

INTERNATIONAL
FUNDR**ISING**
CONFERENCE SAN FRANCISCO, CA
APRIL 30 - MAY 2, 2017

ALBERGO ETICO

The Albergo Etico, a professional cooperative association, was founded in 2006, thanks to an enlightened group of friends: professionals operating in different fields such as food service, tourism and architecture; and was later supported by journalists, commercial directors and bankers who wished to make their own contributions to improve the society they live in.

The Association is now a lively organization, in constant growth; for example, it is a pioneer in providing personal and professional enrichment for young people with Down syndrome and, others with intellectual and emotional disabilities.

The Albergo Etico's mission

To create the conditions for which people with Down syndrome and other intellectual and emotional disabilities, can exercise their rights of active citizenship, therefore contributing – as any other citizen – to the social and economic development of the society they are part of.

What Albergo Etico does

Concretely, the project is based on the development of the necessary competences to exercise active citizenship as well as to raise awareness, particularly in the hospitality and food service industries – where they mainly operate – bringing trainees to employment.

The exercise of active citizenship is possible when people can achieve personal autonomy, functioning capably in city spaces, using public means of transport locally, regionally and nationally; competence in communicating with others and living as independently as possible; and in developing workplace competence.

Raising awareness among employers is aimed at revolutionizing the perspective of hiring a disabled worker, i.e. passing from considering such employment as a burden to a resource instead.

Why Albergo Etico exists:

- to develop the skills of active citizenship
- to create specific workplace opportunity

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How Albergo Etico works:

Through “*Metodo Download*” (Download Method), a personally customized process that focuses on the individual’s existing cognitive and other resources through:

- training in an organized environment, in collaboration with the Scuola Alberghiera Colline Astigiane
- training in the workplace at the Albergo Etico in Asti and the Tacabanda restaurant
- training in how to use public transport
- learning how to live independently -- with progressive longer stays at the **Accademia dell’Indipendenza**

The commitment aims to give full value to people’s potential.

The challenges

Setting up the original project in Italy, the main challenge was to create a stable path, not just a one-shot program.

The theme of sustainability, then, was among the main worries of the Board, since the idea behind was in the direction of having a practical, realistic and manageable way to encourage the families of young people with Down syndrome to bring their children into the mainstream.

Accademia dell’Indipendenza

The first step after planning the **Accademia dell’Indipendenza** as a project has been setting up the fundraising strategy. Despite its century-long tradition of philanthropy, the Italian Third Sector has undergone a “renaissance” as public funding has been deeply cut, in the last two decades. This has resulted in a slow but permanent development of fundraising and its underlying cultural premises.

Fundraising Strategy

The national and global fundraising strategy developed for Albergo Etico was planned on a two-level approach: a broad-based membership; and outreach to small business, larger companies, clubs and foundations – which has provided the needed sustainability.

The starting point for international fundraising has been to develop an accurate mapping of possible constituencies in countries that might be interested – using Board dues for working trips abroad; using previous contacts; or simply identifying people with a known interest in nonprofit organizations supporting people with Down Syndrome.

Such activity takes a considerable amount of time but is necessary to define a strategy based on planning rather than on “let’s try and see.” This was a challenging concept for the Board to accept.

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However, the most challenging step prior to internationalization has been branding Albergo Etico in terms of mission, vision, clarity and understanding everywhere.

Three priorities based in our experience (and some tips)

The project first. Being focused on the project and its strengths and weaknesses, rather than just the context. The way each project is conceived strongly affects the fundraising strategy, which has to be managed by local staff. Suggesting what works in Italy was sometimes useful with the expansion of Albergo Etico, especially because it comes from a somewhat difficult context. But what really matters is having a clear idea of objectives and the related level of sustainability, on which a winning fundraising strategy depends.

Cultural background. International expansion requires a deep knowledge of the cultural background, as well knowledge of the specifics of the philanthropic sector in each country. This can be the most challenging aspect for those coming from outside the country, and the most time-consuming. It takes time to collect materials, reports and publications, but most of all to talk with locals – which, for us, first happened via Skype and e-mail. Sometimes we felt quite frustrated, other times we were confounded by unexpected difficulties – but each time active listening and patience proved the keys to success. Understanding the external environment through official reports, surveys, research from socio-economic bodies, foundations, and others, was also very helpful.

Relationships. It may be an obvious point, but useful to repeat: people donate because they are engaged in the stories of other people. In “our” case, they are the stories of Nicolò, Marcella, Stefano, Alex, Antonio and many, many more, now, from all over the world. When approaching a prospect, simply telling the story of the people who succeeded at Albergo Etico is the best way to engage other people. Fundraising is (always, luckily) a question of relationships: the time to build and nurture them, openly, sincerely and passionately.