

# STARFISH

# ANNUAL

# REPORT

# 2022



STARFISH  
FOUNDATION  
*-Helping People in need*



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# INTRODUCTION

The Starfish Foundation was established by residents of Lesbos in 2015, who witnessed the arrival of thousands of refugees. Born out of the need for humanity, dignity and care for all, Starfish has since expanded, becoming one of the longest-standing grassroots NGOs on the island.



Our mission is to provide safe spaces that build community, promote personal growth, and support integration through skill development and learning.

Through our programs and partnerships, we envision an integrated community where all people reach their full potential.

We currently have three locations where our projects take place: OpenSpace Opportunity Hub, the Mavrovouni refugee camp (CCAC), and the Foliá safe house.

In the **OpenSpace Hub**, we offer:

- vocational training and skill development,
- a co-working space,
- community meetings and events, and
- a multilingual library.

At the **Mavrovouni refugee camp**, we offer:

- a pop-up library,
- an area for children to play games,
- and a bike fixing area.

The **Foliá** safe house provides safe housing, support, community, and activities for vulnerable displaced women and their children.

In all of our spaces, we offer a welcoming environment, free from discrimination and full of acceptance, where everyone can feel they have the freedom to express themselves.



**We believe that life is more than basic needs—it's believing in hopes, dreams, and every human's potential.**

# A LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTOR

I am often asked how I find the strength to do what I do and how I can continue when faced with the heartbreaking stories I see and hear.

For many months, I was in the unfortunate situation of giving bad news to Poppy (name changed), who was seeking asylum in Greece. Many rejections later, when I was finally giving up hope, as was she, I could tell her the fantastic news that she had a positive decision after her numerous failed applications. For almost over two years, I had to watch her try to survive and get pushed out of the system repeatedly and watch her fall and get up and fight again. Fight for the right to live, laugh and survive that we all take for granted because we were born in a different country.

The emotion that I felt as I told her that she now had a positive decision as the tears poured from my eyes can only be a pinprick of what Poppy felt. She still has a long, hard journey, and the fight is not yet finished, but one hurdle is won! It's the Poppies of this world that give me strength !!



**Melinda McRostie, Founder & Director**



The Starfish Team, 2022

# KEY NUMBERS



**835** BOOKS BORROWED  
MULTILINGUAL LIBRARY



**1226**  
BIKES FIXED  
OPENBIKE



**40**  
BABY BOXES

**2058**  
BENEFICIARIES



**90**  
FOOTBALL PLAYERS  
OFC



**36**  
WOMEN & CHILDREN  
FOLIÁ SAFEHOUSE

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## OpenSpace

OpenSpace, our Opportunity Hub, is a 150 m2 building on 2 floors, where more than 10 people from the Starfish team work.

A wide range of activities are offered there, such as vocational training and skills development, a co-working space, community meetings and events and a multilingual library. Some of these activities are also offered inside Mavrovouni refugee camp.

This year we were also able to fix up our backyard and turn it into a more welcoming space.



## Vocational Training and Skill Development

The skill development activities were an opportunity for people from different communities to meet, learn new skills and have fun. These activities included:

- OpenBike: Bike repair workshops
- BagForEveryone: Sewing classes
- Capacity-building seminars
- OFC: football trainings
- English & Greek language lessons
- Fitness and self-defense for women
- Game night

8

activities

64

sessions

89

participants



## PROJECT OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

### OPENBIKE

In May 2022, we started our OpenBike project, with the aim to introduce both refugees and locals to the benefits of cycling. The project included a monthly bike event whose topics have covered different aspects of cycling. In OpenSpace we have opened a bike service station, where cyclists can come by to maintain and repair their own bike. We also started two different bike courses: One about learning how to bike as well as safety in traffic, and our weekly "Hubs and Spokes" bike mechanic course, where participants have been able to learn how to maintain and repair their bikes.



### BAGFOREVERYONE

**350** hours of lessons were delivered during the sewing workshop, where students from different cultural backgrounds had the chance to learn how to sew different bags. During the class, new products were created such as backpacks and belly bags. One of our biggest achievements this year was the new collaboration with a local store in Bern; "RRRevolve". The bags can now be purchased at this store in addition to the website.

### CAPACITY-BUILDING SEMINARS

Starfish launched a series of free seminars to provide advice and training to NGOs and businesses to enable them to find funding for their projects, operate more efficiently and take advantage of the new opportunities that technology opens up, as well as to promote their work more widely. **38** local organizations and producers have already benefited from **69** hours of training.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

### OPEN FOOTBALL COMMUNITY (OFC)

At the end of May 2022, we launched a new project and we started a football team with unaccompanied minors hosted by Iliaktida.

OFC is an opportunity to create community and build confidence and skills. Over **90** players participated in our weekly training and friendly games and we were able to provide football shoes and clothes.

We also managed to participate in a summer tournament and organized some friendly games with another local team and three players got drafted by local teams.



### OTHER SKILL-BUILDING AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



In June, weekly **Fitness & self-defence** empowerment classes for women were started again; more than **35** participants have been attending since then. While working with positive self-empowerment throughout the course, this activity allows one to connect with other individuals and share experiences and skills in a safe environment.



More than **40** participants joined the **Greek and English** classes. Students learned basic phrases on how to interact in everyday life and how to communicate their needs in public services, such as a hospital or a pharmacy. Learning took place in a multicultural environment through games and continuous interaction between students



Thursday's **Game Night** aimed to connect people in a joyful way and in an enthusiastic atmosphere. A wide range of different games were available, like chess, UNO, PlayStation and the highlights have been Charades, Bingo and Karaoke. Game night also provides an opportunity for people to connect with others and form connections.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

### Multilingual Library

The Multilingual Library project, based in the Mavrovouni camp and in the Open Space Opportunity Hub, aims to increase availability of literacy and access to new opportunities by providing both refugee and local population with a variety of activities. Our library contains more than **7000 books** in more than **25** languages.

In March 2022, we opened our Library Container in the camp's Educational Hub, where children were invited to participate in recreational activities with our volunteers. Since then, more than **650** children have engaged with them before their classes and during their breaks. One of our biggest accomplishments has been striving and continuously managing to adapt to the changes of camp residents' demographics and their needs by expanding our selection of languages and materials. Lastly, our activities were also carried out in the "New Arrivals" zone, where people are secluded once they arrive for an uncertain period of time.



### Co-working Community

OpenSpace offers a place to work when you are away from home. In the co-working space you can have a desk, a computer, fast internet, color laser printer and scanner, and a comfortable place to work. Organizations, businesses, and individuals are welcome to use OpenSpace on a short-term and longer-term basis.



**120** individual bookings

In 2022 we had:

**12** group bookings

**3** organizations registered their base here



## PROJECT OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

### Mavrovouni Refugee Camp

The refugee camp in Mavrovouni was emptier than in previous years. Although arrivals have been increasing, there has also been a greater transport increase to the mainland, particularly to Athens.

In the camp, we implemented various projects such as a bike fixing area, Safehands, baby boxes for all newborns and the multilingual library.



### OPENBIKE - Bike fixing area

In June, we opened a bike workshop in the Mavrovouni camp, where our community volunteers have repaired over 1000 bikes, enabling the residents to travel to Mytilene by their own means.



### SAFEHANDS

In Safehands project, our camp residents community volunteers handed out thousands of masks on a daily basis in the Mavrovouni camp. The hand washing station continued until the end of summer, and even after that, the team kept distributing hand disinfection.



### BABYBOXES

This has been the 5th year of providing baby boxes for all newborn babies/mothers and new mothers with babies up to four months old. In collaboration with MAM, more than 40 baby boxes have been distributed within the Mavrovouni camp since January 2022. These boxes contain various items, such as sleeping bags, warm clothing for infants, underwear for mothers, nappies, hygiene products, toys, and blankets. The baby box can also be used as a baby bed, light enough to be carried around and resistant to be used for different purposes.



### Folia Safehouse

In 2022, **26** single **women** and **10 children** were accommodated at Folia, our shelter for vulnerable women and their children.

There, we advocate a holistic approach to support systems, providing all residents with bureaucratic, administrative, and psychosocial care and case management to facilitate further individualized support services based on their specific needs.

By offering various activities, we hope to empower and encourage our beneficiaries, considering the complexity of their traumatic past.



The aim for the next year is to continue identifying the most vulnerable women and subsequently offering safe accommodation as an immediate protection intervention, as well as providing the already-named services to ensure the physical and mental well-being of all our beneficiaries.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## MAIN DONORS

### Hammer Forum Medical Aid for Children e.V.

Partnered up again with us in 2022 through donations for our projects such as Folia Safehouse, baby boxes, OpenBike and Safehands.

### Open Society Institute Foundation (FOSI)

Greatly supported all our projects with their presence and expertise as well as the capacity building seminars.

### Lifeline e.V. Mission.

Founded in 2016 at Dresden, Germany, dedicated to rescuing people at sea in the Mediterranean. They have contributed with regular financial support to our Folia safehouse project.

### #EducationEveryone(Switzerland)

Together with EducationEveryone and their contribution to the BagForEveryone Project, we were able to make this project come true and continue it again this year.

## SUPPORTERS

### Showerpower

Generously supported us with donations towards the organization and our projects.

### Solidaritetsforeningen Sjøstjerne

Our sister organization from Norway that has greatly supported our OpenBike project.

### Carol Christ Giving Fund

We would like to express our gratitude to Carols Christ Giving Fund that has greatly supported the majority of our projects.

### SH Individual donor

We would like to thank our special donor SH who has been our largest individual donor since 2015 with incredible generosity and support through monthly donations.

### Safe Place International

Founded in 2017 and providing basic needs, housing and sustainability to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, they have provided us with the Folia safe house property.

### Just Humans EV

Just Humans, an organisation working with people in Stuttgart, Germany, supported with a donation for our projects and activities at OpenSpace and Folia.

**7**  
donor organisations

**116**  
individual donations

**53**  
Starfish community people

### The Starfish Community

Last but not least, we want to thank each and every one of you. Without our great staff, volunteers and supporters we would not be where we are today.

# WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN OUR PROGRAMS

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