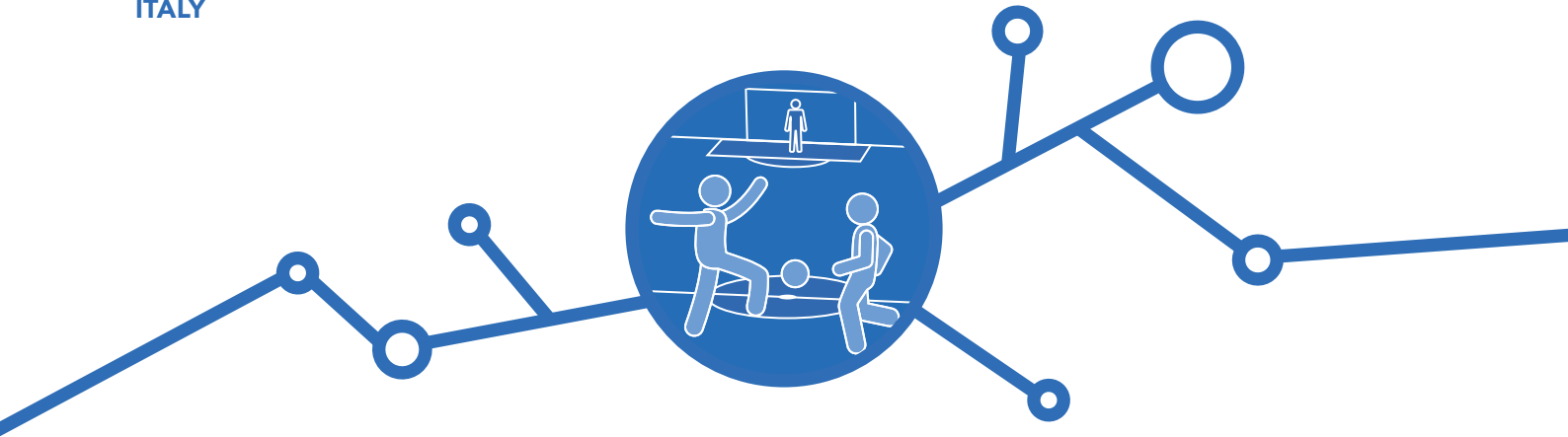


UNITED THROUGH SPORTS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

UNITED FOOTBALL TEAM, ROME
ITALY



CATEGORIES

- A** Connecting activities & community events
- E** Joint local engagement for the common good
- S** Community spaces where diverse people meet

PRESENTER

Sara Mesa, Team Manager

DESCRIPTION

Pineto United is a grass roots football team that seeks to facilitate interaction between young asylum seekers and Italian youth through sports. Team sports enable young people to create relationships that go beyond the playing field and facilitate functioning integration of youth. This activity has invigorated the neighbourhood and the public park where players train, helping to create a new sense of community among Pineto's residents.

MOTIVATION

The project aims to offer free sports activities to asylum seekers, refugees, and local neighbourhood youth in distress, thus creating new communities and helping to invigorate society. Mutual support allows migrant youth to be included in the social fabric of the neighbourhood. The entire neighbourhood benefits from this new line of activism that allows for continued development.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The project aims at facilitating the integration of foreigners who are oftentimes rejected by society and hindered in the integration process on the basis of a political and cultural campaign that dismisses their background and identities. The shared practice of the game allows to go beyond ethnic diversity; it allows players to discover what different people have in common, highlighting the perspective of the "other" as a positive resource rather than a problem.

MORE DETAILS

The Pineto United Football Team was founded in 2017 when local associations, guests of local Migrant Reception Centres, guests of Municipal Managed Family Houses, and neighbourhood youth started training at Pineto Public Park and the surrounding areas. The goal was to create a grass roots team including vulnerable people (asylum seekers, refugees, and both Italian, and migrant minors facing social and economic challenges) that was able to join an amateur football championship. The team was supported by the whole neighbourhood, in particular by the boys of the local school and of the Municipally Managed Family Houses, who gathered as a support group called „North-West Donkeys“. The link with the school was strengthened with a series of activities such as:

- the organization of friendly matches with representatives made up of teachers and pupils
- neighbourhood parties where refugees and asylum seekers cooked dishes from their countries
- local schools inviting team players who shared the stories of their difficult journeys while coming to Italy with the students

As result of this engagement with schools, two teachers became regular and active members of the football team. Simultaneously, footballers and supporters started an awareness/advocacy campaign aimed at the revitalization and rehabilitation of the Urban Park of Pineto, particularly targeting the clean-up and renovation of the abandoned soccer field of Valle Aurelia, which was returned to the citizens as a public asset. Additionally, the players' integration into the neighbourhood was made easier and valuable job opportunities transpired through collaborations with local artisans and businesses.

Moreover, the community of Pineto United participated in various events promoting anti-racism and the building of open and supportive communities. In a challenging social and political environment increasingly hostile to migrants and refugees, Pineto United is becoming an anti-racist stronghold. Pineto United won the Best Practices Award "Mamma Roma and his Best Sons", has been in the media spotlight, and repeatedly featured in the local press.

OUTCOMES

The creation of Pineto United Football Team allowed for:

- The rehabilitation of a disused soccer field.
- The establishment of a network of associations called „Camp for All“ which includes 10 local associations involved in the soccer field rehabilitation.
- The collection of more than € 3,000 of funds, which enabled Pineto Football team to join an amateur football tournament as well as the purchase of uniforms and training equipment.
- The hiring of some asylum-seeking players.
- The participation of the local population in public initiatives working against the closure of Asylum Seeker Reception Centres initiated by the new Italian government.
- The Best Practices Award "Mamma Roma and its Best Sons".
- A successful fund-raising dinner promoted by Gustamundo, a local restaurant that offers dishes from across the world and employs migrants and asylum seekers.
- Positive media attention regarding the issue of migrants, owing to good publicity about the football team's project in local and national newspapers.

LESSONS LEARNED

It has become evident over time that better coordination between the people and the organisations involved allows for more success. Further, an organisation that delegates specific roles is more functional and effective in taking care of the athletic and above all the emotional needs of the people involved in the team. However, it is difficult to understand how to act effectively without prior experience. The players and coordinators have grown together over the years and have learned to cope with emergencies as well as difficult day-to-day life challenges faced by the children involved.