



Corporate Citizenship



Lorenzo Dente

YouthSpark Grant

This Italian entrepreneur turned his love for the environment into a plan to clean up his community.





Teen takes on Garbage and Lawlessness on Italy's Streets

Walking past littered parks and buildings strewn with rubbish, Lorenzo Dente can see why teens in his neighborhood feel unmotivated. Living in a low-income area lined with high-rise housing projects, the 19-year-old has remained optimistic while watching many of his friends choose the wrong path.

Lorenzo lives with his parents in Scampia, a suburb on the northern outskirts of Naples, Italy, developed for residents displaced after the 1980 earthquake. It's considered the "problem area" of Naples and its residents are plagued by violent crime, unemployment, and street corner drug dealers.

"Life here is difficult and a boy must grow up quickly to not be involved in crime," says Lorenzo. "I have many friends who do not work. Being unemployed means feeling useless both to themselves and to society."

In Italy, the percentage of students who drop out of school is particularly high and the large population of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is especially serious. An estimated 34 percent of young people in Italy between 15 and 24 are unemployed, and 23 percent are considered NEET. In Scampia, where Lorenzo lives, the unemployment rate is a whopping 42 percent.

"Despite being surrounded by peers who are not working or in training, Lorenzo is passionate, does not give up, and is full of ideas for his future."

Mirta Michilli, Fondazione Mondo Digitale



Lorenzo lives with his mom and dad in Scampia. His father works with the public garbage company and his mom works part-time taking care of an elderly woman. His brother (far right) moved to Germany to look for work.

But Lorenzo has an entrepreneurial spirit and didn't want to join the 42 percent. Through a voucher program to train low-income youth, Lorenzo started earning Microsoft certifications. He also signed up for [Meet No NEET](#), a program run by the NGO Fondazione Mondo Digitale and funded by [Microsoft YouthSpark](#), the company's global initiative to help young people build a better future through creating opportunities in education, entrepreneurship, and employment. The Meet No NEET program addresses Italy's rampant dropout rate by helping young people through tech skills training, networking, and the creation of ideas and projects that solve important problems.

It puts young people in teams and asks them to identify problems affecting their daily lives and to come up with practical solutions that can be turned into businesses. For Lorenzo and his team, identifying problems was easy: garbage and lawlessness. They wanted to come up with a way to visually transform the city, produce jobs, and therefore reduce the number of criminals.

After weeks of brainstorming, the team came up with "Ripuliamo portando Innovazione" or "Clean Up and Innovate."

"Many young people throw garbage on the street and many of these materials could be recycled into urban artwork," Lorenzo says. "By collecting and selling these materials, we will give bus tickets to reward responsible citizens who participate in the collection."

The team of 15 students developed and submitted the project idea and sought partnerships and funding. They received ICT training from Microsoft experts as well as lessons on social innovation and project management. Lorenzo learned to program static and dynamic pages for the project website, create a [crowd-funding platform](#), sell the art pieces online, and manage Operating Systems, networks and databases. Without these tools, he says, the project couldn't succeed.

The team worked with the city of Naples to get free bus tickets to offer in return for trash and set up stands to collect the recyclables. In a lab at school, they created lamps, flowers and ornaments, plastic boxes and other art. They sell the objects online and during events in the town square and use the proceeds to purchase more bus tickets and pay the team.

The team uses recycled materials to create lamps and other art to sell online.

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With training from Microsoft, Lorenzo creates a website and digitally manages the project.

"I've always been concerned about the environment but I didn't know how and what to do with the garbage, how to convince people not to litter but to make better use of it," Lorenzo says. "The program showed me that when you see a problem, you can find a solution. My idea will help create jobs, and give people a chance to become integrated into society."

In addition to his environmental goals, Lorenzo and his team hope to address unemployment by hiring more youth. They plan to target high school dropouts for recruitment, and match them with professional tech volunteers utilizing the website Lorenzo built. Lorenzo hopes to show other youth that with a vision and proper training, they too can be successful.

"Lorenzo is in stark contrast with the youth trend of Scampia," says Mirta Michilli, general director of Fondazione Mondo Digitale. "Despite being surrounded by peers who are not working or in training, he is passionate, does not give up, and is full of ideas for his future."

"Before meeting with Fondazione and Microsoft for this project, I did not have big aspirations," Lorenzo says. "I saw a world that was not ready to listen to young people. But now I realize there are companies that can and want to listen to us and are willing to accept and help young people who need to express their ideas. We don't have many chances for success here, and this has given me the skills for my future."