

The Football and Roma initiative in Milan 2012-2013

The football training group for Italian Sinti living in Treviglio near Milan, which was launched in September 2012 by Football and Roma and *Opera Nomadi Milano*, came together for the last time in August 2013 with their coach Ines Österle. The highlight of the final training was a photo shoot for the players which was used to create personal autograph cards for each participant as a goodbye present.

The Treviglio football project engaged a total number of 20 girls and boys of the age of 5-18 years over the one year project period. The weekly activity was focused on basic football skills such as shooting and ball control, with significant time dedicated to playing football games. Before and after the sessions, the coach and an assistant ensured that there was sufficient time to talk to the children as it soon became evident that a relationship based on trust and friendship between trainers and participants was crucial for the functioning of training and to gain notable participation.

A highlight of the project was the participation of two children engaged in the project, Dylan and Michele, within a training session of the local football team. Unfortunately, after a couple of trainings it became clear that it was not possible to enrol them in the team, mainly for organisational reasons. However, the boys were quite content as they realized that they can match the standard of same-aged club players and were able to assimilate within the training, therefore experiencing a seldom sense of achievement.

Both girls and boys participated in the Football and Roma training group which is a great success given that football is still a male domain in Italy. The biggest problem the trainer encountered during the project was the fluctuation in the training participation; in fact, only a few children showed motivation to participate constantly over the project life time. It was positive that most sessions included a good quality football game and most exercises were carried out with high concentration levels. Above all the youngest players showed surprising amounts of endurance when participating in basic football skills and therefore made good progress.

After the kids received their personal autograph cards during the final meeting, they were also given the footballs they played with in the course of the project as it became clear that a few kids had become passionate about the sport. The trainer from Football and Roma which followed them over the project period, Ines Österle, is confident that a few of them will follow their passion of football and will take advantage of the opportunities to play football in school and with their friends. And hopefully, one day, Dylan and Michele, or one of their teammates, will have the opportunity to score goals or defend them in the colours of the local football club in Treviglio.