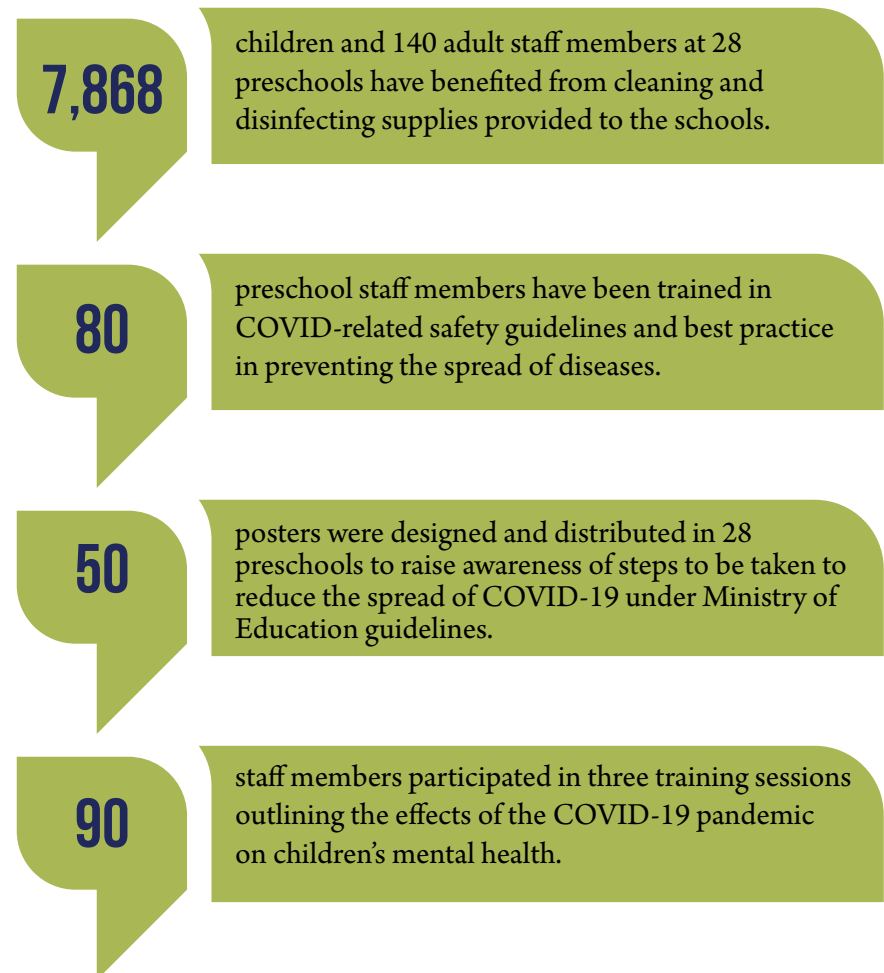
Each group identified a topic of concern for their community and developed an initiative to help address the issue. The three groups organised the following meaningful community-based activities:

1. The Ali Podrimja School youth group organised a painting competition in their school entitled “Children’s Rights from Their Own Eyes” to address awareness on the universal rights of children. Six symbolic prizes were distributed for the most beautiful paintings.
2. The Girl Scout group cooperated with the local municipality to open and staff touristic InfoPoints at local touristic sites.
3. The youth of the Konferenca e Bujanit School organised a mini awareness campaign entitled “We Care for Our Community” to highlight local ecological issues. The new installation of 6 street rubbish bins was achieved with the support of the local municipality.



### 3.5. Psychological Services and Sanitizing Supplies for the Lezha Municipality Preschools System

This project was funded by the EU through the UNDP’s Reload Project Albania and supported the Municipality of Lezha in establishing disease prevention measures in preschools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. MWL ASC Lezha led this project in partnership with the Municipality of Lezha and preschool administrations throughout the region of Lezha.





## C.4. MWL EDUCATION PROJECT

The ambitious goal of the Education Project is to actively contribute to the elimination of corruption and unethical practice in the Albanian education system by strengthening the necessary value system and democratisation in education. To achieve this goal, the project sets out the following 3 components outlined below.

The results of the academic research project entitled “The Perceived Causes of Unethical Behaviour and Corruption in the Education System in Albania” were published.

326 teachers, parents and representatives of statutory services attended 13 training sessions on ethics organised in the regions of Tropoja, Shkoder, Lezha, Tirana, Elbasan, Vlore and Saranda.

Ethics committee members of 5 schools were trained on the roles and responsibilities of ethics committees in schools and how they contribute to the positive development of the education system.

People from 84 institutions providing instruction to youth benefited from ethics training.

The service-learning methodology was introduced in 4 schools, two in Lezha and two schools in Tropoja, which involved the training of 63 school staff members.

400 students were trained in the different stages of a service-learning project lifecycle, including community mapping, planning, budgeting, etc.

## 4.1. Research on the Perceived Causes of Unethical Behaviour and Corruption in the Education System in Albania.

The current project is a continuation of the national research study entitled “Ethics in the Education System in Albania” which was originally published in April 2017. This new research aims to reveal what makes unethical and corrupt behaviour, in general, socially acceptable and how teachers, parents, pupils, lecturers and students justify unethical behaviour. Considerable time, energy and close communication with the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports were required to successfully conduct this research due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

Members of the project’s education board were instrumental in guaranteeing the integrity and design of the research project. Hence, the board was actively involved in every stage of the project and provided invaluable feedback and guidance. In the end, the company ACER was chosen to conduct the research, collect data and provide methodological guidance in the formulation of the survey questionnaire.

The study focuses on three levels of education, from elementary to university, in three regions of the country: Vlore, Tirana and Shkoder. However, the scope of the initial project plan had to be scaled back due to the closure of educational institutions because of COVID-19 and a lack of support from the Ministry of Education Sports and Youth. As a result, questionnaires were distributed to a smaller pool of subjects than originally planned.

Despite these challenges, 65 pupils, 29 parents, 64 teachers, 489 students and 59 lecturers participated in the study by filling out the questionnaire digitally online.

Among the main findings, the study identifies the presence of moderate to high levels of corruption and unethical practices across all levels of the Albanian education system. Unlike previous studies, this research clearly shows how pupils and parents are singled out by all parties as to the most frequent initiators of corrupt behaviour across pre-university levels.

Research findings further indicate that the main factor contributing to low reporting rates of ethical violations and corrupt behaviour across all levels of Albanian education is a lack of trust. Specifically, individuals lack faith in the fairness exhibited by institutions



and the impartiality of the justice system. This attitude leads to the perception that reporting violations have no value and results in nothing.

The research findings of this study are currently available in both Albanian and English and will be soon available for download via the MWL webpage. Preparations are currently underway to organise a nationwide conference to launch the research findings. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, this conference will take place via Zoom on 27 February.

#### 4.2. Trainings in ethics for teachers

Based on the above-mentioned research findings, a series of trainings in ethics for teachers was organised throughout the entire country. For this purpose, an agreement was signed with the Northern Regional Department of Albania, which secured the signoff of the Albanian ministry of education to allow teachers to attend the trainings. MWL staff, in consultation with members of the education board, decided to focus on four resources when designing the training modules. These four resources were:

- 1) The Character Led Leadership approach of the McCain Institute
- 2) Social Teaching of the Catholic Church
- 3) Erasmus+ Teacher's Manual on Ethics
- 4) The Code of Ethics approved by the Ministry of Education of Albania

Upon completing the training module design, a training plan was shared with the regional education departments of Lezha, Shkoder, Tropoja and Mirdita. The first two training sessions took place in Lezha at the end of February. The plan foresaw the completion of trainings in northern regions of the county by mid-April, at which point training would have shifted to southern regions. However, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, all training plans were suspended by the law forbidding any gathering of more than 5 people. Trainings were therefore subsequently held online.

Additionally, members of the ethics committee of 5 schools received training in the role ethics committees are designed to play within schools. An accompanying manual was produced and made available to school ethics committees as a reference guide and capacity-building tool. The manual is designed as a guide to assist ethics committees in handling cases of reported ethics violations in a more professional manner.



In total, 326 individuals, comprised of teachers, parents and representatives of statutory services, from 84 different institutions attended 13 training in the regions of Tropoja, Shkoder, Lezha, Tirana, Elbasan, Vlore and Saranda.

### 4.3. The Service-Learning methodology

The introduction of service-learning methodology was initiated in 4 schools, two in Lezha and two schools in Tropoja, and involved the training of 63 school staff members. Local partners, NGO staff and community members were also invited along to familiarise themselves with this methodology and the benefits it provides for both the learning process and community itself. Likewise, school students in two participating 9-grade schools, a high school and a vocational school received training in service-learning methodology.

The responses of students, parents and teachers to a questionnaire provided the attendees with a list of community priorities. Environmental issues, bullying and internet safety, cultural and heritage preservation and physical education projects topped the list of projects chosen by students. However, both students and parents had to work together to negotiate and achieve consensus on one single project to implement.

The total number of actively engaged students in these various projects has now reached over 400. Consequently, 400 students have received training in various aspects of the service-learning project lifecycle, including community mapping, planning, budgeting and more. Many projects were in the implementation stage when all school-based activities and instruction were halted on 12 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

To keep the pupils engaged during the COVID-19 lockdown, many different school-based projects continued to be pursued. For example, more than 100 students participated in an action entitled “I Care for the Environment by Planting a Tree or Flower”. An additional example of youth engagement drawn from student-identified topics is an online anti-bullying campaign. More than 50 awareness-raising videos and 30 drawings were submitted by students and judged in a competition. Another group of students from a hotel and tourism vocational school organised online cooking courses. Chosen candidates had the opportunity to demonstrate their recipes and cooking skills at a live event.

## OUR BENEFICIARIES' OWN STORY

The following stories were collected by social workers attached to our MWL ASC in target areas across Albania. Out of privacy and for protection we have used fictional names and hidden any personally identifiable information.

### ALINA

Single moms can be true heroines, and they find the strength they need in their children's eyes. This is the case of Alina, mother of three, who experienced domestic violence and human trafficking. Her life has been tough. She had to be both a mother and a father for her children, go to work, cook, take her kids to school, help them with their homework, take them to the doctor, play and watch TV with them, answer all their questions, and most importantly, protect them.

But Alina made it! She knocked at every door possible to seek support if needed. She only needed a helping hand, never asking for a ready solution. When she came to ASC, her life had once again collapsed. She had serious health problems and had lost her job. Since she could not afford to pay the rent, she had been kicked out of her apartment where she and her children had been living for a year. In tears, she explained that because she had received support from service providers in the past, those doors were now closed to her.

Alina received emergency accommodation support, healthcare for her and her children, food and clothes, vocational training and coaching for employment, psychological support and service referrals.

And here she is now, healed and again strong, working in a company, making her living and being a dedicated mom. She does the best she can to provide a better future for herself and her children.

### SONYA

Sonya is a 22-year old woman who has already faced many hardships in life. As a child, she routinely witnessed physical violence against her mother and was sexually abused by her father. Her parents divorced when she was 11 years old. Shortly afterwards, she was kidnapped and gang-raped. At this point, she began to withdraw from her friends





and family and spent most of her time in her bedroom on social media chatting with random individuals. In this fashion, she fell victim to online trafficking. Sonya was promised a happy marriage and dreamlife abroad. Her first planned escape with one of the traffickers was foiled when her mother found out about the situation. Sonya was still only 17 years old at the time.

Due to the traumatic events she has experienced, she struggles with mental health issues. Because of her fragile condition, she refused the support of many service providers who tried to assist her, thus remaining vulnerable and at risk for trafficking.

MWL has provided targeted support to empower her family so they have the strength, resources and capacity to support Sonya and provide her with a stable home environment. Sonya is now aware of the risk of trafficking and understands ways to protect herself.

## LEYLA

Accompanied by her mother, Leyla, still a minor, reported that she had been routinely sexually assaulted and raped by her step-father from the age of nine onwards. Still, in a state of disbelief, Leyla's mother swears she had no idea about what was happening until learning it from her daughter. Considering all available service providers, MWL ASC staff drafted an emergency plan of action for the mother and daughter. In one month alone, the southern regional MWL ASC handled 4 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against minors. Emergency action plans were initiated for each of these four cases handled by the local MWL ASC centre.

## ZANYA

Zanya is a 28-year old mother of 5 from a small mountainous village. Married at the age of 16, she has faced many social, economic and psychological problems ever since.

Not having had the chance to receive a formal education, Zanya saw no other choice but to endure years of abusive at the hands of her husband. She recounts some of the most severe forms of violence committed against her and her young children. Not



even expecting their fifth child in the eighth month of pregnancy spared her from her husband's violence, neglect and psychological abuse.

The family lived in a very poor village, in a dilapidated house belonging to a relative, without many of the barest essentials. Her husband consumed alcohol instead of providing the family with any income. Her children survived on handouts from neighbours and went out begging on the main street of the village, thus becoming potential targets of exploitation. She started having a very difficult pregnancy and it appeared that the baby was not developing normally.

In a moment of utter desperation, Zanya reported her violent husband and immediately received emergency support from the police. A protection order was obtained from the local court. She was then taken to hospital for medical examination. MWL was able to provide her and her children with food through RENATE funds and psychosocial services were provided by MWL social workers. The case was referred by MWL to other support service providers, such as the Food Bank Albania. The municipal government of her region was activated as well.

Eventually, Zanya gave birth to her daughter without complications. Her husband continues to serve his prison sentence.

These are but only a few of the many stories of women and girls who are rescued, supported and rehabilitated and who strive for a better life free from abuse and full of hope for the future.

## NETWORKING AND STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION'S PUBLIC PROFILE IN ALBANIA AND ABROAD

A host of various international networking events were attended by the foundation in this period to elevate the status and recognition of the organisation. To this end, a gala lunch at the Groucho Club in London was organised to create a body of influencers for MWL's mission both in the UK and Albania. A group of 20 influential personalities from the legal community, civil society, community policing, fundraising and universities attended the event.

Cooperation and partnership ventures with other internationally operating NGOs such as RENATE, the Medaille Trust, ARISE, Triple Minds, Ethical Goods, Crowdfunding UK and NPV were strengthened during this reporting period. In particular, the Development Team worked to create new opportunities for joint, cross-border applications with the Medaille Trust in the UK.

The MWL Executive President and Leader also entered in dialogue with the University of St. Mary's University College, Twickenham. This partnership foresees St. Mary's to research human trafficking, migration and domestic abuse in the UK and Albania followed by a prevention project based on the recommendations of this research which aims impact at the grassroots level.

Within Albania, the standing of MWL was raised through several key partnerships. For example, the foundation is now the primary civil society partner for the municipal governments of Lezha, Tropoja and Konispol. The foundation was also recognised as one of three main services provides in Tirana and Lezha by the Civil Society for Victims and Potential Victims of Human Trafficking. This was achieved through MWL's appointment as a member of the society's regional committees and technical teams.

Finally, participation in the establishment of the UK based Anti-Trafficking Alliance (AMSA) opened new opportunities abroad. This newly formed foundation focuses on anti-trafficking work in both the UK and Albania and is constitutionally linked to developing work projects with the MWL Foundation as a partner organisation. AMSA will provide:



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- 1) A potential hub of legal aid for survivors who fall through the cracks in the current system of international law governing cross border human trafficking.
- 2) Support in analysing roughly 800 NGOs working in the sphere of anti-trafficking to identify opportunities for effective partnerships.
- 3) A platform to more effectively engage corporations as frontline advocates against human trafficking through project funding and ensuring exploitative conditions are not present in their supply chains.



Since November 2019, the MWL Foundation has been engaged with the task of redesigning its organisational structure from a Green to Teal coloured structure, based on Frederick Laloux's model outlined in his book "Reinventing Organisations". This new model was introduced by the MWL President to better support the current mission of the foundation while enabling its evolution into a "living structure". This transition has been largely made possible through financing provided by Misean Cara as part of their MCD grant scheme.

A Teal organisational model offers an NGO much promise through its principles of self-management, evolutionary purpose and wholeness. To leverage its full potential, however, an organisation's leadership must fully understand both the model's strengths and weaknesses. Unlike hierarchical management structures, self-management boosts the autonomy and accountability of staff members by tapping into organisational knowledge. In adopting a Teal structure, some organisations have taken the process one step further and replaced hierarchical structures with circular ones.

In terms of our transition to a Teal structure, MWL has identified 4 crucial and interlocking steps:

- 1) Acceptance and adoption of the Teal model by MWL team members
- 2) Capacity building for staff and team members
- 3) Identification of new approaches to achieve greater impact for target groups and their communities
- 4) Decentralizing decision-making and promoting leadership among staff members reorganised into self-managing teams

This past year was slated to be the start of an experimental period for Mary Ward Loreto. The environmental circumstances created by the effects of COVID were less than ideal for supporting the piloting of any new approach or methodology, let alone a new form of organisational structure. Despite this challenging environment, the following advancements were made.

### **A. Staff Training on Teal Organisational Methodology**



The MWL staff were first introduced to the concept of Teal structures by the president of MWL, Imelda Poole. Further familiarisation was provided by an external expert, Ms Margie Buchannan, who led us in-depth trainings on Teal structures. The MWL programme leader then began the process of advising and coaching project staff on applying this structure within their teams, advisory boards and community groups.

A generous IBVM Generalate donation enabled the MWL Executive Team to participate in a two-day training led by Bobby Moore at the end of the year. He is a registered psychoanalytic psychotherapist (ICP) and certified group psychotherapist (AGPA). Bobby supported the Executive Team by increasing their understanding of the true extent of change required to make the transformation towards self-managing teams. Additionally, an evaluation of the foundation's operational systems was undertaken by the Executive Team under the guidance of an external expert.

### **B. Formation of Self-Managing Teams**

New teams were formed as part of the organisational restructuring process. However, the level of implementation of Teal related work processes was not uniform across the newly formed teams.

- The overall management and execution of the MWL Foundation's action plan were led by the Executive Leadership Team. This team consists of four staff members, who have all held key leadership positions in MWL for at least 7 years.
- The MWL Development Team is tasked with ensuring financial sustainability to pursue the mission of MWL along with conducting general financial oversight of the organisation. This team fully converted to a Teal structure during the past year.
- Attempts by ASC and project staff to create self-managing teams have had mixed results. Currently, staff members meet in a peer-to-peer group meeting format to address topics and issues. Rather than solving these through collective decision-making, issues continue to be deferred to the Executive Team for resolution.
- The creation of self-managing teams to support the work of the ASCs in MWL's target regions has yet to be fully realised. Initially, these teams were to be made up of different stakeholders from partner organisations operating in the same regions as



the ASCs. Peace Corps Volunteers, who was deemed a crucial part of this strategy of fostering self-managing teams, were evacuated due to COVID-19 in March 2020. Currently, various individuals still act as project advisors in the regions ASCs operate.



### C. The Path Towards Wholeness

A weeklong retreat was held to draft a new strategic plan for the foundation. The session was facilitated by Shkelzen Marku, an international expert in strategic planning, social business and economic development. As a result, a new strategic concept was drafted which should guide us through this period of organisational restructuring to greater efficiency in achieving the foundation's mission. MWL staff were actively engaged every step of the way in drafting both programme area and operational plans.

In general, the beginning stages of adopting a Teal structure this year have been a beneficial learning experience. Leadership is now a shared responsibility. Decision-making has been decentralised to the team level. Decisions are increasingly reached through improved dialogue and reflection within and across teams. Greater transparency and more open communication amongst staff members have stimulated a sense of belonging and ownership. Staff no longer consider themselves merely as employees of an NGO but as critical individuals committed to fulfilling both organisational and personal goals.

Although the transformation towards a Teal organisation continues, tentative conclusions and takeaways have emerged from the steps taken so far. The first recognition was the necessity to establish clear roles and responsibilities among the Executive Team members. Previously, overlapping roles overcomplicated project implementation, coordination and decision-making authority. A consensus has emerged that there needs to be greater respect for the fit between skills and responsibilities. A new understanding of the links between capabilities, skills and attitude towards work has emerged.

A second takeaway is greater recognition of how culture, history and experience with democracy interact to support or hinder the adoption of a Teal organisational structure. The successful introduction of a Teal structure requires all members of the organisation to internalise the guiding principles underlining this way of working. This is not a process that can be rushed or simply mandated from above. We need to allow ourselves the time and space to grow into this new way of organizing our work processes. We have also come to understand the value of maintaining some elements of a Green organisation, when necessary, as a bridge to a Teal destination.



## SUSTAINABILITY

In addition to the Executive Leadership Team, the restructuring process created a second key team, the Development Team. This team is comprised of members of the Executive Team (CEO and CFO) and MWL's President, Imelda Poole. The Development Team focused on three sets of activities during this reporting period.

Firstly, significant attention was placed on utilizing domestic sources of funding. Correspondingly, the Development Team submitted over 40 applications. Due in part to these efforts, MWL was able to run 21 projects funded by 18 donor organisations last year.

Expanding the foundation's network of international donors is likewise of crucial importance for the organisation to adequately fund its widening portfolio of projects. Thus, secondly, Triple Minds was hired for an 18-month consultancy to assist in building the foundation's fundraising expertise with European and US donors. The creation of a donor map with 30 possible prospects was the first step. The target is to now network with these institutions and submit funding applications with 20 of them. Included in the list of potential donors are a wide variety of EU institutions, UN bodies, trusts, foundations, and charities aligned with MWL's mission.

Thirdly, a UK-based fundraiser has been helping the Development Team expand our fundraising reach in creative ways. A series of fundraising events occurred during this reporting period and others are planned to be held in the UK during the coming year. Additionally, the newly formed "Group of Mary Ward Friends" in the UK has greatly assisted in enhancing our ability to organise fundraising events.

## CHALLENGES

Significant and unforeseeable challenges hampering our ability to achieve our goals during this reporting period. The COVID-19 pandemic struck only months after a major earthquake rocked the country in November 2019 resulting in deaths and widespread destruction. Due to the two natural catastrophes, the economy has been severely affected, causing additional financial security concerns for families throughout the country. Poverty has increased, resulting in higher rates of domestic violence and increased vulnerability for certain groups.

### **Further challenges include:**

- Due to the remote nature of where most of our beneficiaries live, very few have access to even the most basic of services. Our ability to conduct family visits as part of a comprehensive case assessment process were limited due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and lockdown.
- The assessment process had to be switched to an online format. Under extraordinary circumstances, cases were still handled in person at a centre while respecting all governmental and WHO guidelines for preventing the spread of the virus.
- The identification process of victims of human trafficking was negatively affected during periods of lockdown as individuals could not physically access service points. In response, a full assessment, including a risk evaluation for potential trafficking and exploitation, was conducted as a routine part of every assistance call received by the ASC.
- Counselling and therapy with ASC clients had to be switched to an online format. Face-to-face sessions were allowed in some cases according to the severity of the psychological state of the clients. Telephone calls were also conducted with those who do not possess a smartphone or have internet access.
- As most public and non-public stakeholders were either closed or working exclusively online, available service providers were overwhelmed with a tsunami of referrals all at once. In close collaboration with the municipality we provided and delivered necessary services to their homes.
- Access to public health services was severely restricted. With attention and recourses



being diverted to preventing new COVID-19 infections and treating positive cases, other public health services, such as surgeries, medical visits and dental services, have closed indefinitely. These services now offer emergency care only.

- In-person capacity-building projects and trainings for service providers had to be postponed since the second half of 2020 due to the lockdown and restrictions. A workaround has been providing trainings online whenever possible.

### Public Services

- Overly bureaucratic procedures remain one of our greatest challenges. Lengthy processing times by public agencies and some NGOs result in many women not being able to access assistance when it is needed most. This situation significantly impairs the provision of our services and negatively affects our ASC referral system. A more sustainable solution must be found than our current practice of ad hoc workarounds.
- Corruption in the healthcare system means that many go without care. Although citizens and legal residents are entitled by law to free public healthcare, individuals are routinely asked to pay for surgeries and other medical procedures. Even though healthcare cost support is included in our programmes, we are unable to provide for any non-routine procedures. There is a continued need for greater advocacy to guarantee the right to free healthcare.

### Cultural Issues

- Non-realistic expectations from our beneficiaries continue to be a challenge. There remains a dominant cultural expectation that one will be provided with fast and ready solutions from non-public services. However, all the services we provide aim to empower the communities to face and solve issues themselves over the long-run. For this reason, our beneficiaries are provided advice, referrals to relevant services, labour market and job skills training, along with trainings in interpersonal skills.

- Creating new opportunities for the development of joint and cross border applications with Medaille Trust (UK), the University of St. Mary's and other potential partners. Such partnerships will develop and expand MWL's expertise and reputation as a valuable and strong partner.
- Continued capacity building training for MWL staff in the TEAL methodology of organisational structure.
- The organisation of the Groucho Club Gala Dinner – a UK fundraising event for MWL.
- At least 20 applications for external funding will be sent to donor institutions to secure the financial resources necessary to sustain MWL's programmes.
- The organisation of activities surrounding the UN Anti-Trafficking Day
- Advice and Service Centre programmes fully funded and operating at full capacity.
- The continuation and expansion of service-learning mini-projects involving youth.
- Summer camps for youth & children in all target regions served.
- Expansion of emergency services provided by ASCs, such as food and shelter.
- Further development of the Economic Empowerment Programme as one of the vehicles for reducing the vulnerability of human trafficking, exploitation and the illegal migration of youth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND INSIGHTS FOR THE MWL FOUNDATION MISSION

### 2020: THE YEAR OF GREAT CHALLENGES

by Pjeter Tanushaj – Executive Team Member

Given the earthquake and a global pandemic outbreak, the year 2020 was one of the most difficult and challenging in living memory. In Albania, as in many other countries, the lingering effects of both events continue to pose enormous economic, social and political challenges for all of us.

Both crises fostered a general mood of fear and insecurity for everyone in the country, even more so for a large portion of our beneficiaries. We have heard many, many stories of difficulty and despair from across the country. For vulnerable families, the effects of these twin disasters have compounded economic, social and health challenges they were already struggling to manage at the best of times.

We, as a foundation, have also faced many challenges in continuing the uninterrupted delivery of our services while also meeting the new and acute needs of those suffering from natural disasters and sickness. Travel restrictions, lockdowns and transitioning to telework have all created immense challenges to our operations.

We, as MWL associates and staff, are also mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters and brothers, and not immune to our challenges and those of our extended families brought upon by these extraordinary circumstances. We have been there for each other, whenever possible, united, as colleagues, to support each other emotionally and however we can so we can continue our mission in serving those in need.

In my role at MWL, I have had the opportunity to travel across the country despite general pandemic restrictions. I have been in direct contact with many of our beneficiaries. That is how I know for a fact that our work at MWL continues to have a very real and positive impact on the communities and individuals we serve. Those in need continue to receive psychological and social services. Women employed in our social businesses are still working and receiving a salary. Medication is delivered.

In these difficult days, the services MWL provides are now more important than they have ever been. Most importantly, our beneficiaries see us not only as an important lifeline of support but also as a source of hope.

## A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

### A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

By Gazmir Memaj – Executive Team Member

This past year we stayed true to our commitment of initiating a transformation towards a Teal organisational structure. Little did we know when we set off on this journey that we would be facing simultaneous natural disasters and financial insecurities along the way.

And yet we stuck to the plan and began exploring whether this model is the right solution for the betterment of our organisation, and by extension, the betterment of our world. Because of the type of work we do, improvements to our work directly translate into improvements to our world.

The tactics of human traffickers and the nature of this hideous crime are always changing and evolving. For this reason, we must evolve as well. That's why I knew that embracing the Teal module is so important. The flexibility it fosters in our organisation allows us to more effectively respond to the ever-changing circumstances we face in combating the many ills of the world.

I will be honest with you. This process has been very challenging for me in multiple ways. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic added a new complicating factor in setting priorities and finding a balance between work and home life. Should I not fully devote myself to protecting my health and that of my family? With so many conflicting demands, risks and competing priorities, how could I focus on adopting high and lofty Teal values?

As a consequence of this transformation, I met the hardest boss I've ever had – me! Gone are the days in which I could just simply sit back and do what the boss told me. Many a time I caught myself asking why things had to change. "That's the way we've always done it!" Now, managing myself and being my own boss are new skills to master.

Despite, or because of, these many challenges, this year has helped me grow and develop professionally and personally like no other year before. Implementing a Teal structure has allowed me to gain a clearer picture of how our mission is achieved through a wide range of activities. Before, as a project manager, I only saw what was directly related to





my projects. Now, I better understand how every activity of each ASC, office or project is an important part of the total equation. It is inspiring to see how single actions are interconnected and contribute to realizing our mission.

Likewise, I'm now better able to look objectively at myself. I have more courage to be open and honest with myself and others than before. Also, I find myself more motivated to be creative.

I am thankful to Mary Ward Loreto for enabling me to have such a life-changing opportunity. Likewise, I am grateful to my dear colleagues for their trust, support and guidance so generously shared.

## EPILOGUE FROM THE MWL PRESIDENT, IMELDA POOLE IBVM/MBE

This reporting time has been an extraordinary year. I have experienced and witnessed the dedication and sheer grit of the MWL staff who have worked tirelessly throughout this period to achieve the goals of the mission of MWL. These were severely challenged by crisis management presented during the post-earthquake era and which was followed sharply by the global pandemic. This can be only seen as purely heroic. We recommend all the staff for their true dedication and willingness to be flexible, kind and collaborative throughout this time of suffering and mystery.

We know that self-managing teams are not all easy to work with, especially at the beginning, and there have been challenges in working out the best methodologies to enable them to function well. This was made more difficult because of social distancing, lockdowns and illness. At least half of the staff team suffered from COVID-19 and some with more difficult circumstances than others. They managed to get the balance right and were not afraid to move online and were not afraid, with care and protection, to respond to emergency needs in the field and to conduct trainings in the most marginalised areas where the IT support was not available. Funding was not readily accessible at the level we would all want for the mission this year, but the generosity of the MWL staff in stretching funds to fulfil the purpose on the ground was wonderful to see. You can see from this report how amazingly this mission has been achieved and in the most creative of ways. To combat human trafficking is a mission that is not popular in the eyes of most people. Albania is still considered a tough place in the list of countries to be given funding, similar to the rest of the south Balkans, but we proceed with great trust knowing it is a worthy mission. It is the one in which we are combatting the most heinous crime in our world today where up to date statistics state:

- 150.2 billion dollars are the annual profits of human trafficking in the world, two-thirds of which derive from sexual exploitation
- 21.800 dollars are the annual profits per sexually exploited victim of trafficking, 4.800 in the building, manufacturing, mining and utility sectors, 2.500 in farming, and 2.300 in domestic work.
- 34.800 dollars are the annual profits per victim of trafficking in advanced economies, 15.000 dollars in the Middle East, and 7.500 in Latin America and the Caribbean,



5.000 in the Asia Pacific, and 3.900 in Africa.

- 50% of exploited workers carry out forced labour to pay off a debt (peonage).
- 337.462 euros was the economic, social and human cost per victim in Europe (UE27) in 2016 (latest available data).
- 200.000 dollars is the economic return for an organ transplant in Western Europe against payment of 10.000 dollars to a “donor” living in extreme poverty in Central America

Mary Ward Loreto strives to stay in touch with the real and to make those most vulnerable to being trafficked; the exploited and the trafficked with whom we work, have a strong voice alongside us in our advocacy and awareness-raising task. The dignity and respect given to all, with a desire to mutually empower each other as friends and companions on the way, is the fruit of this work. We can absolutely say that the family of this foundation has exploded, as our partners and beneficiaries become our friends, working together to realise the fullness of the life intended for all. Pope Francis understands this crime in a fully eclectic way. All the above concerns are his concerns and he can see the vital connectedness of the need for reform. Without these reforms, climate change and care of the planet and the fact that we all belong to a common home do not make sense. We are called by Pope Francis to have the common good at heart. All people are our brothers and sisters, he says, how can we sit back and remain indifferent to millions dying of starvation every day, millions trafficked into the most degrading and cruel of trades. His latest encyclicals ‘Fratelli Tutti’ and ‘Laudato si’ are at the heart of this call for change. We are called to open our eyes and change our hearts to acknowledge the need for every human being to be given the dignity and respect which is their human right. This is the aim and goal for all the work of MWL into the future.

We thank all our many donors and benefactors across the globe who have sustained us and encouraged us throughout this challenging year. Thank you!

# ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2019 – DECEMBER 2020

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Mary Ward Loreto Foundation  
Address: Rr. Skenderbej, 4.1.14, Tirana, Albania  
e-mail: [info@marywardloreto.net](mailto:info@marywardloreto.net)  
FB: MaryWardLoreto