

A more human, human being

An unlikely source of inspiration led **Sabina Sozzani** to volunteer at Casa del Giovane

It all started with a book. Around the middle of 2020, in some of the darkest months of the pandemic in Italy, **Sabina Sozzani** came across a book titled *Alice e le regole del bosco* (which roughly translates as “Alice and the wood’s rules”). This book was one of the reasons that Sabina chose to volunteer with Casa del Giovane, a non-profit organization founded to help young people suffering from drug addiction, in Pavia, Italy.

The book tells the story of **Alice**, a seventeen-year-old girl who has a seemingly normal life, but feels different, out of place, and misunderstood. This all changes when she meets Samuele, who has a bad reputation for going to “the Wood” or Rogoredo, which is one of the biggest drug dens in Northern Italy, located in Milan. She falls in love with him and he leads her to the Wood. She ends up becoming addicted to heroin, but tries desperately to make her two parallel lives, that of a normal girl and that of a drug addict, work.

Continued on next page



► **Sabina Sozzani**, a field product specialist for the Reproductive Health specialty in EMEA, prepares food at Casa Garibaldi and Casa San Martino community center.

“During the lockdown months, people kept on saying that a better humanity would rise from this health emergency. I thought this was my little way to really become a more human, human being, through helping others where I could, especially now that my business travels are less frequent.”

– **Sabina Sozzani**, field product specialist for the Reproductive Health specialty in EMEA

EMPLOYEE FEATURES

Continued from previous page

"Reading this book was painful and shocking at times," Sabina said. "The Wood is less than an hour away from my hometown of Pavia. I think that it made me realize that once drugs get hold of someone, they never let go."

According to Sabina, entering this Wood is easy, but getting out is not. Alice tries to escape on her own, but is unsuccessful.

"Luckily she finds the outstretched hand of one of the many volunteers who, against all respectable logic, continue to lean over the edge of the abyss, offering a handhold," Sabina said.

The lifeline was thrown by **Simone Feder**, who not only changed Alice's life, but is also a psychologist and the coordinator of the youth and addiction area at Casa del Giovane.

After finishing the book, Sabina reached out to Simone.

A more human, human being

Casa del Giovane was founded in the late 1970s by a priest named **Don Boschetti**. After Pavia began to experience a heroin phenomenon, he realized that there was a very pressing need to do something to support both the community and the families of those—like Alice's—who were dealing with drug addiction.

In the following years, Boschetti's community evolved into different projects and sub-sections, in parallel with the needs of the evolving social situation in Pavia. They founded a house to welcome young adults with multiple substance addictions and a shelter for mothers escaping from sex-trafficking or domestic violence. Simone joined the organization and founded a group of volunteers that still go into Alice's Wood on Wednesday evenings and, depending on the season, bring food, warm clothes, and commodities.

They also have two sub-chapters, Casa Gariboldi and Casa San



▲ Some of the minors that stay at the center participating in a soccer match. Sabina sometimes attends these matches to show her support (above). The entrance to the Casa Gariboldi center (right).



Martino, where they take in unaccompanied migrant minors, young first-offenders on probation, and youths who have experienced domestic violence. This is where Sabina goes to volunteer on Saturdays.

In the weeks after her first conversation with Simone, Sabina knew that they would need to understand where and how she could be helpful. They repeatedly assessed her by asking questions about her availability and intentions. One of the major issues that these organizations face is the lack of consistency from volunteers. The guests at the community Sabina was looking to join have trust issues, so the management wanted to make sure that she was reliable and motivated.

"I have become determined to dedicate some of my time to volunteering and that's an idea that

came out of the pandemic," Sabina said. "During the lockdown months, people kept on saying that a better humanity would rise from this health emergency. I thought this was my little way to really become a more human, human being, through helping others where I could, especially now that my business travels are less frequent."

A bit of this, a bit of that

Sabina volunteers at the community center on Saturdays, between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm. She helps with cleaning and she cooks with the minors that are staying at the center.

“Food is always there on the table for me and for my family. We are free to eat whatever we want. We can even go out for dinner tonight. But these boys and their stories pushed me to think about things we take for granted, they are—in a way—expanding my point of view in life. In a nutshell, they are giving me so much more than I am giving them.”

— Sabina Sozzani

“It is not much, I think. I am basically spending time with them,” Sabina said. “I keep them company, I listen to their stories, and bit by bit, a relationship is formed with them. I become part of their everyday tasks, and sometimes I attend their soccer matches at the local sports center.”

In addition, she uses her professional knowledge of both English and training dynamics to support the center by interpreting, translating, and analyzing clinical studies and medical texts. In 2022, the community plans to provide their guests with general clinical training on sexually-transmitted diseases, and basic sex and pregnancy education too.

These are all areas in which Sabina can help, although it is not an easy experience, or at least it is not easy at first with all guests. The adolescent boys at the center are going through a difficult age and they are either alone in Italy or far away from their families and friends. Some of them do not even realize that their alternative could mean prison.

“I feel that my boys, as I came to call them, are given an opportunity to secure some sort of better adult life,” Sabina said. “The community provides school education for some



▲ The center's mantra, which translates to, "If you don't love life, you cannot donate it."

of them, while others are introduced to work life through in-house practical workshops that aim to develop different skills, such as gardening, cooking, carpentry, and so on. Local businesses get involved too and sometimes they end up hiring these boys.”

The things we take for granted

Another source of inspiration for Sabina was Cook's 38th & Sheridan Project in Northeast Indianapolis, where food access was the main problem.

When Sabina cooks for, or with, the boys at the center, she realizes

that we often take for granted what we have regular access to, such as food. Some of the guests at the community center did not have access to food supplies in their home countries. Others, in slightly easier circumstances, complain that they cannot freely decide what they can have for lunch or dinner.

However, in both cases, one of the main objectives of the center is to instill or develop a sense of community by cooking and eating together. Groceries are locally sourced, seasonal, and fresh, and account for all religious and non-religious needs. Food also represents a second chance for the boys, as well as a means to learn how to live together and develop collaboration within the house.

“I never thought of food in this way, before joining the volunteering center,” Sabina said. “Food is always there on the table for me and for my family. We are free to eat whatever we want. We can even go out for dinner tonight. But these boys and their stories pushed me to think about things we take for granted; they are, in a way, expanding my point of view in life. In a nutshell, they are giving me so much more than I am giving them.”

• **Vanessa Marengo** (Vanessa.Marengo@CookMedical.com) is a Reimbursement manager based in Italy.

“What is your story?”

What are your **hobbies**? Are you involved in a **cool group**?
Do you do **volunteer** work or **donate your time** to helping your **community**?

We are always looking for stories like these.

Send your ideas to
Angiogram@CookMedical.com.