

## MORE NEWS FROM SCAMPRIA, NAPOLI

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*NOTE: Scampia (rhymes with sangria.) is a New Town development on the northern edge of Naples. It is part of what the French call 'banlieu' and the Italians call 'periferia'. The population includes a large percentage of recent immigrants.*

### More News from Scampia

**W**e are busy in the after-school centre *Oasi Buon Pastore* 3 days a week, from 3.00 pm until 7.00. To tell the truth we are concerned about the turnover among the boys who started the year there. Only the younger ones have attended faithfully, or those who are chased up by their parents. The real '*scugnizzi*' have hardly been seen again, at least not with anything resembling a schoolbook in their hands. This is a valuable service organised by the Parish with two groups of volunteers. However, it lacks leadership and organisation, and this explains the absenteeism.

Certainly, some of the older boys have already either given up on secondary school or have such a patchy attendance record that they are bound to fail. They will be our first customers, when we get our *CasArcobaleno* (Rainbow House) Project going. It will be our job to help them get a 'second chance', but unfortunately it will all be outside the regular school structures.

Our presence in the Play Centre run by sister Edoarda is becoming more regular. We give training in citizenship to the girls, some of whom went to the National Gathering of Young Lasallians. They returned full of enthusiasm. We have now been asked to organise a weekly session of reflection for teenage boys and girls (about 15 in all) who used to attend the Play Centre. Their response is remarkable. In last week's session, after some activities that had a rather mixed reception, we sat down to chat and finished by looking at the text of Psalm 139 "O Lord you search me and you know me". We did not have to say anything. They began straight away reading the psalm carefully and asking explanations of words that were too difficult for them and they were soon sharing with their neighbour the words and phrases that had impressed them. Finally, they took turns explaining to the whole group their understanding of the verse they had chosen. This was in spite of the difficulty some of them have in reading in public, or even reading at all, though they are in the third year of middle school.

We have had a few more 'providential encounters' on our journey. One Monday afternoon we had a visit from the local 'capo piazza', the man from the

Camorra in charge of collecting payments in the neighbourhood. It was not an easy meeting. When you meet with a '*camorrista*', even a minor one, you are forced to choose which side you are on. How do you meet him as a child of God like yourself, without compromising yourself with the criminal in him who controls the district and kills people with the drugs he is peddling?

We needed to make him understand the reason for our presence here and the nature of our mission, and we wanted to ensure that the area we were developing would be exempt from the '*spaccio*' payments to the Camorra, since it was being developed for the benefit of the children of the neighbourhood, many of whose parents were already paying into '*o sistema*'. At the same time we wanted to avoid a facile compromise and to keep ourselves 'clean', not from any human contact with these people, but from any suggestion that we were under their 'protection'. He was a bit taken aback when we finished the exchange by asking if we could pray for him. His response was affirmative though embarrassed. An hour later his daughter came to join us for the after-school activities.

Two of our encounters with victims of 'The System' have been painful and tearful. One twelve-year old boy saw his father killed by a rival clan last September. Another boy's uncle (his godfather) was killed in an ambush a few days ago, and now he does not want to make his first communion. It is not easy for children to come to terms with death, especially when it comes so savagely and violently.

In getting to know these two boys, we have become more keenly aware of the reality of life in Scampia. Previously, these were things we only heard tell of, or read about in the newspapers. Now the victims have a face, and even the dead 'baddies' are not strangers but people with names and a story. The news items about deaths in gang warfare touch us almost physically, because they involve individuals who are relatives and friends of the people with whom we share the streets and squares of Scampia. They are no longer just news bulletins but the cries of women and children we know. They are tragedies that generate more violence in return, or a hatred that lies hidden but will one day burst out and destroy the lives of other children and other families. We have come to immerse ourselves in this whirlpool of hate and rancour to see if we can somehow break the cycle of spiralling violence. We represent a God who died on the cross and tri-

umphed over death and over hatred and every kind of violence.

Meanwhile the external and internal works at *CasArcobaleno* are progressing. The gates have still to be put up, and the earth that has been brought in must be levelled before we can start planting out the garden. The District of Italy wants us to set up a legal Association as the basis for our presence in Scampia. We have chosen the title '*Associazione Arrevummatoce*', which will be more easily understood. In the Neapolitan dialect the word '*arrevummatoce*' is a reflexive verb that means 'let's turn ourselves upside down' or 'inside out' (like socks). It is our hope that the presence of a Lasallian community here will stimulate people to turn themselves around and change their patterns of behaviour, their fixed habits and their mentalities. However, we realise full well that this call to conversion is addressed first of all to ourselves. The document *Being Brothers Today* invites us to relive the 'dangerous memories' of our story, and for us here in Scampia that means learning to share the conditions of the poor in a very real way.

Your Brothers, [Enrico](#) and Raffaele.