



Helen builds a more hopeful future at Kindergarden in Albania

In contrast to her daily struggle with poverty and hunger, Helen, a lovely Roma girl age 6, is fond of princess castles. With her kindergarden peers she constructed her favourite princess castle, with colourful cubes, and was happy to show it to the teacher. She has lately realized her desire to start education and hopes that brighter days are in her future.

Helen is one of 130 children, at Save the Children's newly supported kindergarden in Berat. Helen is benefiting and enjoying the changes the support has brought so far which include a safer atmosphere, good lunch and many friends.

Though the kindergarden, poor infrastructure means educational equipments and materials, including manipulative toys, are mostly not available. Still, Helen enjoys her time in the kindergarden. the kindergarden,

Three months ago she used to spend her days looking after her siblings' age two and four "She felt tired and friendless and cried almost every day" –said her mother.

The kindergarden provides a break from the daily struggle with poverty and hunger, and more than that,-it makes a different future possible. "The teachers and children treat them well and they've learned many poems and new things"-said Helen's mother.

Helen's family, like many of the Roma families living in the neighbourhood, are faced not only with poverty but also with ethnic prejudices. Young children often work to help support their families or pass their time playing in the streets. Either way they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Helen's house is a shabby and very small, humid and cold room made of old bricks and mud. Her father is in prison and her mother is unemployed. Her mother often collects cans to sell to save her family from the pangs of hunger. This does not, however, cover the debts she has to pay to the grocery and bakery shops.

Helen joined the program six months ago. Initially she was timid and unsure of being in a group of children. Now she is an eager participant and has learned many new colours, animals and poems. "Tiger is my favorite animal. I like him as he is strong and runs fast"- said Helen.

Arts is also in the kindergarden's daily schedule and Helen and many children like these classes best. They paint, sing children's songs and dance. The safe atmosphere of the kindergarden gives these children a chance to learn without fear of violence. It enables them to grow with confidence, and equips them to move on to primary school with a better chance of succeeding.

"Violence is a widespread phenomenon used by teachers and parents for disciplining children and this should not continue anymore"-expressed the Mayor of Berat Municipality, who is committed and agreed to be involved in the fight against violence towards children in school and at home.

"I guarantee the Municipality will support every stage of this project and take the chance to thank you Save the Children Albania for this important intervention" –expressed the Mayor of the Municipality of Berat.



Helen, in the middle with green pattern shirt, with her kindergarden peers building the princess castle

"In the kindergarden, I can play with friends, have good lunch and learn many things" - Helen