

Making waves in the classroom: Adopt a Ship



The 'Adopt a Ship' programme forges unique links – between ship and classroom, captains and pupils, seafaring and learning. Originally created by the Cyprus Shipping Chamber in 2006, it has expanded into the Philippines, Poland, India, Greece and North America. Irene Notias, founder of the non-profit organisation that introduced and manages this programme in Greece, Project Connect, tells Triton why she is championing 'Adopt a Ship' in Greece.

In October 2018, Irene Notias received approval from the Greek education ministry to introduce the Adopt a Ship programme to schools in Greece. The first match, with an elementary school, was made almost immediately – and within 18 months, the programme had attracted 138 classrooms and nearly 100 vessels. The numbers are still growing – Irene hopes to have linked classes with more than 200 vessels by the end of the year. It's a result she's proud of, and a programme she passionately believes in.

Project Connect

How did it begin? Irene appears to embody the phrase 'If you want something done, ask a busy person'. Founder and Managing Director of Prime's Bunkersplus Services in Glyfada, she was already running Project Connect, a matchmaking service she had set up to link students/graduates with jobs in the Greek shipping community. The Swedish Club has provided sponsorship for Project Connect, which Irene describes as an 'auxiliary Human Resources facility for the Greek shipping community's benefit'.

It was Project Connect's Honorary Chairman, George Tsavlis, who introduced Irene to Adopt a Ship. Having

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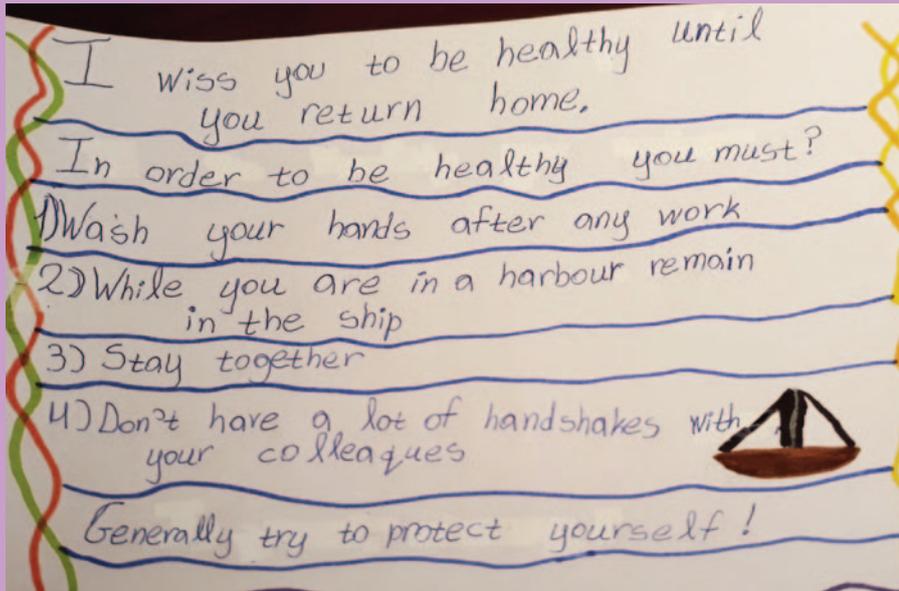
met with the founders of the Cyprus programme, she worked with a young intern and another assistant to create the Greek version and get authorisation to take it into the education system.

A flying start

"Once we had the authorisation, we had to get the ships! I used my own client base and had seven responses right away," she says. "We began matchmaking almost immediately."

Adopt a Ship had begun. Very quickly, classes of nine-year-olds at seven schools were matched with seven vessels.

"The children wrote their first letters to the captains – beautiful letters, very inquisitive, asking about the ship and the crew. They received really touching and informative responses back. The teachers were really enthused because they didn't think the captains would be interested in responding in that way. Happy pupils, happy teachers, happy captains and crew, happy Greece! We need a happy world."



At the end of the first year, a school play was organised in Piraeus, where the seven schools showed their work, including a fabric art installation with sail boats moving through the waves, an entire cargo ship made from water bottle lids, and Greek songs about the sea.

Interactive learning

Adopt a Ship is designed for nine to 12-year-olds. The programme provides each class with a gigantic route map on which

the children can follow 'their' vessel, learning about ports and geography. Each classroom also has a booklet covering the history of Greek shipping and the various types of vessels.

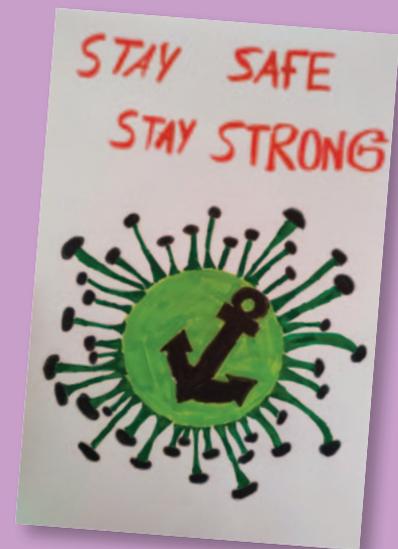
"One teacher told me the children want to go to school because of this programme – they look forward to getting a letter from the captain. In fact, the children from the next-door classroom were waiting outside, hoping to come in and see what was happening!"

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Industry response

Irene has been delighted by the response from the industry. One shipowner paid for a Skype call so that the pupils could talk to the captain and crew while they were at sea. Captains visit 'their' school when they are ashore. The pupils have been sent sketches from the ships, pictures of the food made on board, and video of the bridge and what happens there. There have been cards at Christmas time and Greek shipping songs. The children write letters about their lives and interests.



The next generation

Adopt a Ship is, of course, an excellent way to raise awareness amongst younger children – and their teachers – of the importance of shipping and career opportunities in the maritime world. The questions can be fun: one child asked a captain, "When your vessels are in the ice area and it is snowing, do you all stop working?"

Other points are encouraging. When asked who would like to be a captain, three young children immediately raised their hands. In a survey of participating children, 97% said women could be captains.

And what's next for Irene? She is planning to create a virtual shipping company tour where visitors can see the office environment and learn about the various support functions that are essential to keeping a vessel at sea. Watch this space! 🐦