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COURTESY OF TASSANO CONSORZIO (4)

Special Cooperation

Tassano Consortium, a successful EoC initiative that helps people in a variety of situations enter the workforce, tells its story at the United Nations.

BY JOSEPH KLOCK

ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF THE Economy of Communion is Italy's Tassano Consortium, a successful and repeatable model of collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Sleet and snow were falling on New York City in February as the Tassano contingent arrived from Italy: the CEO of the consortium, the president of the non-governmental organization New Humanity, the vice president of Liguria,

Italy, and a counselor on solidarity from Genoa's city government. They came to share their story at the United Nations.

In 1989, a small group of entrepreneurs put together \$2,000 to form a cooperative. Their goal was to provide work for people with various disabilities, recovering addicts and recently released prisoners.

Today, the consortium employs 1,300 people working in 62 cooperatives. It has grown at an impressive rate of 70 percent per year since it began and now generates more than \$50 million in annual revenues.

Three of the 62 are "social cooperatives," partly funded by the rest. They employ 150 people who have difficulty finding jobs for various reasons. By training and employing people to work in the cooperatives, they help them eventually to find work in other businesses.

The contribution of this civil initiative to the common good benefits the neediest of society. It follows the principle of subsidiarity, that is, public institutions providing services that civil society cannot organize or sustain themselves.

The governmental social service providers of the Liguria region, together with the province of Genoa, the Catholic Church and all the towns in the area support the program. They have realized the social and economic value of this work, as well as the savings to the communities that result from it. They created a foundation to help the program provide the psychological counseling and specialized assistance



Left: Tassano Consortium has its headquarters in Casarza Ligure, Italy. Right: Partnering the public and private sectors, the group specializes in training and employing people who might normally fall through the cracks.



Top: Tassano was presented at the U.N.'s Commission for Social Development in February. Among presenters and sponsors were (from left) Alberto Ferrucci, president of the NGO New Humanity; Massimiliano Costa, Vice President of Liguria; Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Vatican Permanent Observer at the U.N.; Paolo Veardo, Genoa's Counselor for Solidarity; and Maurizio Cantamessa, Tassano's CEO.

necessary for these workers to enter the workforce.

Local business associations invite area businesses to subcontract simple assembly work to these social cooperatives. For example, the workers currently assemble life jackets for various cruise ships built in the Liguria region.

After the workers leave for other jobs, the consortium will welcome them back if necessary. The program builds on the idea that a protected but productive job can help marginalized people gain a sense of self-confidence.

In working to create businesses that benefit society, they have built an atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood among the workers and with supporters in government, business, the community, the organizers and the managers.

Since the 62 businesses are cooperatives, workers participate in the decisions and management of the businesses, including the social cooperatives. To maintain the financial viability of these social cooperatives, the other cooperatives in the consortium contribute \$400,000 per year.

Because of the U.N. meetings in February, officials there invited the Italians to repeat their Tassano presentation in Austria and Argentina. 

