



Mobile Library



JANUARY - JUNE 2024

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

BASIC STATS

SESSIONS: 165

Our sessions are adapted to the need and requests of our library users. Sessions can include children's activities, language practise, informal legal support, music sessions and endless games of Jenga and Uno.

LOANS: 632

125 Arabic, 116 English, 69 Farsi, 46 Turkish

RETURNS: 440

Almost 70% of all books are returned. Not as much as we would like, but within normal parameters. We aim for 75% returns rate, but rarely get it.

SITES VISITED EACH WEEK: 7

Victoria Square, Notara autonomous space, Oinofyta camp, Malakasa camp, Ritsona camp camp, Thiva, Korinthos community centre - twice a month, alternating with Lavrio self-organised camp.




LIBRARY SESSIONS SUMMARY:

Oinofyta: Following our successful community day at Oinofyta just before new year we have had some lovely sessions here crafting with the children and adults. We were treated several times to the wonders of stuffed vine leaves and we also had a bake-off for one of our youngest library users birthdays - we counted at least 5 different types of sweet or cake.



Malakasa: we were able to loan our kurdish saz to friends inside the camp which stayed there for several months until they left in March. They said that being able to play their music sustained them through difficult times and they were very happy that they had encountered the library not just for the books and the musical instruments, but also for the friendship. Many winter evenings were spent playing inside the library van and dancing Yazidi-style outside of it. One friend left us his guitar so we are able to bring even more instruments to our sessions. Malakasa remains the place we consistently loan the most books - almost 200 this past 6 months although, as at every camp, outreach remains a real challenge and we are completely reliant on people hearing about us through word of mouth or through chance encounter.



Ritsona: loans remain reasonably high here and we have also been able to support people with their legal status through collaborating with a caseworker of Refugee Legal Service. We have managed to connect better with Somali and Portuguese speakers of the camp as we enriched our library collection with new books in these languages. It is here that we are slowly perfecting our skills in Uno and Jenga.

Thiva: Many library users travelled onwards during this period, and when we changed our timings to not coincide with Rosa moving safe space it did have an effect on how many women and children were visiting. However it is the only way we can manage to timetable all our sessions in the week and slowly, despite the heat, we have built up a really beautiful session here which again has revolved around music. Recently we have ended up sitting with friends from Kurdistan and Sudan discussing life, history, philosophy, drawing, playing music and eating pizza until 10.30pm at night. We loan books here in smaller numbers, but to diverse groups within the camp and in many languages including Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and English.

Korinthos: we started visiting the Cheirapsíes community centre which is a 10 minute walk from the camp at the start of March. We have enjoyed meeting new people and loaning a small number of books as well as supporting people with legal information which is otherwise incredibly difficult to access. In April we brought a travelling musician and gave a very sweet mini-concert which was warmly received.

Lavrio: After the forced eviction of the main camp last July we kept in contact with former residents and also stayed informed as to the situation in the upper camp which remained open. In March we began to visit every couple of weeks as a way of reaching out in solidarity to the Kurdish community there and we have loaned books in Kurmanji, Sorani and Turkish and drunk many cups of tea and coffee. Most recently we engaged the artistic skills of the women there with bracelet-making which was a huge hit, and last week we learned with a couple of the residents how to play draughts/backgammon/tavla - we suspected that they were letting us win every time.



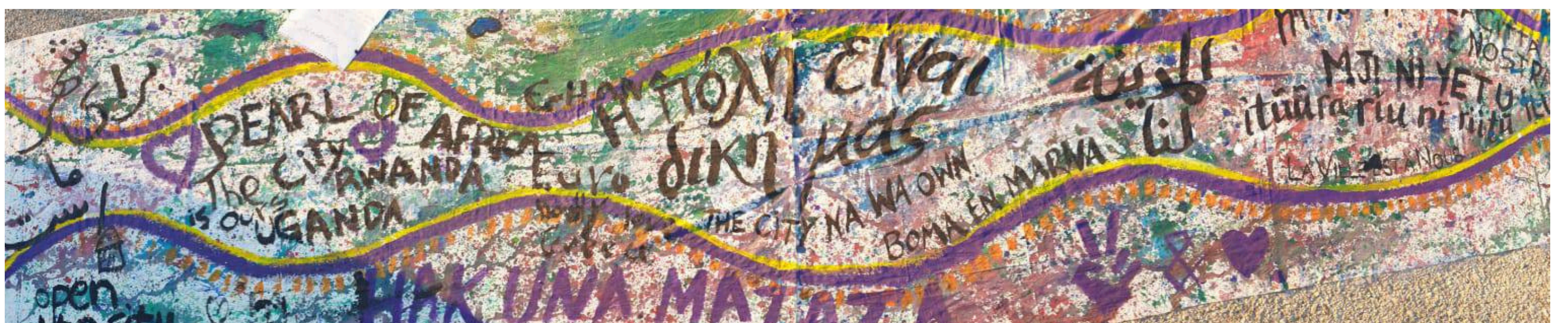
Some of the handiwork of our keen bracelet-makers



City Sessions: Our Monday city sessions involve a weekly visit to Victoria Square followed by a children's session of book reading at Notara autonomous space in Exarcheia. We have seen the square become home to many families released from the closed facilities on the islands and told to come to Athens with no accommodation made available to them. We supported one family to find emergency accommodation when they first arrived and saw them almost every week until they managed to get travel documents to move on.

OTHER NEWS/ACTIVITIES

In May the library participated in the first ever Kypseli Mundial, a football tournament that involved local Athens teams including from African community associations such as Nigera, Côte D'ivoire, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and many more. We were also surprised by an impromptu visit to the library by the vice mayor of Athens. It was a lovely weekend to make connections and see friends old and new. We are getting ready to participate in the Athens anti-racist festival taking place between 5th and 7th July - another opportunity to connect between Athens-based solidarity movements and our work in the camps.



The collaborative banner that we created at Kypseli Mundial saying in many many languages: the city is ours.

In March/April we ran a campaign which managed to raise around £2000 for the library.

In June it was time for the library van's technical inspection. It turns out that the van needed quite a few repairs and it remained in the Garage for one week. The bill was steep, but now we are safe to be on the roads for the next two years.

Book acquisitions: We have been kept busy with new book arrivals in many languages, including Farsi, Arabic, Somali, Portugese, Turkish and French. We continue to be on the look out constantly for sources of good quality books in any language that is requested. Our next challenge - Malinka!



PLAN FOR THE REST OF 2024

In August the library will take its annual break of one month. Activities will re-commence at the start of September.

Because of the unexpected gap in funding that has become apparent, the coordinators are now focusing on trying to find more sustainable sources of income for the basic library activities. Part of this is to set in motion the opening of a Greek branch of ECHO which will hopefully make it easier for us to apply for European and Greek-based funding. The process takes a while and costs us around 90euros per month for Greek accounting and around 700 to tax authorities per year. We are hoping that it will be worth it.

Many grassroots groups in Athens have struggled these past years to support their work financially and have been forced to close. The situation in Greece is no longer in the news and many are not aware of it. Part of what we want to do is continue to advocate and raise awareness of what is happening at the borders of Europe. As such we are happy to give talks and information sessions to any groups that are interested. We are passionate about the library's work and the role it has to play here at the fringes of the camps and we want the situation in Greece to be considered in the wider context of Fortress Europe and the militarisation of EU borders.

