

# [The Smile of the Child is threatened of dieing](#)

By Victoria Mindova ([http://www.grreporter.info/en/smile\\_child\\_threatened\\_dieing/4482](http://www.grreporter.info/en/smile_child_threatened_dieing/4482) )



The state appears powerless to protect the children's rights and health, but where the public system dies, various NGOs come to help. "Do you know what it means for a child to return home where the father has abused and harassed him, because the court's decision drags for three or four years?" This was the question that Kostadinos Giannopoulos asked reporters at a press conference about the difficulties of the non-governmental voluntary organization "The Smile of the Child". He is its director and founder, and it exists for 16 years already.

With exacerbation of the economic crisis, the financial problems also caught "The Smile of the Child". At the same time the picture of children on the streets, begging, praying, cleaning car windows, selling lighters is a common sight in towns and cities of Greece. Due to lack funding, public institutions responsible for the preservation of mental and physical health of children are closing down one after another, making the need for organizations like "The Smile of the Child" even greater. The frustration however does not break the moral of the 300 employees and 4000 volunteers who have embraced the initiative and who are trying to deliver every day of the purest and most innocent people from the worst, inhumane and unbearable living conditions which they are living in.

"We are not a charity fund, but an organization that provides solutions," said Kostadinos Giannopoulos. To describe some of the activities Giannopoulos gave the example of several cases. One of them was about three children of seven, ten and eleven years of age who after being for three days left to the arbitrariness of fate, have sought assistance from the police station in the area in which they live. The three children were abandoned by their mother, who disappeared suddenly. While the heavy bureaucratic system started to move, the police decided to ask "The Smile of the Child" for help, where children received assistance. Social workers of the organization took care of the minors, until a new suitable environment was found for the kids.

"Children who are subjected to systematic harassment, torture and malnutrition fall into the system every day," says Giannopoulos. "The Smile of the Child", unlike most non-governmental organizations seeks specific solutions for each case. He told us the horrific case of 18 month-old baby who died after being abused by her father. At the signal of the organization, the prosecutor has issued three straight decisions to withhold the children from their parents, but because of administrative obstacles every time they were sent back. After the efforts of the organization her eight years old brother was found a shelter in a children's hospital while a more suitable environment is found for his rehabilitation and development.

"The Smile of the Child" was initiated in the name of the young Andreas Giannopoulos, who at the age of 10 lost the harrowing fight against a deadly disease. Shortly before leaving this world the young Andreas wrote in his child's diary a text, which became the reason for the creation of "The Smile of the Child", and his words today are a manifesto of the organization: "We all know and talk about some children on the

streets who have no smile. They don't have a smile on their face because they have no money, no toys, nothing to eat, and some of them do not even have parents. Start thinking and leave already the talking, let us unite and see that *in poverty Albanians or not, black or white, all children have the right to smile. This union will be called "The Smile of the Child"*. Let us all help to unite in order to succeed."

With these words, the young Andreas, who would have been a young man in his mid-twenties today named the voluntary organization "The Smile of the Child". Its main goal is the care, protection and provision of mental and physical support for all needy children in the country. The national helpline of the initiative has taken over two million calls since its opening. The 11 houses of the organization have sheltered more than 1180 children over the years, and a total of over 26,000 children and in some cases their families have received assistance from the organization. Through the hotline for missing children Ameb Alert, "The Smile of the Child" is helping for the search of young children in and outside Greece.

The organization needs about 600 thousand euros annually to support the services and structures established so far that serve to rescue children from suffering and torment. They rely entirely on the mercy of bona fide citizens, corporate responsibility programs of large companies and are completely independent of government funding. Kostadinos Giannopoulos explained that over the years they have not obeyed party interests and as a result the state has refused to support their activities. The utilization of donations by the organization is subject to detailed examination of one of the largest auditing companies in the world *Price Water House Coopers and ranks first in the rating of trust between NGOs in the country. Only ten percent of the costs of the organization goes to management, which means that for every euro donated 90 cents go to children in need.*

"Today we are sending an SOS signal, because the problems of children in distress remain, and money is not enough". Giannopoulos said that with the help of volunteers from the advertising business an advertisement has been prepared to promote the phone number for donations from the public before Easter. Its broadcast, however, was denied before the holidays because I was seen as too pessimistic by the control authorities. The concept of the TV commercial is inspired by reality, which unfortunately is not pink, when talking about children in distress.

With the exacerbation of the crisis Kostadinos Giannopoulos and his friends sat down to consider where to make cuts so as to keep the activity of the organization and asked themselves the question "What to Cut?".

**The answer was "We cannot cut anything – not the homes for children in need nor the eight ambulances for emergency assistance in emergency cases, nor the hotline 1058, or Amber Alert nor the health support. Nothing." So as not to deprive the already deprived of luck children, the organization urged the civil conscience of the Greeks:**

**"To save the "Smile of the Child" donate the euro, which you also need to the children, otherwise we have a month and a half of life". The telephone lines 14545 for landlines and 54020 for messages from mobile phones have been, which cost consumers 2.46 euros, but are priceless for children in distress.**