

Atina

Solidarity Erases Inequalities



Citizens' Association for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and All Forms of Gender Based Violence Atina from Belgrade (Serbia) was established in 2004 as a response to trafficking in human beings and the lack of adequate programs for long-term victim support and social inclusion assistance.

“Our work primarily focuses on combating trafficking and victims protection; we are insisting on systematic efforts to improve the situation of women and girls who had suffered the most due to exploitation and violence. Bear in mind that human trafficking goes beyond a crime itself; a society misset along the lines of inequality, racism, misogyny and gender inequality feeds into human trafficking”, says Marijana Savić, Director of NGO “Atina”.

She highlights the necessity to build a comprehensive, conducive and long-term program to help women and girls who have experienced trauma.

“We came to realize that, yes, we can provide psychological and sociological support, legal counseling, and physically safe space for women, but it is also economic independence that helps women the most to get out of the circle of violence and start building the life they deserve. Conditions had to be created to empower girls and women professionally and economically. This is how the idea of launching a women's entrepreneurship initiative was born. It first provides financial assistance to women in our programs, but will in later stages contribute to the recovery of all victims of human trafficking who find their safe place in our association,” stressed the Director of NGO Atina.



NGO "Atina" takes pride in many of its projects. One that stands out is women's social entrepreneurial initiative "Bagel Bejgl".

"It is our baby, born as a cry for change in society, in political and economic order. The company arose from the despair we felt because we did not know how to bridge that last link that is missing for civil society organizations, and girls and women alike, in need of support as they are coming out of violence situation. We are proud of each other, for taking responsibility and the matter into our own hands. We wait for no one. We are not waiting for the law on social entrepreneurship to be adopted. The essence of this unparalleled story is that through our business, work, economic activity, production of super-quality bagel pastries, combined with other delicacies, we enter the market and generate income for recovery programs for women and girls who had experienced violence", says Marijana Savic.

She explains that "Bagel Bejgl" is a resource hub for girls and women looking to engage in food industry. The basic idea is to provide hands-on training for as many girls and women as possible, not only in making pastries, but also mastering other business fundamentals, such as communication, correspondence, finance to an extent, as well as introduction to labor law.

"We also work with socially responsible companies that provide these girls and women with the opportunity to try out other professions, after engaging in our company. One of the goals of our company is to sensitize the business sector to the importance of corporate social responsibility, environmental business and reassurance that we are mature enough to renounce harmful stereotypes and prejudices and to fight together for a better community", stressed our interlocutor.

To her account, NGO "Atina" has two major potentials – active women who make up the Association and the community they have been building over the years.



"We share a common idea and vision of society in the future we want to live in. Women and girls who have been in a situation of violence and trafficking have relied on their experience for years to develop plans with us, as a part of our team. We learn from each other and always try to be proactive and go several steps ahead. If we talk about financial sustainability, we have built a relationship of trust and long-term strategic partnerships with many foundations for development projects; we apply to institutional funds such as those provided by the European Union, we generate income from trainings that we design and conduct with other organizations and institutions in the areas we specialize in. We hope that our enterprise will grow and that we will generate higher profits that we can direct towards our social inclusion programs", says Marijana Savic.

She believes solidarity is the key to creating sustainable communities.

“Active participation in addressing the challenges and problems faced by the community, supporting those who need help at a given moment, nurturing togetherness, caring for others, a sense of belonging regardless of individual differences, acceptance and respect for others in your community – that is solidarity. Solidarity erases inequalities and power relations that are inherent in our society. The more solidarity within society, the more satisfied and happier the people”, stressed Marijana.

Now more than ever, she believes we need to turn to each other and be aware of the world we live in.

“Every girl and woman we came in contact with, brought more color to our world, made it a more sublime place. We learn and adapt every day so that what we do best responds to the needs of those who are the reason of our existence”, says Marijana Savic.



She adds that NGO “Atina” will soon table the initiative of “Creative Bagel Plant”, which brings them great joy.

“It will also serve as a space for women to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for work in the food and catering industry, but also for networking with potential employers and companies and for entrepreneurs seeking to have their own product line but lack funds for professional kitchen or logistics and knowledge how to market their products”, she explains. As she puts it, there are small things that add soul to their actions and sustain it.

“It is wonderful for the team to gather women around a common goal and common mission and for us to proceed together in the same direction. It is a unique, incredibly fulfilling and rewarding experience. And of course, a delicious bagel”, concludes Marijana Savic.

For more information on NGO “Atina”, see: atina.org.rs.

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