

Carmen Street, Brescia (Italy)

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S.Maria del Carmine



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In 1981, the Italian Marists moved into the quarter of Carmine. The diocese had just closed the imposing church of S. Maria del Carmine and was looking for somebody to care for it. The aim was not just to be the curators of a historic building, but to have a presence in this quarter with his particular needs and opportunities. After a time of looking and reflecting what they could realistically do, the decision was taken to focus on youth.

But how?

Rather than trying to help young people in trouble, the idea was to do something to help them avoid getting into trouble in the first place. The result is “Carmen Street”, a centre for young people. The centre is open to anybody, especially young people. It has evolved over the years, but a central emphasis has remained on bringing “ordinary” young people and the young people with difficulties and challenges together in the same place. They socialise together, engage in a variety of activities including, sometimes, gathering in the same space to get on with their homework.



Street acrobatics

Getting to know each other

It is not a “ghetto” for young people with problems, or for immigrants, or whatever. In 2014, around 200 young people came to the centre on a regular basis. Of these 70% were foreigners, belonging to 30 different nationalities. This is one of the features of Carmine – it’s a cultural and ethnic melting pot. The centre gives local Italian children and the children of immigrant families an opportunity to get to know each other and to become friends.



What's in a Name?

The mediaeval spaces that surround the ancient Carmelite church of S.Maria del Carmine echo to the sound of Italian, as the young people play games, study, plan activities, or simply talk. It's a simple formula, but it works well, and the centre has developed its own distinctive character.



A word on the name "Carmen Street". This came from some of the young people themselves. It's a play on words. "Carmen", in the dialect of Brescia, doesn't refer to the opera but to the quarter of Carmine itself. "Street" is, well, street, an English word imported and combined with the local expression to give the name a particular character to young local ears. It's local and global.