

Seeing the Invisible

The Spes Program at the Brafa sports school (Barcelona, Spain) accompanies people who are “invisible” to society, affirming their dignity and offering them trust, support, and opportunity.

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Four years ago, Rubén was living in a tent on an empty lot in the Canyelles neighbourhood of Barcelona. A mix of hardship, bad luck, and a few poor decisions had led him into a precarious situation.

Then he discovered the Spes Program run by the Brafa Foundation – free football matches for people at risk of social exclusion – and showed up to it with a bicycle and a small trailer carrying all his belongings. The matches helped him reconnect with others, learn to trust, and feel accepted and valued.

Two years later, Rubén told the volunteers who run the program that he hoped to buy a scrap car to live in. “A great step forward!” they thought, and it was. Today he is saving to take a coaching course. He is excited by the prospect that it could lead to his first job.

Rubén is one of the people featured in a recent video released by the Brafa sports school to shine a light on the “invisible ones,” a term used to describe people without legal documentation, who are among the

most vulnerable groups in our society.

The video also features “Rüdiger,” a young man from Cameroon who arrived in Spain by boat. His real name is Issa Fofana, but his likeness to the Real Madrid defender earned him the nickname. Rüdiger lives in a Red Cross reception centre. He survives by collecting and selling scrap metal, and his dream is to obtain papers so he can work legally.

Mamary is another participant in the Spes program. He is fortunate because he already has papers and recently started working at a construction company. His job allows him to rent a room and send money back to his family in Mali. He first met Brafa three years ago while living on the streets. Now that he is employed, he volunteers in the program, which brings together around 60 people across two groups,

one in the morning and one in the afternoon, two days a week.

Over the years, the program coordinators have collaborated with over twenty third-sector entities. Working with others is always essential, particularly so when it comes to helping people in such precarious situations.

At Brafa, the first goal is to welcome people, listen, play sports, exchange experiences, rebuild, laugh, and talk. But the Spes program coordinators want to go further. They hope to help their participants regularize their legal status so they can work. The process is long and costly, but indispensable if the “invisible” are to become “visible” and enjoy the dignity they deserve. After all, *spes* means *hope*.

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