



“Breakfast with a smile” **- Combatting contemporary forms of poverty** **Italy, La Spezia**

Offering coffee and a smile to those who have nothing: such is the objective of the project *Colazione con il Sorriso* (“Breakfast with a smile”), created by Italian AIC volunteers. Four mornings a week, a small group of AIC volunteers welcome about 40 homeless people, offering them a drink and cookies, a homemade dessert and sometimes unsold bakery products. Beneficiaries help volunteers prepare everything, and they all have breakfast together as one big family. Beneficiaries can also take a hot shower and wash their clothes. This warm and friendly atmosphere makes them feel like they are no longer invisible, and has already enabled some of them to find a job and a home.

Source: [“Il bar più bello di La Spezia non è un bar: la storia di Colazioni con il sorriso”](#) by Valentina D’Amora (extracts)

Context and project activities

“Days should start with a hug, a kiss, some affection and a coffee. Because breakfast should be plentiful,” Lucy told Snoopy in an episode of Peanuts. And in La Spezia, Liguria, that’s exactly what happens. Almost every morning, before dawn, in a welcoming and friendly environment, tea, coffee and freshly baked cakes are served to everyone. This initiative, called “Breakfast with a smile”, began six years ago to give homeless people not only a place to spend a few hours in the warmth with a coffee, but also a friendly atmosphere with familiar faces.



Context and project activities (continued)

"Here we are all one big family," explains Anna Lavazzo, the AIC volunteer who is in charge of the service. "We welcome everyone who shows up to have breakfast with us, after a night spent in the cold, in a disused train car or under a porch"; and over the years, strong and meaningful relationships have been created.

Impact

"At the beginning, there was a lot of anger about the hardships, the rough nights, whereas now people come to us with a smile. And the great thing is that we don't just give out the first meal of the day, but we all have breakfast together, sit at the same table, tell stories."

Anna explains that La Spezia has always been a city that looks after the most disadvantaged people. The local government gives a lot of support to associations that deal with the difficulties of those who live on the margins. *"We are all brothers: for us, the least we can do is take care of those who are disadvantaged compared to us."* That's why for Anna and the other volunteers, the alarm clock rings very early: *"The service opens at 5:45 a.m. and continues until 9 a.m."*

At the beginning, many people came to get out of the cold, but unfortunately there weren't enough volunteers. *"That's why we do everything together now: those who come, despite the difficult night, help. There are those who heat the milk, those who set the table, those who prepare the coffee, they do it all spontaneously."*

Evolution of the project

In addition to breakfast every morning, the space also allows people to take a hot shower and wash their clothes, which they get back clean and fragranced the next day. *"We have put bottles of shampoo and shower gel in the bathroom, just like at home, and soft towels where you can wrap up and dry yourself."*

Anna says that the laundry service developed over time, from an idea provided by some of the people who came to have breakfast, thanks to the trust they built up day by day with the volunteers. *"Why do they have to throw away their clothes every time they get dirty? Finding something comfortable and that they feel good in is an achievement for them. That's why it's right to give them the opportunity to keep their clothes and not throw them away when they need to be washed."*

Knowing that there is someone in the world who is thinking about you completely changes your outlook on life. Anna first had the idea for the project when she was having breakfast with her family one morning. Watching her husband and children eat breakfast and smile, she asked herself *"why us and not them"?*