

Press Release

Promoting Healthy Nutrition and Eradicating Poverty: The work of Prolepsis Institute

Monday October 12, 2015 - The economic crisis has a severe impact on children's lives in Greece. Almost 50% of students, especially those residing in less-favored areas of the country are facing food insecurity. One out of six students is facing physical health problems and one out of four is facing emotional health problems. The prolonged socio-economic crisis is increasing the problem of food insecurity and enhances unhealthy eating habits. The Program "DIATROFI" supports families in need by providing free meals to students and educational activities on healthy nutrition.

The aforementioned conclusions have been presented at a Press Conference held by Prolepsis Institute on Monday October 12, 2015 in the University of Athens on the occasion of the World Food Day (October 16) and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (October 17). The Event was moderated by the journalist, Kostas Hardavellas. The press conference focused mainly on the the Program "DIATROFI" and the programs of Prolepsis Institute which focus on healthy nutrition, disease prevention and public health.

The Prolepsis Institute is running the Program "DIATROFI" since the school year 2012-13. The Program "DIATROFI" is a Food Aid & Promotion of Healthy Nutrition Program implemented in socioeconomically underprivileged areas of Greece for five consecutive years. The Program is managed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. 11 million meals have been offered so far to 450 schools and 75.000 students around Greece by the Program "DIATROFI". For the current school the Program "DIATROFI" will start running this week in schools of the prefectures of Attica, Thessaloniki, Imathia and in the region of Thrace. The resources gathered to date are sufficient for 100 schools and 7,500 students in total. However the applications of schools around Greece are 2,032 within the last month. This number is equivalent to approximately 250,000 students and is significant of the gravity of the situation.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF, www.SNF.org) is the founding donor of the Program since its launching and is supporting this year's Program with a donation of 2,5 million Euros in total. From this amount, 1 million Euros will be used directly for the needs of the Program while the rest will be given as matching funds. Thus for every 100,000 Euros gathered from other donors the SNF will be donating an equal amount of money.

The data gathered by the Prolepsis Institute during the year 2014-15 demonstrates in quantity and quality criteria the children's need: 53% of the children participating in the Program "DIATROFI" had been experiencing food insecurity while 21% had been facing food shortage. In addition, 64% of the participating families had at least one parent unemployed while 15% of them had no source of income. "The income of a middle class family has been reduced by 33%. The reductions along with expenditure cuts of 33% in the fields of health and education have lead 36% of the population to facing the danger of poverty or social exclusion. This has tremendous consequences in the lives of middle-class Greek families and especially in the lives of the families residing in areas mostly affected by the crisis: Hungry

children tend to have more school absences or drop out of school while the percentage of students who are repeatedly absent from school due to health problems reaches 18% for families who face food insecurity compared to children who come from food secure families. Students coming from food insecure families have difficulty in keeping up with their school work, 24% compared to 13% and have also a lower school performance, 22% to 10%. This problem, can deteriorate the cognitive abilities of children and affects exclusively the most socio-economically vulnerable parts of the population with huge long term consequences for the country's future" as stated by Athena Linos, Professor and Chair of Dept. of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics of the Athens Medical School and President of the Prolepsis Institute. Prof. Linos added: "We call everyone to join us in this fight: the state, institutes, associations and all citizens. We need help to avoid this risk and to support children in achieving their best but first and foremost to help them remain healthy".

According to the analysis of the data, collected by the Prolepsis Institute during the implementation of the Program for the school year 2014-2015, the benefits of the Program are multiple and significant to the children and their families. Food insecurity has been decreased by 10%, the number of students facing food shortage has also been decreased by 20% while 33% of the students have reached normal weight, 38% of students' physical health has been improved and 42% of students' mental health has been improved their.

In addition, the participation of all school students in the Program reinforces its dynamic spirit and makes it an integral part of the daily school life. The program has cultivated solidarity among students who have also acquired important knowledge on nutrition, it has strengthened schools' educational work and parent-teacher communication. Over 60% of parents have reported improvement of their children's school performance and decrease of absences and school drop-out.

At the Press Conference, the Program "Ef Dia...Trofin" which has been designed by the Prolepsis Institute and responds to the development of context, the production and the broad distribution of the National Nutritional Guides, has also been introduced. The National Dietary Guidelines are addressed to the adult population in general, women at the important periods of their lives (pregnancy, breast feeding and menopause), children, adolescents and the elderly. The main objective of the Guides is to contribute to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle based on contemporary scientific knowledge and making the best use of Greek traditional nutrition. The National Dietary Guidelines are accessible at the webpage www.diatrofikoiodigoi.gr

Other programs run by the Prolepsis Institute have been referred to at the conference, such as the program introduced in "Centers of Open Protection of the Elderly" on preventing accidents of older people at home, on preventing misuse of medicines and on improving health literacy of the elderly who along with the children are the most affected by the consequences of the prolonged crisis.

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The Institute of Preventive Medicine, Environmental and Occupational Health Prolepsis is a scientific non-profit organization, active in the field of medical research, health promotion, environmental and occupational health and has contributed at the improvement of the quality of life and of the health of the Greek and European citizens for the past 25 years.

For more information on the Program "DIATROFI" you can visit our websites <http://diatrofi.prolepsis.gr> and www.prolepsis.gr or contact Mr. Yannis Koutelidas at the number: 210- 6255700 (int. 120) or at the number: 6936631702.