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1. Letter from the Chairman

Dear reader,

It's been a turbulent time, with a pandemic that hit everyone around the world, but especially the most vulnerable ones. The effects were clear in the refugee camps, as the already limited support system decreased even further. Connect by Music kept going throughout to support the people living in such difficult conditions, and offered its program to bring relief, connection, playfulness and warmth.

We are proud of what we do, we are proud that music can bring a spark of joy to the people in the camps. We are proud that, despite all chaos, children and adults continued to come to class and played. We are proud that, even in hectic times, our team of professional teachers and therapists continued to run the program.

Most of all, we are so proud of our students.

They are the ones that are brave. They go on stage with an open heart, trying to connect, trying to reach out. The Camp to stage program that we offer not only brings enormous empowerment, it also contributes to acceptance and integration. It's even a strong tool against xenophobic feelings, which is so important. By giving themselves a face to the world, they also give others a face to the world. Others living in similar conditions. Conditions that no one should be forced to live in.

And we are glad that music brings hope, which is very much needed in this world.

Adriaan Kok

2. Overview

2.1. Who We Are

Music is a universal language; music can express when words are not enough.

Connect by Music is an organisation that originated from the Netherlands and is now an official Greek NGO, registered in the national registry of NGOs of the Ministry of Migration. Connect by Music aims at enhancing the quality of life and the well-being of refugees in reception centers and shelter locations, by offering a space where they can experience safety, peace, and comfort while exploring creativity and fostering their resilience and strength. By offering music education and music therapy, Connect by Music helps refugees in coping and transitioning to the Greek society and/or other countries in Europe.

2.2. Mission and Vision

Connect by Music is committed to provide psychosocial support to refugees through music education and music therapy. We aim to improve their mental health and create connections within themselves and with society. We are driven by a strong will to keep learning, growing and building capacity in order to best serve our beneficiaries.

Our dream is that our approach will become part of a broader support program of psychosocial care for refugees and thus make a lasting contribution to the well-being of all those who are forced to leave their home countries.

2.3. The Challenge

Mental health and psychosocial support have to be recognized as a basic need. As there is a global shortage of relevant healthcare professionals and experts, it's essential to develop a program offering the necessary care from the moment people arrive in Greece, as to prohibit their mental health condition deteriorating further.

2.4. The Solution

Music has been proven to have a significant and beneficial neurological impact on the developing human brain and mind. Using this knowledge and investing in a community centered approach, Connect by Music offers a program that has a positive impact on mental health. Through music,

children, adolescents and adults can self-express, create, grow, recover, and develop themselves.

3. Years in Review

Over the course of two years, our students played, connected, developed and blossomed. During the many moments of joy and relaxation, these children developed the necessary confidence and pride. Showing their skills within the community is an important part of Connect by Music. Even though the covid restrictions, we tried to reach out to the community as much as possible. Other than the concerts in their direct surroundings, our students experienced to play in some very special occasion. Below you'll find a few Connect by Music highlights and other important moments we've gone through over the years.

3.1. The year 2021

January – A fresh start

After ending 2020 in a lockdown, our team and students were more than excited to start the program in real life again in January. A big part of this year was also affected by the global pandemic, with more lockdowns, quarantines and other regulations. The Connect by Music program adapted whenever necessary to keep delivering the much-needed support to our students.

February – The Recording Project

The Recording Project was born from the need to expand our services in order to reach the needs of one of our groups: the advanced students that followed our program and became outstanding players. One of our teachers on Lesvos, a professional musician and self-taught producer set up the project after assessing the need of a more challenging approach for this specific group. Working more in depth with these students allowed them to develop even further on a musical and personal level.

March – Team building and psychosocial impact

During the covid pandemic, it became even more apparent how important the Connect by Music program is in the daily lives of the people living in the refugee camps. Now that we were able to see each other in person

again, this month was filled with team building and training on child protection and psychosocial impact.

April – The end of Kara Tepe

Connect by Music was founded on Lesvos and started its activities in the refugee camp of Kara Tepe. After an intense period in which we accompanied thousands of students, it was time to say goodbye to this location. All Kara Tepe residents were moved and the camp closed.

May – Sharing their story with the world

We collaborated with Fausta Cardoso Pereira who featured Connect by Music students in the documentation of their stories. *Open Camp - a new narrative from children in refugee camps* is a project funded by National Geographic and has the goal to empower refugee children and teenagers with a new language, animated films, and let them be storytellers of the narratives they want and need to tell. The videos and audio that came out of this project aim to lead to the understanding and acceptance of migrant communities, releasing their stories to the world. In a symbolic way, refugee children and teenagers leave the refugee camp to speak to a broader audience, outside the camp. Watch and listen to their stories here: <https://vimeo.com/user140920833>

June – European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Conference

Connect by Music was invited to speak at the ESTSS 2021 Conference on "Trauma and mental health during the Global Pandemic".

The team spoke about the ways Connect by Music implements trauma informed practices, music and trauma research, music therapy research and music therapy practices related to trauma. We were able to show how the Covid pandemic impacted our activities and how it worsened the circumstances for all those living in the camps and the severe impact it had on their mental health.

July – First Orchestra Award

This month, we participated in the Χορωδία Ορχήστρα Νέων - XON Panhellenic Orchestra competition in Athens and our Connect by Music students won the 1st prize! Many musical ensembles from all over Greece participated, giving our

students the opportunity to meet other musicians their age. After a long period of Covid measurements and lockdowns, it was amazing to see the children shine on stage. With support of Solidarity Now, it was a day to never forget.

August – Fires in Greece and the launch of the Connect by Music Spotify channel

Greece was battling many intense fires near the capital city Athens and on the island of Evia this month. Several areas had to be evacuated, including the residents of the Malakasa camp. We saw the similarity between the refugee crisis and the climate crisis, regarding forced displacement. People have to leave everything they have built behind, dealing with uncertainty about their futures. This is hard on anyone forced to leave their home, but especially those who have been in an unstable situation for a long period of time.

On a more positive note; we launched our own Connect by Music Spotify channel. Now you are able to enjoy the songs that we use in our classes at home! Songs from many different cultures are included and show the diversity of our program.

*September – Launch of awareness campaign #whymusic
“Music is medicine for the soul.”*

Because of new developments in the covid pandemic, we were forced to teach outside in one of our locations. Running a program during a pandemic and during summer is a challenge which involves flexibility from students and teachers. Grateful that we were able to continue, it became clearer how music gets us through difficult periods. That’s why we launched the #WHYMUSIC campaign on our social media. This online campaign was designed to increase awareness and knowledge on the amazing qualities of music regarding mental health. Ten different reasons and topics were discussed, showing the deeper layer of our work and the impact of music in general and specifically on our beneficiaries.

#whymusic REASON 1: Music can reduce stress

#whymusic REASON 2: music can help manage pain

#whymusic REASON 3: Music can improve cognitive performance
#WHYMUSIC REASON 4: Music enhances social bonding
#WHYMUSIC REASON 5: Music can improve sleep
#WHYMUSIC REASON 6: Music can improve motivation
#WHYMUSIC REASON 7: Music can improve your memory
#WHYMUSIC REASON 8: Music can improve mood
#WHYMUSIC REASON 9: Music may reduce symptoms of depression
#WHYMUSIC REASON 10: Music can improve endurance

October – Song release

The Recording Project mentioned earlier became a tool of self-expression. In one-on-one sessions, the advanced students would experience a safe space where teacher and student made a pedagogical journey through life memories and experiences in order to explore the social and emotional side of music. Creating a song that spoke about themselves helped our students reach higher levels of emotional awareness, self-knowledge, self-regulation, motivation and imagination. The result of one of these journeys was now presented: *When I see her* by Nathaniel.

November – Collaboration Pierce - The American College of Greece in Athens and the Connect by Music Bandcamp release

Our team gave a presentation at Pierce - The American College of Greece in Athens. Spreading the word in Greece is one of our priorities because we value sustainability and consistency by hiring Greek teachers. Many students attended and led to enthusiastic registrations for volunteering within our program. It's important to keep sharing the work we do and inspire young people, as educating and informing is a big step towards an open minded and inclusive society.

The CD *Music by Connect by Music – Volume 1* is now available on Bandcamp, for everyone to enjoy. The recording of this CD took place inside the camp and includes some of our students' favorite songs.

December – Concert at the Ministry of Migration

Our students were invited to play at the Ministry of Migration in Athens, where the members of the parliament listened carefully and the students received a big applause.

3.2. The year 2022

January – New year’s concert

The year started in high spirits with a performance at a festive event at a in Lamia. As part of our aim for inclusion and acceptance, our team was able to speak about the universal love for music that can lead to connection and understanding.

February – Changing living conditions in Malakasa camp

During this month, residents of the Malakasa camp moved into their new housing. After the horrible living conditions in wintertime last year, improvements were essential. The new housing units, so-called isoboxes, have solar panels for electricity and offer a bit more comfort.

The conditions in refugee camps are tough and put a strain on everyone living there. It gets even more difficult when extreme nature forces like wildfires and snow worsen the circumstances. Let’s keep spreading awareness about the living conditions in camps together, but let’s acknowledge progress as well.

March – Visit from the General Secretary of Education and performance at the Ministry of Education

In honor of World Refugee Day, we were invited to perform at the Greek Ministry of Education. Minister Niki Kerameus decided our students to be the highlight of the day by performing at a Ministry’s event. We strive to keep showing what we do and to address the importance of psychosocial support for the people we serve, in all layers of society.

The Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Alexandros Koptsis, visited Connect by Music. After a conference on education for refugees, the Secretary General visited the camp in Thermopyles to see the Connect by Music program. He met the students and our teacher and had an open discussion on the topic of education. The students gave a small concert in his honor and the Secretary

General congratulated the students on their musical skills and Connect by Music on the wonderful work offered in the camp.

April – 5th birthday of Connect by Music

Five years ago this month, Connect by Music started operating on the island of Lesbos, Greece. To mark this special occasion and emphasize the importance of music as a tool for social cohesion and mental health support, a set of postcards was developed. Aiming to spread the word and build towards a world in which the circumstances where we provide music will be different in the future.

May – Closing of Eleonas camp and Concert Music Hall Megaro

Connect by Music students from Thermopyles camp are playing in the stunning Megaro Mousikis Athinon: the biggest and most famous theater in Athens. They are participating in a big festival that hosts 2500 people from all over Greece. They will cherish this memory of the performance in the most beautiful concert hall in Athens and look back on an amazing day full of love, after working towards this event for months.

After conducting music classes in the Eleonas camp for a couple of years, we had to part from this location in the city of Athens. Residents of the camp were transferred and the reception center was closed. We were able to teach and share until the end, so our students could take music with them to cherish and develop at the next stop in their journey.

June – Sounds of Change and Community Concert Malakasa

The organization Sounds of Change provided a training to the whole team where the teachers and therapists could develop their skills. Educating, developing, reflecting and improving and key elements to a successful program, so we're always eager to get fresh input. The days were filled with team building, exploring new musical ideas, music making, songwriting, trauma-informed practice and sharing expertise.

As the summer was near, our students sparkled in a special concert in Malakasa camp. All the children worked incredibly hard to give their all in this

end-of-the-school-year performance, supported by the IOM. A beautiful crowd of friends and family were present to show their support. These concerts give mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters the chance to be proud and for the students to feel accomplishment. The community sang along to some of the popular Afghani songs and enjoyed the guitar, piano, violin and cello music.

July – Trauma Training

As mentioned earlier, investing in the skills and expertise is an ongoing process. This month we were joined by Lisa Beritzhoff and Carole Christensen, a psychoanalyst and psychotherapist from San Francisco, USA. Sustaining the psychological well-being of caregivers is essential in delivering sustainable quality program, which is why Lisa and Carole have been offering a regular reflective space to our team.

August – Collaboration with School for All

By performing in Greek high schools with our students we draw attention to migration and integration. It is a beautiful opportunity to create new connections. In this way, we expand our impact from within the camp to the local community. That's why the students and team are preparing for the upcoming school year and performances with the project School for All.

September – Performances at Welcommon Hostel

Every month we team up with Welcommon Hostel in Athens for a concert night. This hostel provides sustainable tourism: everyone is welcome, including refugees or people who can't find a place to stay.

Connect by Music students from Malakasa camp come to Welcommon Hostel to perform. New musicians join the concert every time, giving our students a chance to broaden their horizons, get out of the camp, play with different musicians and practice performing. Community at its best!

October – Solidarity with Ukrainian refugees

The Connect by Music students had a beautiful opportunity to give hope and joy to children in a similar situation; the refugees from Ukraine. The embassy of the USA organized a special summercamp for the Ukrainian children in the area of Lamia. By expressing our solidarity and recognizing

the similarities between the kids, we showed how much is possible through investing in music education.

November – State visit of the Dutch King and Queen to Greece

Connect by Music was a proud part of the program of the official state visit to Greece. The Dutch King and Queen enjoyed a performance of the Connect by Music students, where the children played Arabic, Greek, Dutch and Argentinian songs with all their hearts. In this touching concert the necessity and joy of music were both visible.

December – Christmas Concerts and Visit of the Dutch Embassy

Our students made it a special holiday season by spreading their warm wishes through music in many occasions. Their heartwarming playing led to some special invitations. They played for the Cardinal of Lamia and gave a concert at the Presidential Palace for the President of Greece.

The Ambassador of The Netherlands spent an afternoon with us in the refugee camp of Thermopyles. As a follow up on the Connect by Music performance at the State Visit in November, she listened to the stories of our students and their families. The families were thankful, as they felt seen.

4. Making Impact

4.1. Music as a tool

“Music is therapy. Music moves people. It connects people in ways that no other medium can. It pulls heart strings. It acts as medicine.” – Macklemore

Connect by Music responds to the need for psychosocial care by offering its program from the moment people arrive in Greece. Because this intervention is non-verbal, it can be successfully applied in an often uncertain and restless environment, in contrast to more conventional mental care. Music is used a tool for improvement and change. Connect by Music takes on the challenge of providing mental support to people at the earliest possible stage in locations where this is often challenging. The program builds bridges between

communities that are otherwise distant from each other. Engaging different groups of people, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, ages and genders, is a core element of the Connect by Music program.

4.2 The Connect effect

The Connect by Music teachers and therapists respond to the needs of every individual. In response to the difficulties the students are facing, focus is put on self-care, relaxation, affect regulation, coping hope or pain relief. Within the program we see anxiety and depressive complaints in children, but also developmental disorders and self-harm. With participation in the music program, students get the chance to recover and develop. Children and adolescents are given the opportunity to express themselves through music and learn how to listen. Valuable assets like concentration, social skills and cognitive functions improve greatly. These are important qualities that they desperately need in their new society. A direct consequence of the intervention is that our students will adapt quicker to the new living environment they're in or they're moving towards. On the long term; less care is required for this specific target group in their new environment, creating positive social and economic effects. Connect by Music has successfully performed several programs with unaccompanied minors on Lesvos and included them in the regular programs in the reception centers on the mainland. A special intervention for this vulnerable group has proven to show positive results on their mental health.

4.3 Method

Connect by Music creates sustainable relations and effects by seeing the students on a regular basis. Using a community-based approach, the program not only reaches students in the classroom, but also spreads its power more widely. Because of this, Greek officials regularly request that Connect by Music expands its activities to more locations. As we noted before, the reach of the program goes beyond the population we work with. By organizing concerts outside the shelter locations, we strengthen ties with the local population and contribute to integration, acceptance and a reduction of xenophobia within the Greek community. After participating in our program for a limited amount of time, most students are already capable of participating in these concerts. The

program is designed to be as inclusive as possible. All levels can join in, even without any prior musical experience. The method is designed to provide positive reinforcement within each session, motivating students to continue to develop and grow.

When students show motivation and join us for a longer period of time, they receive an instrument so they're able to practice at home. By integrating playing music in their daily lives, the students are able to continue recreating the positive effects outside of the Connect by Music sessions. Whenever they move on from the shelter location, they take this knowledge with them and can motivate others in their direct surroundings. The Connect by Music team is trained in the specific trauma-sensitive working methods, and is implementing a specific teaching method including multicultural repertoire. By including songs from the cultural heritage of the students, we foster a sense of belonging, safety, recognition and pride. It's incredibly motivating and rewarding to be able to be fully emerged in music from your home country. By including teaching methods and musical elements such as improvisation, songwriting, composing and singing, the children and adolescents develop a greater sense of ownership and ability to open up. Not only do the students develop better communication with their peers, their attitude towards other groups and challenges in life improves. Connect by Music has a strong focus on Social Emotional Learning, where students are encouraged to develop the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success.

4.4 Child Protection

Connect by Music provides a safe place within a troubled environment. From this basis, the Connect by Music Child Protection Policy shapes the protection and developmental needs of children. Connect by Music's specialists work with the same children almost every day and are embedded in the local community through this intensive presence. As a result, psychosocial problems and unsafe situations are identified and tackled at an early stage. By combining psychosocial care for children and young people with attention for caregivers and other adults in the immediate environment, we also improve their well-being and their ability to provide care and support to the children on a broader level. Through collaboration with families, communities, local organizations

and authorities, the program offers an effective intervention that enables children and young people to develop their resilience and become stronger in life.

4.5. Programs

4.5.1. Malakasa

The population of Malakasa has fluctuated over the years, ranging between 900 and 1500 residents living there, coming from Afghanistan and Iran mostly. In February 2022, living conditions were improved as people were moved into isoboxes with more facilities.

There are no educational programs inside the camp because, legally, refugee children are entitled to go to Greek Public School, which happens only for fewer than half, meaning that half the children in the camp are left without any access to education. Connect by Music represents the only access to education, creativity, and monitored recreation.

4.5.2. Thermopyles

Thermopyles is a small refugee camp with capacity for approximately 300 residents coming from Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan, Kuwait, and Palestine. It's an old hotel from the 1960s and therefore a building, where each family has a room of their own.

The camp is isolated, far away from the closest village. The only actors operating in the camp are IOM, Solidarity Now, Happy Caravan, and Connect by Music. Once more, Connect by Music, alongside Happy Caravan, becomes one of the only two educational and recreational spaces for children in the camp.

4.5.3. Eleonas

Eleonas hosts approximately 1,500 refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. They live in over 300 prefabricated housing units and tents that are set up and tore down regularly. This camp was closed in May of 2022, ending the Connect by Music program on this location.

4.5.4. Lesvos

The island of Lesvos has been one of the ports for massive landings since

2015. After the devastating fire in camp Mora in summer 2020, we continued to provide music education and music therapy in Kara Tepe Camp. This camp hosts families with recognized vulnerabilities. After the closing of Kara Tepe in April 2021, part of the team continued working in the programs on the mainland of Greece.

4.6. Connect by Music in Numbers

In 2021 and 2022, Connect by Music...

- Supported hundreds of people on a daily basis
- Reached thousands of people with the power of music
- Gifted hundreds of guitars to students
- Added 65 new songs to the repertoire
- Participated in 28 concerts
- Received donations from several benefit concerts
- Implemented 10 volunteers in the program
- Trained 8 assistant teachers inside the camp
- Celebrated its 5-year existence

5. Child Houses

Connect by Music is the mother organisation of the registered non-governmental and non-profit Child Houses. Child Houses prime focus is providing humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) living in conflict areas in North- West Syria.

In April 2020, after opening its first emergency shelter for unaccompanied and separated children in North-West Syria, Child Houses witnessed the broken institutionalized care system for UASC in Syria, and as a result, the severe gap of support for these children. Child Houses seeks to not only fill this gap, but to be a pilot for change in the way UASC are cared for through its alternative care system.

Since the start, Child Houses has been able to protect 401 children who became victims of the longlasting conflict in NW Syria and helped them find new foster parents or reunite them with their family.