



Our Reflection on 2019

We enter a new decade, the 2020s, with hopes for positive news and developments to improve the situation for all communities on the Aegean islands.

Grab a cup of coffee, sit back and read what Starfish has done during 2019...

Last year was marked by a surge in refugee arrivals. The pressure increased on everyone – both the refugees and the local population – with the conditions in Moria camp getting even worse. The numbers speak for themselves. There are **more than 20,000 people** living in or around Moria camp, a facility **built to house 3,000**. There are now **over 1,140 unaccompanied minors in Moria**.

Starfish, through your continuing support, has done its bit to do what we can to make life a little more bearable for those living in appalling conditions.

2019 also saw Starfish Foundation launching the **OpenSpace hub** in Mytilene. OpenSpace is rapidly becoming a focal point for **community groups**, providing a place they can **work, exchange ideas and develop new projects**. Starfish ourselves have started new projects, expanded existing projects, and supported local initiatives.

This is a brief look back at highlights from a very productive year...

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

Over **31 women** participated in our self-defence and empowerment classes at OpenSpace and in our Moria container.

We distributed nearly **30 baby boxes** per month in Moria to parents of newborns. More than **700 refugees & volunteers** took part in our yoga classes at OpenSpace.

Over **100 students** registered and attended our new Greek classes in our Moria container.

920 books were collected to start a multilingual library at OpenSpace.

Funds from OpenSociety were distributed to support **21 local initiatives** in Lesvos.

Our 7 seater van travelled **23,115 km** and transferred **2,133 people** to and from Moria camp to hospital and other health facilities.

3 large shipping containers of donations received and contents distributed.

DISTRIBUTING & TRANSPORTING



With many new-born babies in Moria every month, we continued to supply the mothers with baby boxes filled with much-needed items. We included a baby bed and sling when we had the funding. Each month we gave out more than 30 boxes.

There were over 6000 children in the camps, many under the age of five. In one month alone we gave out more than 40 strollers to young families. Starfish continued to search for funds to supply strollers to those in need.

Many people came to know our 9 seat van as ‘The Beast’. It was used daily to transport unaccompanied minors from Moria Camp to medical appointments, a prerequisite for their asylum applications. The van was also used for others in need of medical treatment in Mytilene.

After the lack of healthy food in Moria was brought to our attention, in collaboration with Zaporeak Proiektuawe we began supplying Sections A & B, which house unaccompanied minors, with fresh fruit once a week. The young boys really looked forward to this treat.

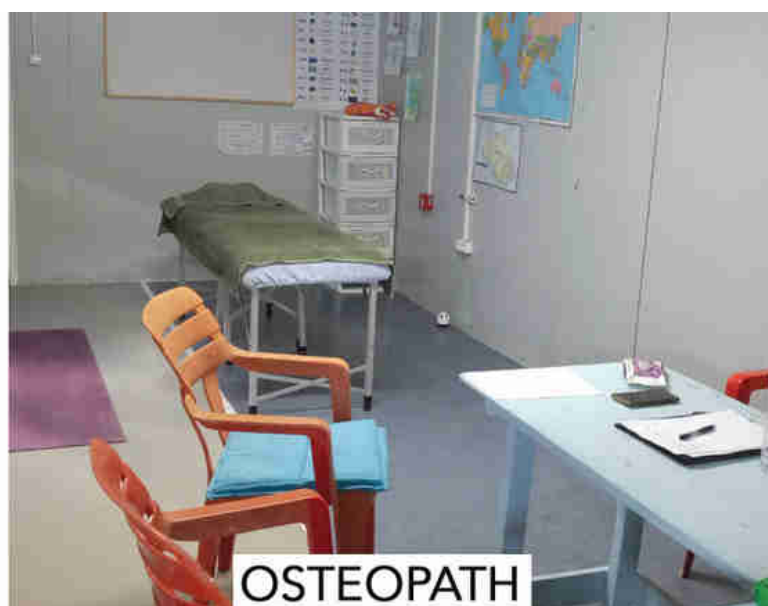
We are happy to announce that we partnered up with our sister organization in Norway that held a *Christmas campaign for our baby boxes* and also raised money through solidarity cafes, lotteries and their regular donors to keep supporting Starfish.

THE MORIA CONTAINER



Our container is the heart of the Starfish operation inside the Moria camp. It allows us to have direct contact with the people we serve.

Community leaders held their weekly meeting in the Starfish container to identify shortfalls in services for refugees and to fill those gaps where possible. The calm and neutral atmosphere of the container made it a valuable space where the community's needs could be presented and heard by Starfish and other partners. Our osteopathy clinic in our container, where patients were sent to us by referral, especially minors and single women was a great success. Due to the limited medical services and resources in the camp, it was a great alternative to help those in need.



The self-defence training for refugee women in Moria was very successful. Women are one of the most vulnerable groups inside the camp and often the victim of sexual harassment and violence. Starfish's goal was to provide them with the necessary strategies to protect themselves. Building on the women's shared experience, the programme taught them how to defend themselves not only physically but also emotionally, learning to set boundaries, increasing their self-confidence and explore different coping strategies. The women's response to the training has been overwhelmingly positive.



Yoga provided an escape and relief from the stress of life in Moria. It was especially valuable and very needed for both women and men, increasing their self-awareness and strengthening their body and spirit. Starfish offered classes not only in the Moria container but also in Mytilene. In September Starfish started Greek classes in cooperation with Greek volunteers. Over 100 registered students aged 15 upwards attended classes of all levels. Their enthusiasm and progress was amazing. Starfish is fundraising for bus tickets so we can offer extra Greek classes at OpenSpace to meet the huge demand.



OPENSOURCE

*In March Starfish launched [OpenSpace](#) as a **co-working space** in the centre of Mytilene. Since it opened nearly 4000 visitors from more than thirty civil society organisations have used the space.*

It is unique on Lesbos because it is a space **designed to be used by both the local community and refugees.**

The flexible space is spread over **3 floors hosting events, workshops, seminars, film screenings, and a range of classes.** It's a work in progress – we have exciting plans to expand further Starfish projects and encourage entrepreneurship at OpenSpace.

Since opening OpenSpace has hosted some of the following events:

Since March Starfish provided a home for [Refocus](#), an NGO dedicated to creating a global network of media labs to equip refugees with modern media creation skills and giving a platform to showcase original work and share their stories.



We welcomed the Lesvos Portal to OpenSpace, a partnership with [ReFocus Media Labs](#) and [Shared Studios](#). The portal is a unique experience, connecting other portals spread all over the world in real-time. Portal serves both refugees and the local Greek community for cultural, social and educational purposes and is free of charge to connect to 50 other portals all around the world.

Last year we linked live with university students in Herat, Afghanistan, with the founder of the Portal network, Amar Bakshi, in New York, and with women's rights activists of Fondo Semillas in Mexico City and many more.

[ReFocus Media Labs](#) turned OpenSpace into a cinema for a special screening of *Mijke de Jong and Jan Eilander's remarkable film "Layla M."* It was a great privilege to have the directors with us and hear about the process of making the film.



Bag4Everyone is a project sponsored by the Swiss organisation [#EducationEveryone](#). Refugees teaching refugees to use industrial sewing machines and gaining skills to make bags, glass cases and travel bags to be sold to support the refugees and the project.



In October [IsraAID](#) launched ***free embroidery and sewing classes for refugees and locals***. The teacher was a local Greek man. The classes gained a committed group of keen students with 25 women regularly attending. They worked to stitch their embroidery work into one large and beautiful tapestry.

Intensive ***self defence classes*** were held over several weekends throughout the year. They were popular with both the ***locals and refugees***.

Over 13 women took part in our first ***intensive self-defence instructors course*** during May at OpenSpace in partnership with [ESD Global](#). The project came about after we spent many months searching for female self-defence instructors. It became apparent that ***there was a massive shortage of qualified female instructors***.

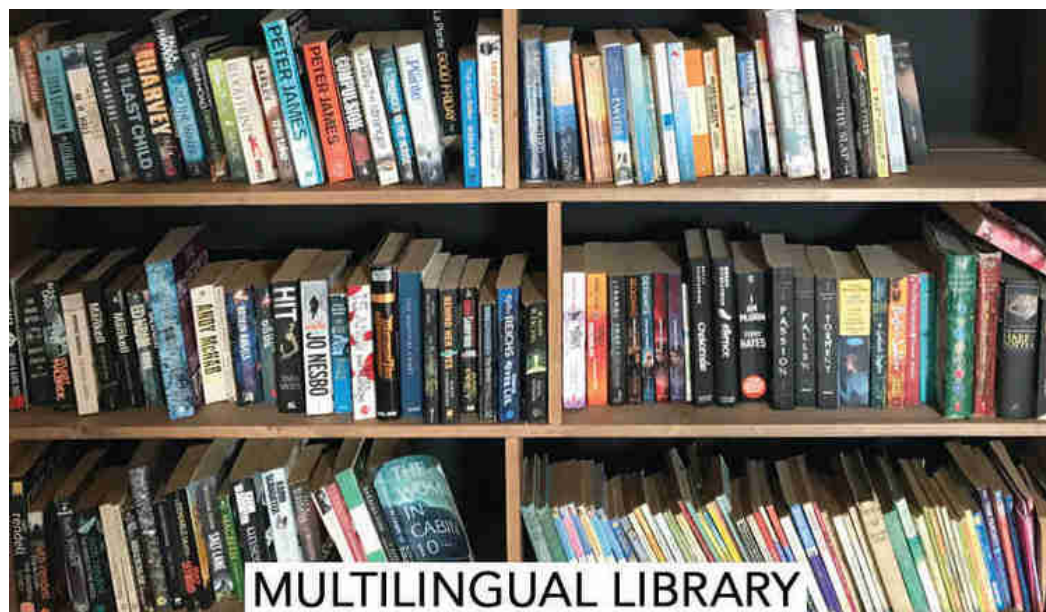
Soon after opening, Starfish started running ***yoga classes*** on the top floor of OpenSpace. Over the year more than six hundred students attended these classes. We extended the programme to include volunteers as well as refugees, the volunteers donating to the purchase of bus tickets for the refugees – allowing them to travel from Moria to OpenSpace. The cost of bus travel was a major limiting factor on the programme. ***We spent more than €1300 on tickets for refugees***.

A major contributor to the programme was ***Maryam***, an Iranian refugee who taught classes for us until she and her family left for Italy in November.

An exhibition and bazaar of *paper-mache sculptures made by children with autism* was held just before Christmas. The event showcased what children with autism can achieve when properly supported.

[The Association of Parents and Friends of People with Autism](#) wanted to show us the work that their children have done during the workshops they attended in collaboration with the organisation [Polytropon](#). The work was for sale and all proceeds went towards creating more projects for children.

Towards the end of the year, Starfish started creating an extensive *multilingual library at OpenSpace*. We have built bookshelves to hold 3,000 books and have collected 920 books so far. The collection includes literature, reference books, and language DVDs, in *Greek, English, Farsi, Arabic, French*. The library will be a welcoming space and a resource for locals as well as refugees to drop in and enjoy the pleasure of reading and self-study.



The Open Coffee Project is a group focusing on innovation and networking for *Lesvos based entrepreneurs*. More than thirty local businesses, many of them start-ups, met to network and exchange ideas at OpenSpace.

Go For It! In August, 62-year-old Arne Martin from Norway started to walk the Balkan refugee route in reverse, from the southern coast of Norway to Moria camp, to raise awareness of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Greece. Many local people joined him in walking the final stage of the march from the ferry terminal in Mytilene to Moria camp and Moria Village.



In 2019 Starfish received a second grant from the [Open Society Foundation](#) to identify initiatives and distribute funds to local projects on Lesbos. The programme recognises the continuing impact of the humanitarian crisis on all communities in Lesbos, and the importance of supporting the local community and the local economy. These range from skills training for the local people to funding local primary schools annual theatre productions.

Starfish sees this programme as a major initiative and we will be sending another newsletter with a more specific report on these activities soon..