

By the autumn on 2011 our friends and volunteers could see that the recession and its consequences had become more serious, leading us to arrange a series of meetings in order to discuss what the priorities of the Network should be. This was nothing new, however the discussions were much more intense, they lasted longer and they involved more people. What concerned us most was that the Network really ought to be giving priority to all children living in deprived neighbourhoods in central Athens, children who were severely affected by the economic recession and by poverty, regardless of any other special circumstances (refugees, immigrants etc). The decision that finally emerged from the discussions was that we should indeed focus on all children in those run-down areas, with the aim of improving their living conditions and contributing to their educational and cultural development.

We decided to look into the matter further by conducting a sociocultural survey and asking people to fill in a questionnaire. It was essential to know what the families themselves thought of the recession, how they tackled it, what fears and hopes parents had for their children and in what ways the Network could help them. However, while conducting the survey and writing a working hypothesis for the Network's programme it became apparent that we needed even better organisation, more volunteers, an appropriate space of our own and sponsors to actually make our ideas happen. A Working Group, made up of members of the Network undertook to put the entire project and the needs that would arise from it in writing and then present it to the rest of the members and to our volunteers. The group very quickly put together a programme which proposed the creation of a «Culture Lab» for children living around Larissa Station, the main railway station of Athens. In no time at all we were in full agreement and proceeded to discuss the idea more widely with teachers, friends and NGOs operating in the area. The idea of a community centre in the neighbourhood that would benefit all children without discrimination found strong support.

There were many opportunities for further discussions in the months that followed: with students and lecturers of Erasmus University who visited Greece in June 2011 to research Human Rights and Social Justice; in a one-day conference on «Social Policy and Child Protection» at the Child Protection Centre of Neapolis in Crete; at events organised around Children's Rights in various schools in Athens; and at the Seminar on Positive Parental Education, organised by the Network in conjunction with Oxford University, the Onassis Foundation, the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine and Pataki Publishing House. This latter event took place in Pataki's bookshop and was attended by over 300 parents. All agreed that a «Culture Lab» would be a major contribution by the Network and the most appropriate one given the prevailing circumstances. The decision was accompanied by the creation of more working groups who would share the workload with the Network's Board of Directors. This included research, contact with schools and NGOs in the area, searching for appropriate premises, sponsorship and the drafting of a programme schedule.

The Culture Lab - 2012

The positive response of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation to our request to fund the programme signalled a major step for us. The creation of the «Culture Lab» gave new direction to the Network: from now on our task was to respond to the new living conditions imposed on children by the recession. The question of their rights acquired new meaning and substance. The socio-cultural survey was carried out in May with researchers from the Panteion University of Athens, assisted by forty-five volunteers, members and friends of the Network. The findings of the survey confirmed our work hypotheses and were very encouraging, moreover the analysis of the results by our researchers allowed us to set our goals properly.

As soon as we found the space to house our cultural centre we met with heads and teachers of neighbouring schools and arranged for fourteen classes from five primary and one nursery school in the area - a total of 245 children and their teachers – to visit the soon-to-be-opened «Culture Lab» during one week in May. The children saw the space and gave us their ideas about how we should use it and what changes we should make. A team of young female architects undertook the architectural design. During May and June we initiated meetings with about a dozen Greek NGOs that were active in the district. Together we discussed prevailing conditions and the possibility of cooperation; exchanged experiences and knowledge about the area and its cultural resources; and examined ways in which we might combine forces on future initiatives. Meanwhile, the «Culture Lab's» mission statement was being written, as was a daily timetable consisting of creative teams, educational programmes, meetings with authors, gatherings, outings and guided tours. The functioning system of the lending library, designed to be the major constituent of the centre and its activities, was agreed upon. The building works were finished by the summer of 2012 and the opening scheduled for October of that year. The «Culture Lab» became a reality thanks to the generous donation of the «Stavros Niarchos» Foundation and its executives. We had liaised closely with them from the preliminary preparations, during the entire works and right through to the official opening. The project would never have come to fruition without the help of numerous members, friends and volunteers of the Network, who offered their valuable time and ideas with reliability and efficiency.

Culture Lab 2012 - 2013

The «Culture Lab» started operating the very day after the official opening with a ten-hour daily programme for children. The lending library was open all day long for young readers to borrow books and board games. The morning educational session was entitled «Young Librarians in Action», lasted an hour and a half and was aimed at classes from schools not only in the vicinity of the Lab but also from other areas of Athens. At the same time we promoted a campaign entitled «Donate the books you have loved, this is what will make our library different from all the rest», directed at schools, authors, publishers, foundations, companies, volunteers and friends in order to increase the number of books in our lending library. Within six months we had 25 volunteers offering support teaching in the afternoons. Volunteer coordinators also ran three sessions of English each week plus creative teams every afternoon.

Campaign for International Children's Rights Day 20th November. As part of our campaign we gave a poster and a handout containing the rights to every child attending the schools in our neighbourhood. Each class received a puzzle with the same theme for the children to solve. On the same day we held a meeting with parents and teachers in the reading room of the nearby Public Library while their children were occupied in creative activities that we had arranged. The discussion was very interesting and covered many issues, ending with the decision that the Network should organise seminars for parents of pre-school children as well as parenting classes at the beginning of 2013.

Between October 2012 and July 2013, 52 separate events took place in the Culture Lab and elsewhere. These included a series of seminars for parents of pre-school children and an adult-education programme for parents. A bring-and-swap bazaar in the forecourt of the Athens Municipal Library was attended by more than 600 families from the surrounding area as well as many

volunteers and friends of the Network. Chefs from six of Athens's top restaurants cooked for us, and we were treated to singing by the Polyphonica children's choir as well as a musical programme by the Athens Municipality Philharmonic Orchestra.

April 2013. «Let's Read!» A campaign with the slogan «April 2013 – Let's Read!» held more than forty events throughout that month. 27 cultural and educational bodies as well as countless numbers of individuals worked together to promote reading. The effort was aimed primarily at children, although some of the activities included their parents and there were seminars for teachers. Our aim was a three-year programme with a steady network of reading groups that would send the message out every April via the campaign.

Cooperation agreement between City of Athens Cultural, Sport and Youth Organisation and the Network. Signed June 2013

The agreement includes recognition of the work of the Network; it encompasses several joint projects by the two bodies and affirms the City of Athens's support for the Network's initiatives for Children's Rights.

The Culture Lab has 500 young members of kindergarten and primary school age. There are 60 volunteers who offer between one and three hours of their time every week and we have a separate group of 10 volunteers who are involved in other projects (information, communication, sponsorship, legal support etc). We have two full time employees and one part-time. We have calculated that our volunteers work the equivalent hours of four and half full-time employees per month.

Further details regarding all activities and programmes of the Network and the Culture Lab, our joint ventures, sponsors, volunteers and partners from 2000 onwards can be found on our website www.dpp.org.gr

**Our Short History 2000 - 2013 was originally printed in Greek in October 2013 to mark the first anniversary of the Culture Lab.*



The
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Become a member
of our Network



The
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Our short history 2000 - 2013*

It all began in the spring of 2000 with fewer than fifteen of us, all teachers, writers, artists and journalists. And what started it was a random incident of abuse that touched us all and made us determined to take action. Up till then, none of us had even heard of the concept of children's rights and it was during those initial enquiries that we first came across the UN International Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by Greece in 1992. It became evident all too quickly however that neither children's rights nor the International Convention were known to the interested parties, namely parents, children and teachers and that furthermore they were frequently flouted at home, at school and in society.

We began discussing what sort of action we should take, how best to intervene as a group in order to disseminate the 42 articles of the Convention, how to bring other people on board and how to increase people's respect for rights by speaking to individuals who shape public opinion. Our aim was to bring the problem to light so that Greece would begin to uphold the Convention. We wanted to put an end to the negative reports that our country was receiving internationally, to allow children's voices to be heard, to ban corporal punishment in school and at home, to offer support to disabled children and so much more.

