

## The UNICEF's "Pigotta Project" (Rag Doll Project)

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Interview with Maria Luisa Blasi, "Pigotta" project manager of the Provincial Committee of UNICEF Perugia, Italy. Blasi explained to us the aim of the project she is supervising: "Progetto Pigotta."

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Since its creation by the United Nations General Assembly on December 11, 1946, [UNICEF](#) [3] has been working to provide long-term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries, bringing emergency food, educational and healthcare services.

UNICEF operates through its National Committees located in 36 [industrialized] countries worldwide, each established as an independent local non-governmental organization

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In Italy, the headquarters of the [Italian UNICEF Committee](#) [4] is in Rome, however it operates in the National territory through its Regional Committees (20) and Provincial Committees (104), the Committee of UNICEF Perugia is one of them.

i-italy had the occasion to interview Maria Luisa Blasi, "Pigotta" project manager of the Provincial Committee of UNICEF Perugia, Italy. Blasi explained to us the aim of the project she is supervising in Perugia: "[Progetto Pigotta](#)" [5] (Pigotta Project).

The word "Pigotta" comes from the Lombardy region dialect and it means "a rag doll," otherwise called in the Italian language as "bambola di pezza." Blasi explained to i-Italy: "Every Region of Italy calls rag dolls by a different nickname, in Lombardy as I mentioned before it is called "pigotta," in Perugia the "buccia," in Rome the "pupazza." Every name comes from a local tradition. "

The Pigotta Project was created by Jo Garceau. Garceau is an American painter from Massachusetts, she has been a volunteer for UNICEF since 1986, and resides in Cinisello Balsamo, Province of Milan, since 1961. After years of collaboration with the UNICEF Regional Committee Lombardy, in 1988 she decided to start a project in Italy, that connected her to her childhood, and it is the project "Rag Doll." Garceau named the doll using the Lombardian dialect nickname of "Pigotta" and called the project "Progetto Pigotta"(Pigotta Project).

"The Pigotta Project's objective is to create rag dolls in schools with the collaboration of grandparents, mothers and dads with the intent to do a research on old local traditions of Italian regions and of other countries in the world. However, at our Committee in Perugia the "Pigotta Project" is open not only to schools of any level, but also to University students, foreign visitors, courses for continuing education (Università della terza età), socio-cultural centers and private citizens who want to support the project.

The rag doll created is going to be exposed in a UNICEF stand with many other dolls and anyone can "adopt" one for a minimum of 20 euro choosing the one he/she likes most. I talk about "adoption" because any doll represents a child in an underdeveloped country and with the money we receive from the adoption of a doll we can offer a child vaccinations for the 6 most dangerous childhood diseases such as polio, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles, diphtheria, pertussis and where needed also a malaria's kit. Every doll has an ID card with her name, weight, heights, nationality, color of eyes and the name and address of the creator attached to her neck, so those who adopt the rag doll can contact the creator," Blasi explained.

Blasi has been in charge and deeply devoted to the "Pigotta Project" since 1998. It has been extraordinary how her deep commitment to the initiative has made the project to expand also in foreign countries and mostly in the US. She has created a strong collaboration with the local schools in Perugia of Umbria Institute and the University for Foreigners of Perugia to let American and other international students participate in the "Pigotta Project."

The rag doll classes for foreign students started 5 years ago. The American students involved are mostly coming from Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, California and Connecticut.

Blasi said "I was very happy of our results inside the Italian schools and institutions, but at the same time I was feeling something was missing. In our global world, it is beautiful to open up to other cultures and that is why I decided to open the doors of this important project to foreign students that are in Perugia for a semester. I created, thanks to the collaboration with Umbria Institute and The University for Foreigners, rag doll classes called "Laboratorio Pigotte," where we create dolls and at the same time we share stories, cultures and traditions. In these months of work together we become a family and we learned a lot from each other's traditions and cultures. I have been an elementary teacher for many years and I know of the importance of teaching our tradition and culture and at the same time learning from the others. Therefore, I decided that our classes must include a cultural aspect that the students would bring back to the US. I took out the geographic map of Italy and explained the different traditions of the Italian Regions. I also showed them videos of the UNICEF work in underdeveloped countries and explained to them the importance of the work they do while creating a pigotta. We exchanged so many experiences, ideas and customs. It is a wonderful



cultural exchange. The beauty of these meetings is the atmosphere of friendliness and cordiality that makes the aim of saving lives even more beautiful."

Many are the nice stories Blasi told i-Italy about the process of creation of the rag dolls and of their adoption. "An American tourist adopted for her Italian-American boyfriend a rag doll representing a Milan soccer player made by the children from middle school. Once in America she decided to write back to the children that made the doll. You cannot believe the joy of the children to know that somebody in America had adopted their doll and they had saved a life of a child. It is extremely beautiful to know that your work is giving hope and saving many children and families."

Blasi added: "I still remember a sweet student from Vermont. Last year she created an adorable doll wearing a red winter sweater. At the end of the project she decided to adopt her doll and give it as a gift to her family. She told me she would have put the doll as Christmas decoration outside of the house door within a Christmas wreath. This Christmas I thought of her and I was imagining the little dolly in the beautiful snowy Vermont, and I felt so good as a volunteer for this important project, we save lives of many children and at the same time we have the chance to enrich ourselves and enrich others exchanging our cultures."

"I will never forget the beautiful experience with three California students from Chapman University: Gianna, Haleee and Kady. We created the doll rag classes upon their request. The result was amazing, they did a great job and two of their dolls were adopted by American Tourists vacationing in Perugia. Their University has also sent to our Committee a generous donation," Blasi concluded.

Blasi's "Pigotta Project" in Perugia with the support of the committee of UNICEF Perugia has created a wonderful atmosphere enriching a humanitarian activity with a wonderful cultural exchange that creates a wonderful unified humanitarian and cultural bridge between the US and Italy.

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/3pigotta1374206871.jpg>

[2] <http://www.i-italy.org/node/36358>

[3] <http://www.unicefusa.org/?gclid=CN72rb-DtbgCFRGg4AodnhMAig>

[4] [http://www.unicef.it/italia/regioni/province/home.htm?id\\_gpl=40&id\\_sezione=58](http://www.unicef.it/italia/regioni/province/home.htm?id_gpl=40&id_sezione=58)

[5] <http://www.unicef.it/doc/347/pigotta-la-bambola-che-salva-una-vita.htm>