

Interview with Dr Nicolas Liengme, President of the Païdos Association



Païdos is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation which aims at reducing differences and injustices experienced by people around us. The activities of Païdos are directed towards infants and adolescents before they suffer any irreversible damage.

Païdos essentially

- welcomes children at risk of exclusion because of their status as asylum seekers, and offers them weekly creative activities alongside other children who are integrated
 - cares daily for teenagers who are dropouts from education or training establishments
- Besides these activities, Païdos is undertaking 3 courses of action:
- "on the ground" surveillance of emerging adolescent problems, using a mobile unit, as well as the publication of reports emanating from this surveillance for the information of the entire Geneva medical-psychosocial and educational network, as well as the political realm, with the objective of improving the match between needs and institutional and social responses.
 - raising the awareness of young people through exhibitions and campaigns with the aim of preventing the occurrence of social exclusion
 - continuous training for professionals in the fields of education, psychology and health in the domains of dropout and marginalisation in adolescence,

Païdos in figures

- an annual budget of 752,000 CHF (2010)
- 25 children between the ages of 4 and 12 years at risk or in difficulty taken in weekly or daily during the holidays
- 20 teenagers experiencing breakdown of social ties taken in daily in the working week: 33 teenagers were followed up in 2010, included in a total of 309 over the last 8 years.
- A rate of return to school or working life of 96%.

Who founded Païdos and how long has it been in existence?

François Guisan and myself founded the association in 1996, when we were at the end of biological and medical studies respectively. We were then involved in both local and overseas humanitarian projects involving children and teenagers on the fringe of society, either in Geneva or in São Paulo (Brazil). Subsequently, Sylvia Serafin, founder of the "Atelier des Bricolos" for children, joined the committee. We are happy today to observe how more than 10 professionals and dozens of volunteers work enthusiastically daily in Païdos.

Who are the supporters and members of Païdos?

The association was born out of voluntary work and it is gratifying that it has become professionalised, in view of the demands and psychosocial complexity of the situations involved. An extraordinary team spirit has developed over the 15 years of our existence. We can honestly say that Swiss citizens and foreigners living in Switzerland, as well as foundations, villages, both the Canton and the City of Geneva are involved with us daily or on regular basis in various ways (professional, material and financial) to accomplish our mission. The association's management committee operates on a voluntary basis and currently comprises a paediatrician, a lawyer, an economist, a youth worker, an environmentalist and a child psychiatrist, providing a wide, diversified and knowledgeable scope.

What do you see as the dangers facing children and teenagers in Geneva today?

In conjunction with the usual risks of drug addiction, especially cannabis abuse, which affects quite a lot of teenagers, and which has caused increased rate in school and training dropouts, psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, problems of individual and group violence are on the increase. Very often, this violence involves the use of bladed weapons. Increasing insecurity in and around Geneva is not only a sign of social decline, but is again an evidence of deep mistrust between the adult population and the youth who are on the fringe of society, thereby creating barriers and reinforcing the ghetto phenomena.

Furthermore, these phenomena have taken on racial implications and consequently lead to the problems of xenophobia and class discrimination.

How do you think you are going to evolve over the coming years to cope with the difficulties experienced by the youth?

More than ever we have to work on building bridges between different sectors of the population, between migrant and integrated people, between teenagers and professionals in health and education. We must avoid school dropout and act on it when it has already occurred, with the aim of preventing it from becoming chronic with the adverse consequences it entails. Mobile outreach projects which allow meeting with teenagers on-the-fringe in their localities and easy-access services are some of our special tools.

How to support Païdos?

You can offer your professional skills, not only in the medical-psychosocial and educational domains but also in administration, communication or management. Any assistance is very welcome! Your donations are important (CCP 60-488321-3). We are committed to absolute openness and to spending more than 90% of our funds for direct aid to people and to spending below or not exceeding 10% of our funds for administrative costs. Please do not hesitate to contact us at info@paidos.org or to visit our website www.paidos.org.

