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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ALBANIA

SUCCESS STORY

Trafficked Children Get a Fresh Start

Organizations educate children about trafficking and help victims heal



Photo: USAID/Stephanie Pepi

An elementary school student reads a brochure about the dangers of trafficking.

“Dritan,” who was 6 years old the first time he was trafficked, now lives in a secure apartment and is training to be an auto mechanic.

Telling Our Story

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“Dritan” has begged, stolen, washed car windows and sold everything from flowers to cigarette lighters on the streets of Greek cities. And on days when he did not earn \$60 or \$70, he was left hungry, made to sleep on the street and beaten.

Dritan is one of hundreds of Albanian children who have been trafficked, mostly to Greece and Italy where they are forced to beg or work. Older girls are often forced into prostitution, while boys may get involved in organized crime, selling drugs, or running their own trafficking rings.

The children are typically Roma, or Gypsy, from poor families who live in cramped quarters with no running water or power. Their families are often approached by a neighbor who says that they will pay the parents a monthly income and that the child will have a good life. In reality, children are mistreated and made to live on the streets, while parents rarely get any money.

Dritan was 6 years old the first time he was trafficked to Greece and spent the next eight years living on the streets — and trying to get home. He eventually was able to take a bus back to Albania, where he was referred to Tjeter Vizion, a USAID-supported organization that helps trafficked children start living a normal life. Some are reunited with their families. Those who have suffered trauma are placed under the organization’s legal custody. Tjeter Vizion runs a residential center, day care center and secure apartments for trafficking victims and other at-risk youth. Staff members help younger residents with their school work while older children are trained in a vocation like plumbing or hair-dressing. Now 14, Dritan has lived in a Tjeter Vizion secure apartment for six months and is training to be a car mechanic.

USAID also supports Transnational Action Against Child Trafficking (TACT), an organization that works to teach elementary school children about the dangers of trafficking before they are placed at risk. TACT visits schools to show testimonial videos of trafficked children and distribute pamphlets about kids who were made to beg on the street. Operating in half of Albania’s districts, TACT has reached some 25,000 children with its anti-trafficking message.