

## Take a look back on 2020 with Starfish

2020 began like any other. As a team we had planned for the projects we would introduce throughout the year, we had discussed the events we would hold in our OpenSpace building, and we had ensured that interest remained high for the initiatives we had started in the previous year. However, as was the story across the world, our aspirations for 2020 did not **quite** go to plan.

However, despite the circumstances, Starfish had a productive year. Take a look back on the projects we pursued, and the people who supported us throughout 2020..

### THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



### THE NEW YEAR BEGINS

As we entered into the new year, several of our projects from 2019 continued to run in full swing: one such project was our yoga and self defense classes. The self defense classes were aimed at teaching both refugee and local women on Lesbos how empowered self-defense can act as a key violence prevention strategy, and both the yoga and self defense classes provided a source of community networking and friendship for women on the island. In the two years since we started our self-defense and yoga classes, we distributed over **2350 free bus tickets** to women in the Moria camp who came along to the classes in Mytilene, and have overseen the **training of 13 women** to become qualified self-defense and empowerment teachers.



Up until March 2020, we were holding regular self-defense and yoga classes (both within Moria camp and at OpenSpace) ensuring that the classes remained accessible for all women who sought to understand the skills involved in self-defense, and the benefits of yoga for both body and mind. Four self-defense classes a week were being held in the camp, right up until Greece entered its first COVID-19 related lockdown.

## COVID REACHES LESVOS

On March 11, 2020 the world changed. That was the day the WHO Secretary General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, announced that the coronavirus outbreak sweeping the world was now officially a pandemic.

For the residents of Moria refugee camp, the recommended measures were almost impossible to take. In March 2020, access to clean water for the nearly 22,000 residents living at the camp and immediate area was severely limited. Regular hand washing was something that would be almost impossible to achieve. As a senior public health official on Lesbos put it at the time, “Moria is a public health timebomb”.

Within days of the pandemic being declared, Starfish set up the first hand washing station outside the main gate to the camp and started the [#SafeHands](#) programme. The [#SafeHands](#) hand washing stations provide access to clean water, soap, and protective masks for all camp residents who stop by. (More info about [#Safehands](#) below!) The stations are overseen by a select few Starfish supervisors, but the majority of daily operations are run by resident volunteers. Each resident volunteer has received training from medical actors (including MSF and Boat Refugee Foundation) to ensure that the information regarding correct mask usage, and COVID-specific hand washing procedures are understood by all Starfish volunteers and is shared with anyone who visits the stations.

## WELCOME TO OPENSOURCE

August saw our move into a new OpenSpace building in Mytilene.

Many of you will know of our community focussed opportunity hub named “OpenSpace”. Originally opened in March 2019, we have used the space to host yoga classes, self defense and empowerment classes, tech labs, sewing classes, and seminars. We built a library of over **2,000 books**, held inclusive dinners and events, used the hub as a co-working area for anyone who wanted to join us, and much more.

Our new OpenSpace building allows us to comply with COVID regulations more easily with two airy outdoor areas and spacious rooms perfect for allowing people to stay socially distanced. Once construction of the new building finishes, and COVID restrictions ease, we aim to restart our original programmes (such as sewing, self defense, and yoga), and have planned to launch new programmes aimed at supporting

displaced persons, grassroots organisations, and the local host population throughout 2021.

## MORIA FIRE

In early September, a fire tore through Moria Camp which left nearly 13,000 people without shelter. In the aftermath of this devastating incident, we began purchasing and distributing water to those who had fled the fire and were living by the side of the road. We worked with Remar, EuroRelief and other NGOs and individual volunteers to distribute food supplied by the Greek Army. Starfish volunteers, as well as resident [#SafeHands](#) volunteers from the camp, helped with crowd control and worked to provide practical care in what was a chaotic, and often stressful situation for those who had fled the fire.

A new, transitional camp was then set up, named RIC Lesvos. Our team at Starfish continue to work to meet the pressing needs of those living within RIC Lesvos, and locals residing outside of the camp. If you would like to see some of our ongoing projects, take a look below..



## PROJECTS

### [#SafeHands](#)

We were able to restart our [#SafeHands](#) project within the new camp and, to date, we have over 75 resident volunteers working at 6 [#SafeHands](#) stations. In the three months since we have been active in the new camp, our resident volunteers have

distributed over **80,000 masks**, and facilitated the washing of over **250,000 pairs of hands**.



### **Mytilene Hospital**

After the outbreak of COVID-19, Open Society gave us money which was to be allocated to the Coronavirus efforts on the ground in Lesvos. We approached the local hospital in Mytilene to understand their needs. Starfish donated **20 computers** (which included specific programmes for medical prescriptions), **6 mobile phones**, **1 respirator machine**, and **4,500 FFP3 and KN95 protective masks** to the hospital.

### **Support for mothers and newborns**

Since 2018, Starfish Foundation has been providing boxes for new-born babies- initially within Moria camp, and now within the new RIC Lesvos camp. These boxes contain essential items such as sleeping bags, warm clothing for infants, underwear for the mothers, nappies, additional hygiene products for baby and mother, toys, and blankets.

Additionally, after noticing a gap in the provision of breastfeeding services to women in the new camp, we partnered with MAM Beyond Borders to start a breastfeeding initiative in December 2020. The initiative focuses on supporting pregnant women at term (especially in the case of their first pregnancy), breastfeeding mothers, and infants up to 1 year old. The initiative encourages and promotes breastfeeding, and is led by a team of healthcare volunteers with previous experience in the field. Group classes and one to one consultations are both available. Currently, the breastfeeding classes are held once a week, but we hope to increase this to **5 classes per week**,

within the RIC Lesvos camp, and also offering classes within our OpenSpace building for all women living on Lesvos.

### *Greek lessons*

Starfish was providing Greek lessons to residents of Moria right up until Greece entered the COVID-19 lockdown. At the beginning of November we were able to restart our Greek lessons for adults within the RIC Lesvos camp; we are delighted to have the support of two resident volunteers, and one overseas volunteer, to teach the classes three days a week. With over **100 students** registered already, we hope to increase the class sizes once COVID restrictions are lifted.



### *Driving unaccompanied minors*

Starfish's nine-seater van named "The Beast" was used throughout 2020 to transport unaccompanied minors from the Moria camp to their medical appointments in Mytilene. Medical appointments are a prerequisite for a person's asylum process, and it remained vitally important that transport was accessible for minors who could not travel to Mytilene themselves.

We were providing this transport up until the Moria fire in September. After the fire, roughly 400 unaccompanied minors were relocated to mainland Greece, and the process for medical appointments in the new RIC Lesvos camp changed.

### **Bag4Everyone**

The bagforeveryone project focuses on teaching people a new skill. In partnership with the [#educationforeveryone](#) team in Switzerland, we host sewing workshops within our OpenSpace building which encourages everyone- both from the refugee and migrant communities, and local Greek people on Lesbos, to learn a practical skill that will support them in the future. Two instructors conduct the sewing workshops, where they teach each student how to use industrial sewing machines. The students progress from learning basic sewing skills to advanced skills, such as the bagforeveryone shopper bag. Once the students gain the set of skills necessary, they too can teach the lessons to others.

You can find out more about the project [here](#)



### **THANK YOU**

To all of you who donated, volunteered with us, followed our social accounts, spoke out about our projects, fundraised, or spread the word about the ever-changing situation here on Lesbos- thank you. We continue to be blown away by the generosity and kindness of the Starfish community near and far. The projects you read about in this report, and the support that Starfish provides to those in need, would not have been possible without the organisations and individuals who support us, and for that we are profoundly grateful.