

COMMUNITY NOTES FROM SCAMPRIA, NAPOLI

By Brothers [Enrico Muller](#) and Raffaele Lievore

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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.

By the start of 2007, we had already been in Scampia for three months. They were months of discovery and growing awareness, of reflection and prayer. Thank God we have still not yet 'got used to' the dirty streets, filled with litter and drug pushers that are a daily sight for the children of the area.

"And what are you doing there?" - is the question we are frequently asked.

Well, the location we have been given for our Centre has been cleaned up and is beginning to take on a lived-in look. Skip loads have been taken away filled with the rubbish and old bushes that had taken over the outdoor areas. A roof has been put on the building and the fence has been repaired. Once the inside is tidied up we will be able to clean and decorate the place from top to bottom. Help has already been offered by local mothers, who know that their children will be able to benefit from the Centre. After that we can think about furnishing the interior and beautifying the exterior. It is a joy to see how much support is forthcoming from friends and well-wishers during this period of 'setting up house'.

During the afternoons, we are available to help the children after they have finished in the local parish school. They are mostly from the primary school, but some are from the middle school. We help these new friends of ours in their difficulties with the Italian language. They learn from us and we learn from them. They all have educational difficulties brought on by absence from school, which they cannot help. Instead of sending them to school, their parents take them along to help out with little jobs or they have to stay home to look after the smaller children. Some boys just roam around the streets all day.

As a result these children are sharp-witted, alert and quick to grasp things, but their experience of life has made them wary. But they also suffer from various kinds of educational difficulties that hold them back.

Among others, we have established important links with the Jesuits, with the Sisters of Providence of Udine and with the Society of the Sacred Heart. Our

initiative with the Jesuits takes the form of a joint effort in educational follow-up. With the Sisters of Providence we share the fragility of living the religious life as part of our commitment to bringing Christ to young children. The Sacred Heart Community is a regular oasis for us. That little flat of theirs is a place of perpetual welcome, where we can exchange ideas in the light of God's Word and share the beauty of seeking the face of God in a peripheral urban development. The common element shared by all these groups is the desire to do something for education in this area, either by helping the children or by helping the teachers.

Our presence here also has the benefit of good relations with the Local Authority and the Education Inspector of Scampia. Because of our availability, we are asked to become involved in the laborious work of setting up a network of resources, skills, funding, energies and ideas, in order to overcome the negative mentality that seems to dominate this part of the urban periphery. From the meetings and discussions so far it is becoming clearer that our Lasallian mission here will be to the young adolescents of the area, especially the boys. There are plenty of groups ready to take an interest in the younger children, while the teenagers are more or less abandoned and condemned to failure.

Another world that has opened up to us is that of the local Romany community. We got to know about it in real terms as the result of a chance accident. (As Lasallians, we cannot but think of The Founder's meeting with Adrian Nyel.) Our efforts will be directed to the boys attending the Middle School. They are more marginalised than others because of the cultural gap. Growing up in Scampia is already bad enough; being a 'Rom' makes things even more difficult.

In January, we were visited by Brother Rafael Matas, Visitor of Valencia-Palma. He came to see us because he would like to send a Brother from his District to join our community. So that will be the start of a European Lasallian community. We have also been to Spain to meet Lasallian communities with this kind of involvement in poor localities. We were able to share ideas and learn new things. At the same time we made our contribution to the development of the web of relationships in the new Lasallian Region of Europe. We are pleased that word 'Scampia' has already become part the District's Lasallian vocabulary, though we do not want to get too much publicity. However, we do ask you all to pray for us.