

BNP PARIBAS ®

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Association Aide aux Vacances des Jeunes – AVJ
[Association for supporting the Vacations of the Youth]

Voice Off: An RCF report produced in partnership with the BNP PARIBAS Foundation.

Journalist: The AVJ Association is an organisation that helps young people from poor families to go on holidays. It was set up in 1969, so it's not exactly new. Based in Livry Gargan in the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb of Paris, its principle is simple but clever. It starts by collecting and selling old and unneeded objects from people's attics, a bit like Emmaüs¹ does, but the initiative is called Operation Clodo. Its chairman, Michel Duchevet, will explain.

Michel DUCHEVET: We collect a lot of things and then hold jumble sales and distribute the proceeds. There is a board of directors that manages all the social welfare case files which we receive from the social work assistants of both the DPAS and the Social Security authorities, as well as from the local authorities or courts, concerning families in difficulty. We mainly work with families from Livry Gargan or its neighbouring communes.

When the case files are examined, a decision is taken on each of them, and a grant is awarded. It can range from a few dozen euros to several hundred. The grants are awarded mainly to children who take holidays through organisations, and the funds are paid directly to those organisations, never to the families themselves.

Journalist: About 80 volunteers are dedicated on this large-scale collection and sale operation. Others work on choosing which cases will receive the grants. Each case file chosen represents a grateful child or family.

Michel DUCHEVET: The work done is entirely unpaid and without any vested interest on the part of the volunteers. We know that, well, even if people think something, they don't always say it – except perhaps when the families are actually visited – because people tend to mix things up; they don't know whether we are a public entity, or whether we are. When they realise that it is a charity organisation, they adopt a completely different attitude towards us. They're touched to learn that people are doing this work for free. In Livry-Gargan, though, we are actually very well known, we're an institution, and we're almost always well received.

¹ Emmaüs: A charitable organisation set up in 1949 to help the homeless.

Journalist: AVJ is also involved in other regular initiatives, including a general distribution of cuddly toys on Christmas morning at three local hospitals.