



Ingrid

#ThankYouCaritasVolunteers

«Is there any volunteer? » asks sometimes the teacher to his/her class. And right away you can see someone raising their hand looking forward for doing an “extra” activity such as making copies, going to call the janitor, writing at the blackboard and so on. In the classes of the small ones almost all hands are raised up, the more they will grow up though, the hands in the air will be less and less and the impetus of voluntariness will be replaced by the inertia of laziness and indifference. Well, during adulthood most of hands will not be raised at all, because there will be even more things to do and “we will not have time anymore”. «I cannot find the will to work and do my everyday activities, let alone offering myself to help someone else without being paid for it as well! » we think. To help means also to love and loving is not quite so easy as they often want us to believe. By loving I mean loving unconditionally, that is without expecting absolutely nothing in return. “This is what has meant and still means for me being a volunteer for Caritas. Expecting nothing, nor gratitude or words of appreciation, nothing at all. But still, magically, something in return always comes” So, I believe that the good we do, always finds a way to come back to us. Being a volunteer is a choice and who makes it maybe loves himself a little bit more than others do, because he knows deep down that the value of what he will receive in return after giving unconditionally will be much more precious than that of money. The children that volunteer to do something want to be at the core of the

experience that is proposed to them, they want to live it at all costs without being bothered by the fact that they have a lot of other activities to carry out beside that one, because instead this is different, new, rare and allows them to get involved. For me, volunteering for Caritas means to jump into new experiences and to go beyond my own limits. I've learned all these things by going in schools and sensitizing the pupils to issues such as solidarity and inclusion thanks to the projects *We need to seed* and *Like an Okapi*, by telling them stories and doing group games to let them know the importance of inclusion and of the role of each of us in our community; by helping at the after-school of S. Fereolo parish; by taking part in the food and school material drive held at a Coop supermarket and in the initiative called *We break the bread*. All these initiatives are addressed to those who "have less" but also to those about whom we usually don't think to, which instead are the most fragile members of the community and for whom those are very meaningful. Then, I have also learned that when we volunteer we cannot take everything for granted and that we can often find ourselves wondering about the diversity of mankind; that the solution is not feeling sorry for the people we are facing and by giving them a pat on the back but by being interested in and willing to listen their stories in order to help them in a more direct and concrete way. I became fully aware of that after participating to "Sconfinati", an initiative launched by Caritas Milan and then re-adapted with some variations here in my city, Lodi. This was one of the strongest experiences that I ever lived, which has made me feel privileged in comparison to other people who instead did not have the occasion to witness a reality different from the one we are used to. I found myself thinking: "Look what they are missing out on, if they only knew..." and at the same time it made me want to know more and to let also other people know about what I found out. Here I met the survivors of a deathly trip, the one from Libya to Italy, who from being some

invisible faces at the news have become friends, some very brave ones. In this occasion too I felt like I was part of a solid network of people who believe deeply in what they do, to whom charity it is a philosophy of life and who engage in every possible way in spreading their message, involving young people too. Finally, still thanks to Caritas -even though when you start volunteering there will never be an end point anymore- I had the chance to meet six amazing kids with their mothers, born in Nigeria, who after several unpleasant adventures were accommodated into a reception centre for asylum seekers in a small hamlet of Lodi. Here I could notice how hard it is to make two completely different communities get close to one another and how language plays a fundamental role in this. I have learned that some traumas, if experienced on our own skin, can be extremely difficult to overcome and that a volunteer could never erase them but at least could help to distract from them and to regain faith in the mankind. The most exciting aspect of all these experiences is that just as me and my family had been given help when first arriving in Italy after having migrated from Romania, I in turn could contribute to help, in my small, those in need and thus “returning the favour”.