



FA BENE

SECTOR

Social and employment services, community action for social inclusion

COUNTRY

Italy

LEAD ORGANISATION

FA BENE, partner of [Caritas Europa](#), the network of Caritas organisations on the European continent

CONTACT

Tiziana Ciampolini, Caritas Torino, ciampolini@s-nodi.org

fa bene. 

 **caritas europa**

DESCRIPTION

FA BENE is a project launched in 2013 in Turin and meant to challenge the widespread view that charity is the best method to solve social problems, rather than promoting systematic engagement of the community against poverty.

The project works as follows: quality fresh food donated by stall sellers is distributed by logistics operators – who have experienced unemployment or exclusion from the labour market – to families that are experiencing economic difficulties. The families receiving fresh food packages agree to support the community by providing dedicated activities listed in a signed 'reciprocity pact'. More specifically, they commit themselves to deliver at least 20 hours of activities per month in their

community. This mechanism helps to build a network of meaningful relationships and supports integration processes. There is no charge for the beneficiaries, but they must agree to the terms of the reciprocity pact; older people or people with disabilities who benefit from this service, however, are not bound to sign it.

The establishment of this new programme against poverty is based on the observation that social intervention is more likely to bring positive results when it involves different local actors in the various phases of the project, and guarantees an outcome in terms of both social and economic added value. This is why FA BENE aims to build a sense of community and positive relationships between all people directly or indirectly involved in the project, through exchange of goods and services but

also of skills, time, and non-material resources.

Moreover, the project supports refuse reduction plans and food waste prevention programmes by promoting responsible use of food resources.

So far, FA BENE has been funded by Caritas Italiana and the local Caritas Torino, by grants from a bank foundation, and contributions from public institutions at various levels. Essential contributions to the FA BENE project come from donations in kind – mostly food – coming from actively engaged citizens, and from activities carried out by volunteers.

A SOCIAL INVESTMENT APPROACH

The objective of FA BENE is to build innovative community welfare models, by replacing traditional charity-based assistance approaches with co-ownership-based models, empowering all actors involved.

The concept of reciprocity is therefore essential in the project. Food represents a vehicle towards the establishment of reciprocal support actions; those who receive food enter a 'refund' process for the benefit of the whole community. They are not merely regarded as people in need, but also as a resource, eager to share their skills and time with the community. In this way, families, market sellers, FA BENE operators, and the community as a whole become both contributors and beneficiaries. This has had a strong immediate impact on the behaviour of beneficiaries in terms of

increasing their cognitive abilities, level of well-being, and self-esteem.

This also positively affects employment inclusion, since some activities conducted as part of the reciprocity pact have led to job offers or the development of a network that has later resulted in new employment opportunities. Moreover, logistics operators hired by FA BENE are people who have been excluded from the labour market in the past. Last but not least, the local economy is also revitalised, and market sellers benefit from increased sales of fresh food as customers are able to buy extra food to donate to users of the FA BENE service.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Research carried out by the Centre for Research in Arts and Economics (CREARE) Foundation of the University of Rotterdam has found that the FA BENE project has increased the social skills of service users, had a consistent immediate economic impact on the logistics operators by generating new income, and has fostered growth in sales for market sellers. It has also generated a feeling of belonging to a community for the beneficiaries and promoted solidarity among all actors involved.

The FA BENE project has brought many other tangible results. About 200 families have been supported in the five neighbourhood markets currently active, each of them receiving the equivalent of €1,400 worth of food every year, and providing reciprocity pact activities for at least 20 hours per month. Even

more importantly, an average of 80% of the families leave the project after having overcome the difficulties they experienced and having restored confidence in their own skills.

LOOKING FORWARD

In order to promote the sustainability of this programme, the FA BENE project intends to create a social enterprise with the goal of co-financing socially-responsible businesses. The idea is that customers buying goods through a FA BENE web-based platform would automatically support FA BENE social shares. All revenues generated by the web-based platform would be channelled to create additional employment and carry out activities in the local community.

The FA BENE project will also be extended to other municipalities on the outskirts of Turin, with the support of the city, local communities and market sellers' unions. Although the project is still in the test phase, many large national and international cities have shown interest in the initiative and are eager to experiment with it in their own territories, including Milan, Florence, Catania, Trieste, Barcelona, Marseille, and Skopje.