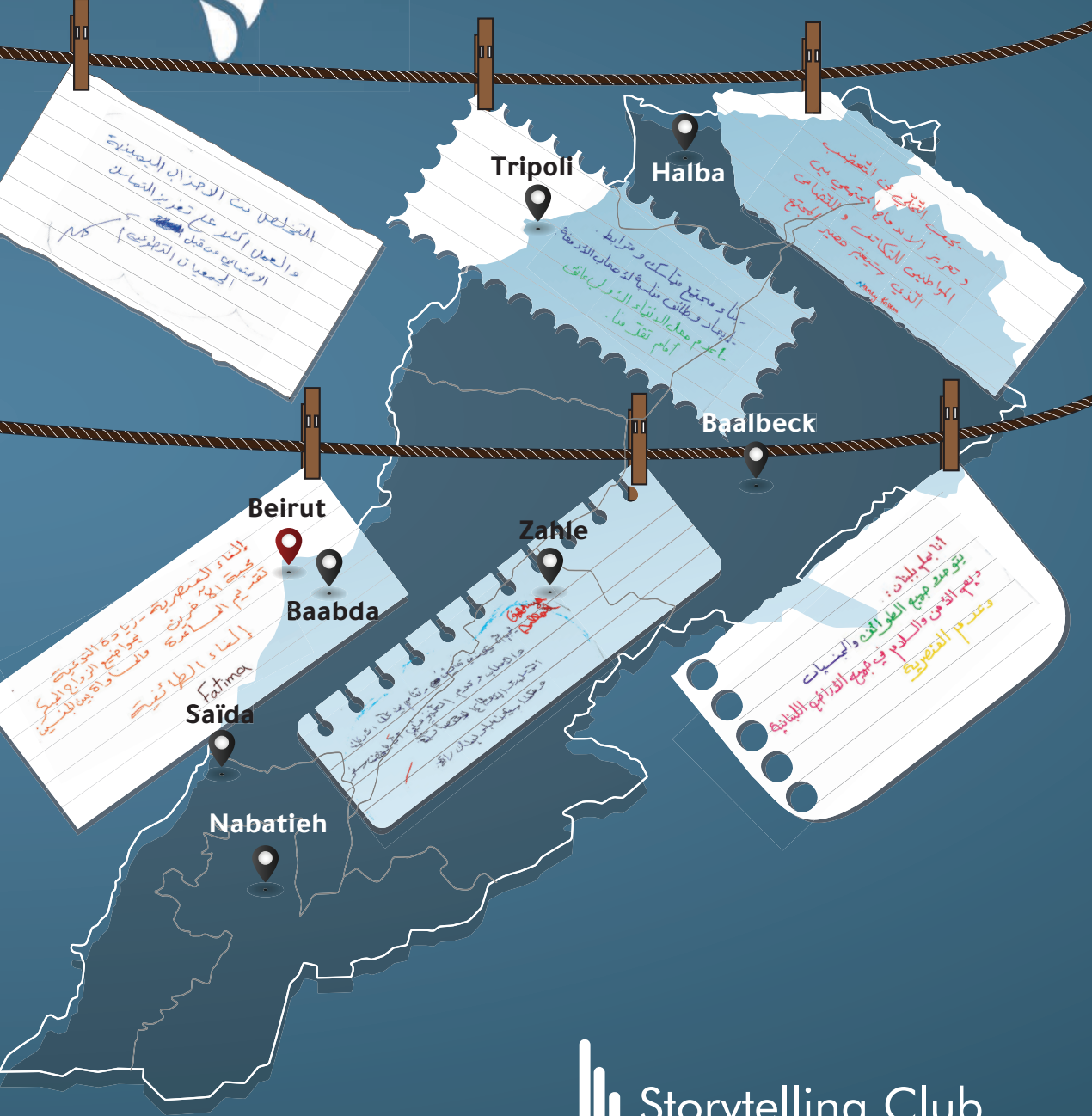




Lebanon, Our Story





إن الأفكار الواردة في هذا الكتاب لا تعبر بالضرورة عن آراء المؤسسة سات-7
وكل ما ورد في هذا الكتاب يعبر عن رأي شخصي.

All ideas and opinions expressed in this book are the personal opinions of the workshop participants. They do not necessarily reflect the position of SAT-7 as an organization, or of its partners, or of its staff members.

لبنان حكايتنا - نادي سرد القصص
Lebanon, Our Story - Storytelling Club
Lebanon 2022

In partnership with بالاشتراك مع



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About the project

The stories we tell play a powerful role in the kind of society we build.

Lebanon, Our Story seeks to tap into the power of storytelling in order to write a new, shared story for Lebanon, one based on openness, transparency, and accountability. The project was formed in response to poor civic engagement and social erosion driven by sectarianism, in particular the effects of this on host communities and displaced people.

Lebanon, Our Story is implemented by SAT-7 and brings together young members (aged 15-25) of various religious or belief groups within Lebanon, including displaced Syrians, Palestinians, and Armenians. Lebanon, Our Story uses storytelling to enable youth to contribute to a shared narrative of hope that drives social cohesion and provides an impetus for meaningful civic engagement. One of the multiple projects under the umbrella of Lebanon, Our Story is the Storytelling Club.

Storytelling Club

Storytelling Club is a series of group activities intended to build resilience and improve the mental health of young people. The format was originally designed by Jeunesse International – Munich and International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI).

For this project, these activities were adapted to focus on advancing social cohesion. Participants were separated into six groups across three age groups (two groups of high-school students, two of university students, and two of young adults). They were guided through a process of offering each other peer support across community lines, identifying common struggles, interests, and means of overcoming hardship.

The sharing of these stories is intended to bridge groups that have been divided and bond people together around our common humanity, shared space, and experiences, so that Lebanon's youth may be better positioned to build – to rewrite their shared story. A story characterised not only by the absence of war, but by the presence of true peace.



Omar
Beirut

22 years old
Syrian

In 2020, I was subjected to a verbal and physical assault by a group of young men belonging to a rival political party. This was because of my own modest activity in politics – because I am of Syrian nationality myself, I had helped organise and taken part in demonstrations and vigils to commemorate the Revolution or the Day of the Syrian Prisoner.

I sustained only minor wounds in the attack. But months later, I began to receive threats more frequently. These forced me to flee from my home just outside Beirut, to a friend of a friend's home. After several days, I returned to Beirut. My housemate told me, "The persecution is still going on, and it would be better if you find housing outside this neighborhood and the area." I was frustrated.

I called my friend, who is a Palestinian and who also lives in Lebanon. He said, "Don't worry, I will protect you."

He called me again and told me about a safe house. I slept there for

several days.

But then, I had to attend an appointment in another part of Beirut. Another friend, who is Lebanese and comes from a different religious background to me, called me and told me that he lives in the same neighborhood that I had to visit, and that he could shelter me there. I called my Palestinian friend again and, with many thanks, told him that I was heading to my other friend in a different neighborhood, which would be safer for me.

My Lebanese friend welcomed me into his house. Later, he secured a job for me and we have since shared ideas that challenged some of my old opinions.

When I was in danger, it was people from different backgrounds than me who came to my aid.

All of this confirms that we are one society, one humanity – no matter how much we differ in our opinions.



Sarah
Beirut

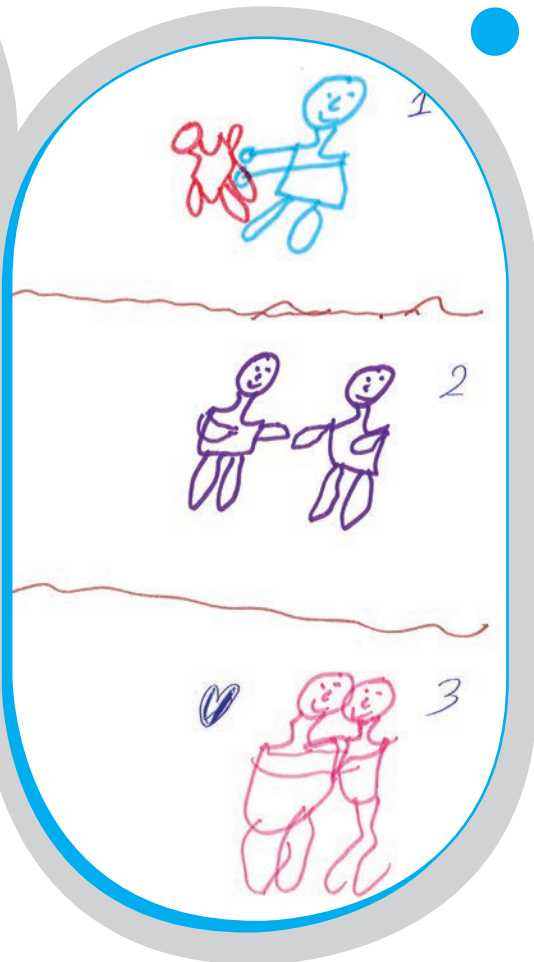
22 years old
Lebanese

I was born in a village in Beqaa. But the school I attended was in a nearby town, and the students came from a wide geographical area. We came from very different backgrounds. We were from different cultures, different religions; we had different ways of living, different financial status – and even different nationalities.

And because of this, I grew up living in harmony with people who are different from me, accepting and even inviting differences. When I went to university, I experienced the same thing.

But then I went out into the world, and I started to listen to the news. To all the negative things being said; all the fights and chaos going on between people of different backgrounds. And I couldn't understand why. Why are the same kinds of people I grew up with fighting each other?

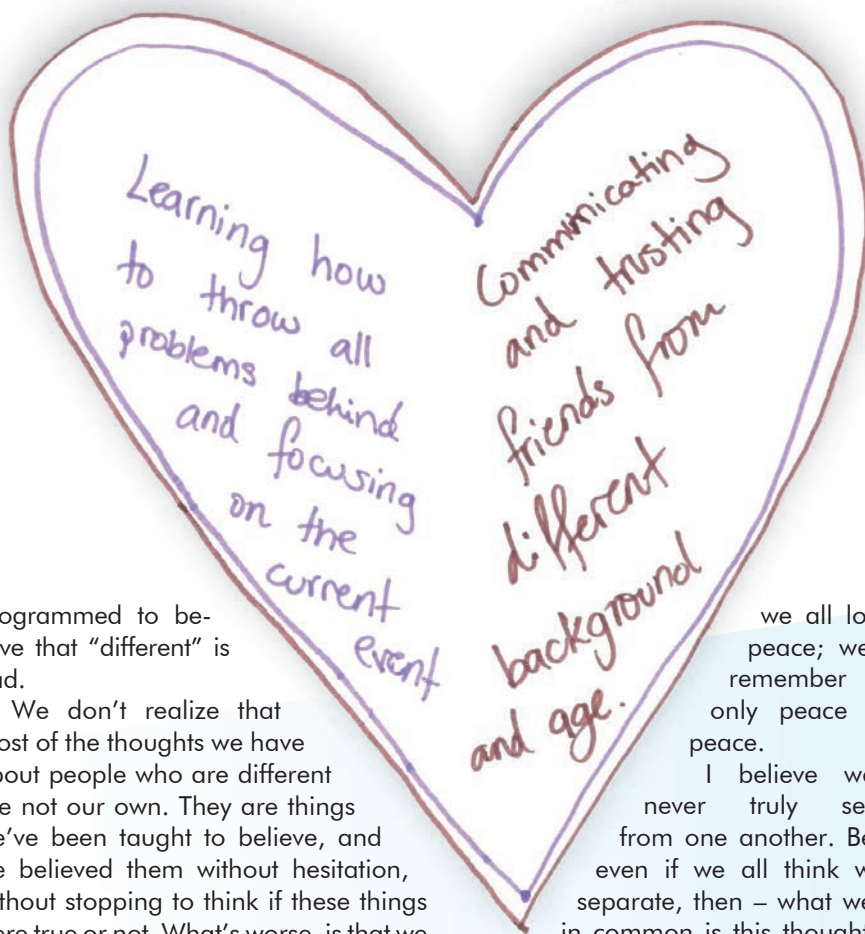
I realized it was because people have



forgotten the root of our commonality: our humanity. Instead they categorize people by their beliefs, based on stereotypes that are always far from the truth.

But in my world, there's no separation, because people's beliefs do not define them. It is in the heart and the humanity of a person where you can find a home and make friendships.

I am blessed that I was raised in a place where there were people of different backgrounds, because I was never



programmed to believe that "different" is bad.

We don't realize that most of the thoughts we have about people who are different are not our own. They are things we've been taught to believe, and we believed them without hesitation, without stopping to think if these things were true or not. What's worse, is that we truly believe these are our own opinions.

So why don't we examine – what do we really believe in or know? And how do we know if our beliefs are true, if we don't experience getting to know someone who is different? Without looking to see – are they really different after all? And if we resist this openness, why are we resisting? Does putting someone else down make us feel better about ourselves?

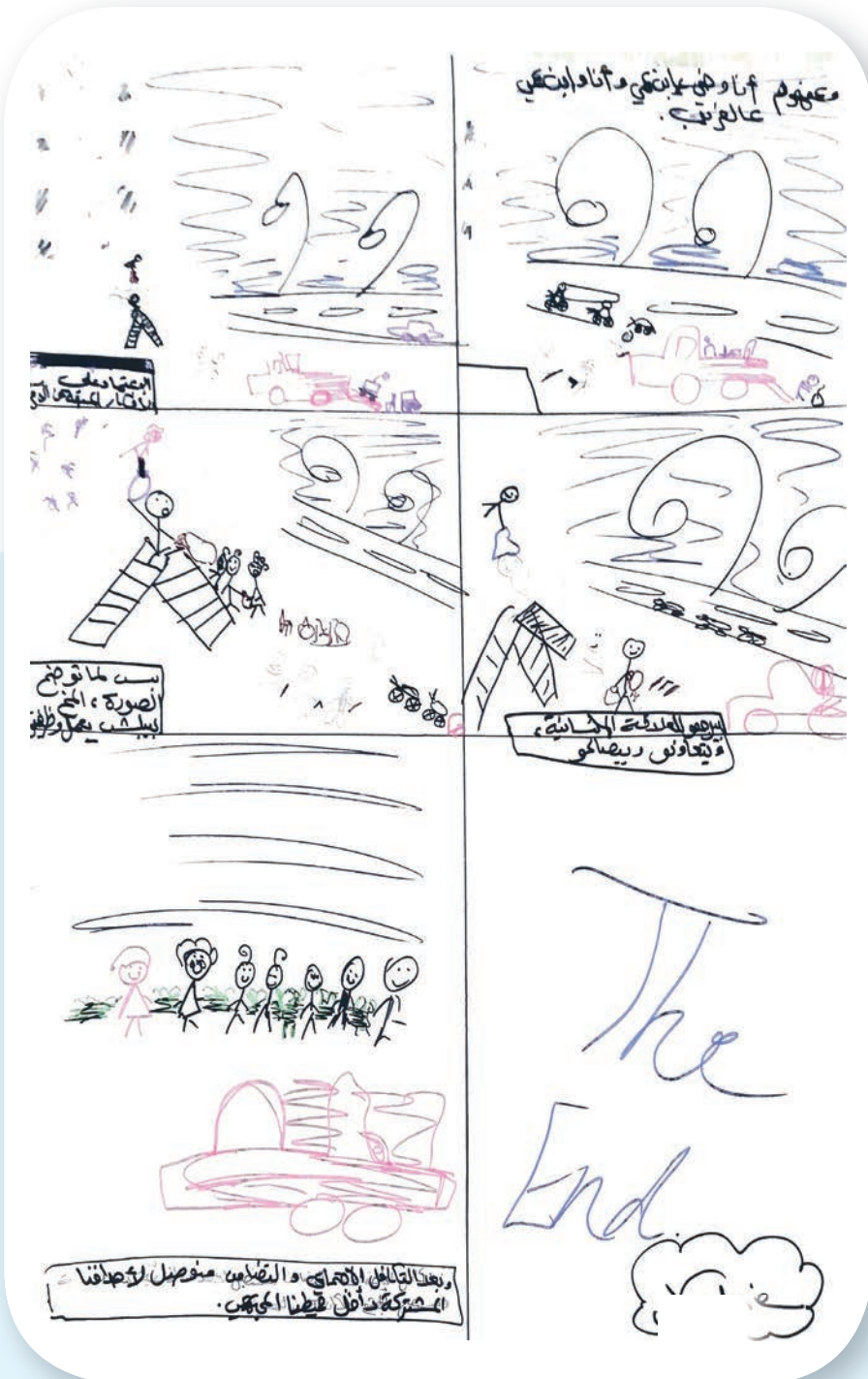
Why don't we drop our swords, drop our competition, let go of war, and choose peace instead. After all,

we all look for peace; we must remember that only peace brings peace.

I believe we are never truly separate from one another. Because even if we all think we are separate, then – what we have in common is this thought itself.

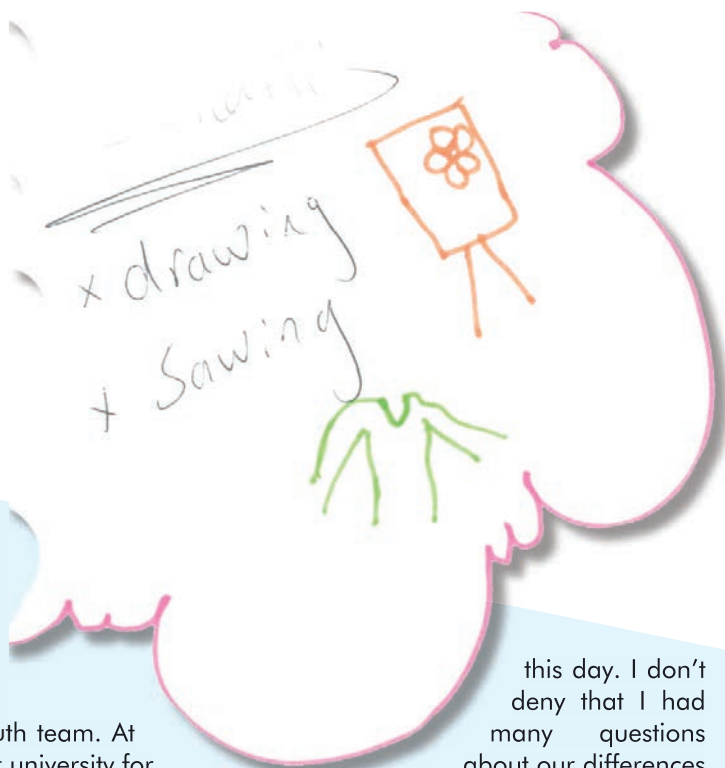
We are only each other's mirrors. Let us choose to love one another, let us choose to love ourselves.

No Judgement
LAUGHTER



Laila
Beirut

23 years old
Lebanese



A few years ago, I volunteered for the Red Cross, in their youth team. At this time, I had been at university for three years, but although I had been introduced to “the other” – people of different religions, nationalities, gender, and sexuality – I didn’t know many Christians.

By this age, I had rejected racism and fear of others. I looked at the world with a will to understand what I saw around me, and to understand my own relationships with those who were different from me. I wondered, do I still look at them as “the other”?

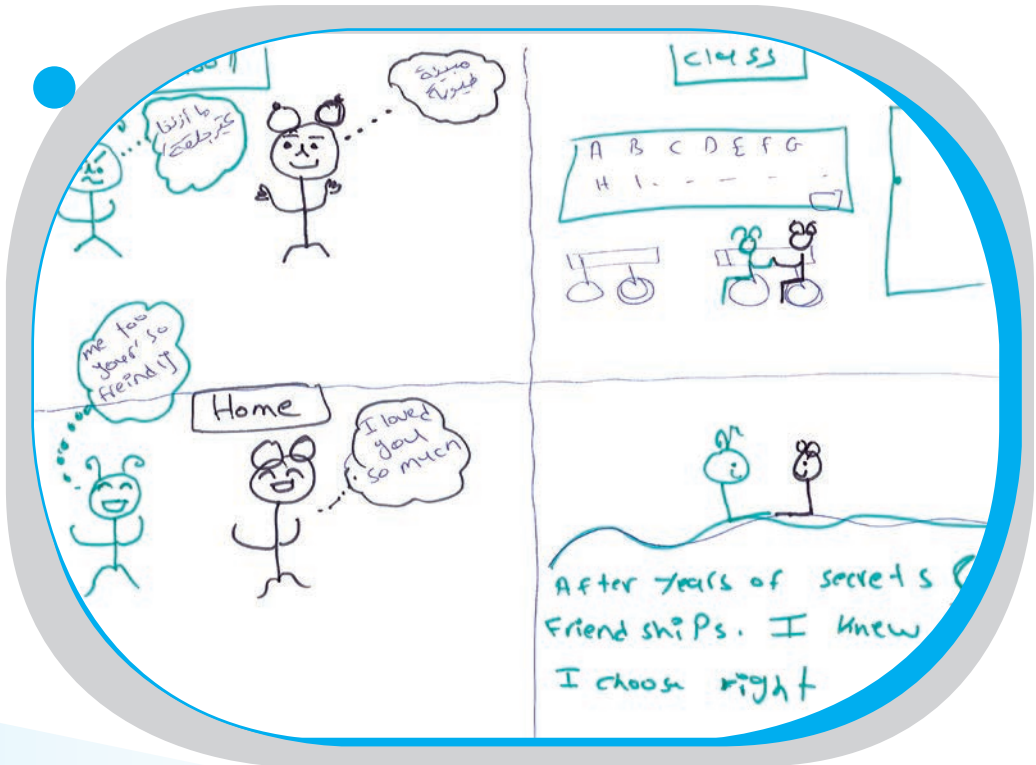
My volunteering allowed me to meet people from many different backgrounds. Even if they didn’t share their backgrounds when they introduced themselves, I could immediately guess their affiliation from their names.

Maroun and Elias are my friends, with whom my relationship has continued to

this day. I don’t deny that I had many questions about our differences at first. Maybe this was because my community felt they were inferior. I had always been afraid even to go near a church, and I felt sure I would be kicked out if I went to a church by myself.

But after I met my friends, I went to church with them for the first time. I went with them several times, including to attend my friend’s grandmother’s funeral. This was the first time I had ever attended a gathering arranged by “the others”.

At the funeral, I watched everything carefully. I was veiled and wearing a black dress, and I felt afraid when I entered the church. My dad often says that Christians “hate us”. Would I face sectarian fanaticism? Or be kicked out and insulted?



I rushed toward my friend and greeted her family – and faced nothing of what I had feared. After all, I had clearly been invited for my friend's grandmother's Eucharist. I realise some people may have wondered what a Muslim was doing there. But truthfully, nobody paid much attention. Everyone came in, received the Eucharist, and then left. Several days later, I helped my friend write an epitaph for her grandma.

My friend Maroun is also a Christian, or at least that's what it says on his ID card. His beliefs are not my business. What matters is that he is the guy who helped me prepare a lot of activities with the Red Cross. That it was his mother who once, after a long workday, brought

us food and insisted I share it with them. She wasn't mean or selfish and wouldn't let me feel any kind of inferiority. The hate I thought she would feel was all in my mind.

This friend helped me a lot, as I did him, and we communicated constantly. He talked to me when his grandfather passed away, and I talked to him when my grandfather passed away. He is trustworthy and lovely.

Maroun and Elias once walked with me from the Red Cross center to my workplace. On the way, we talked a lot about ourselves, and we discovered common ground in that we all had a desire to start therapy. This conversation was where my first steps to truly discover myself began.

Tina
Beirut

24 years old
Lebanese



From the moment we are born, they choose a name, nationality, and sect for us, and we are raised on the sect's foundations, principles, and beliefs.

Usually, the children of the same family belong to one religion and one sect. But what do we do if the people closest to us are of different religions? What if we ourselves do not belong to just one sect?

I was never raised on religious principles when I was young. My parents' education was limited to teaching me morals and human principles, and I never heard the word "religion" until one of my schoolmates asked me which religion or sect I belonged to when I was six years old.

"Are you Sunni?" they asked. "Or Shiite? Muslim or Christian?" At that time, I was very confused. What did all these words mean?

This was my question to my mother when I returned home.

«Where did you hear this talk from?» she responded. After much insistence, she explained those vague words to me. I learned that I was a Sunni Muslim and that there are Shiite, Maronite, and Roman Catholic relatives in my family. I was never nervous about religion, and I did not care about the religious identity of "the other". But as I grew up, I often felt lost in a whirlpool of questions about my own religious identity.

But when I started getting to know people who looked like me and understood my point of view, I stopped caring that the label of "atheist" might be directed at me. Instead, I began explaining to everyone that I am agnostic, and that I had been an atheist, and started explaining the difference between these two concepts.

Kamel Beirut

23 years old
Palestinian

I will continue in volunteering ^{campaigns} to help people all around Lebanon no matter if they were refugees or Lebanese people every single person on this Land is one of my people.

I hope to start up a new campaign to raise awareness, where every single person starts to make spiritual connecting based on our personalities our real identity.

Universities are some of the foremost spaces where students can gather from different cultural, religious, and political backgrounds, as well as different nationalities.

They are drawn together by the thirst for understanding, and connected by the knowledge they gain.

At the beginning of the year, in my first university class, we all began to introduce ourselves. "Ahmad," I said. "Palestinian refugee." Eyes widened around me. Then somebody said, "What are you doing here? Haven't you people done enough to us?"

I was shocked to hear that. It was the first time I had faced a situation like this.

An hour later, the lecture ended and we all filed out into the courtyard. I tried to find the student who had asked me that question. I felt I must find out what he had meant. What have I done to be spoken to like that? Why did he say it after I mentioned that I am Palestinian?

I didn't find him, but I did find an explanation. Another student told me that he was a Lebanese Christian whose grandfather was killed by Palestinian factions in Lebanon. Now this young man considered every Palestinian as a party to the killing. And instead of prosecuting his grandfather's killer, he found all Palestinians guilty and turned to fanaticism against all of us.

I thought about what I had learned. I tried to find a way that he and I could communicate – or at least avoid any conflict for the rest of the year.

I tried in vain. I couldn't find a way for us to connect.

In the last days of the semester, I discovered that I would be sitting right behind this student during an exam. I became very nervous.

On exam day, my steps were heavy as I made my way to the exam hall. Worries weighed down my mind. When the exam started, I saw the student staring at me out of the corner of his



eye. I saw violence in his face.

An hour into this exam, I looked up to see him covered in confusion. "I did not prepare for this question," he said under his breath. "I'm going to fail!"

Would he accept my help? What should I do?

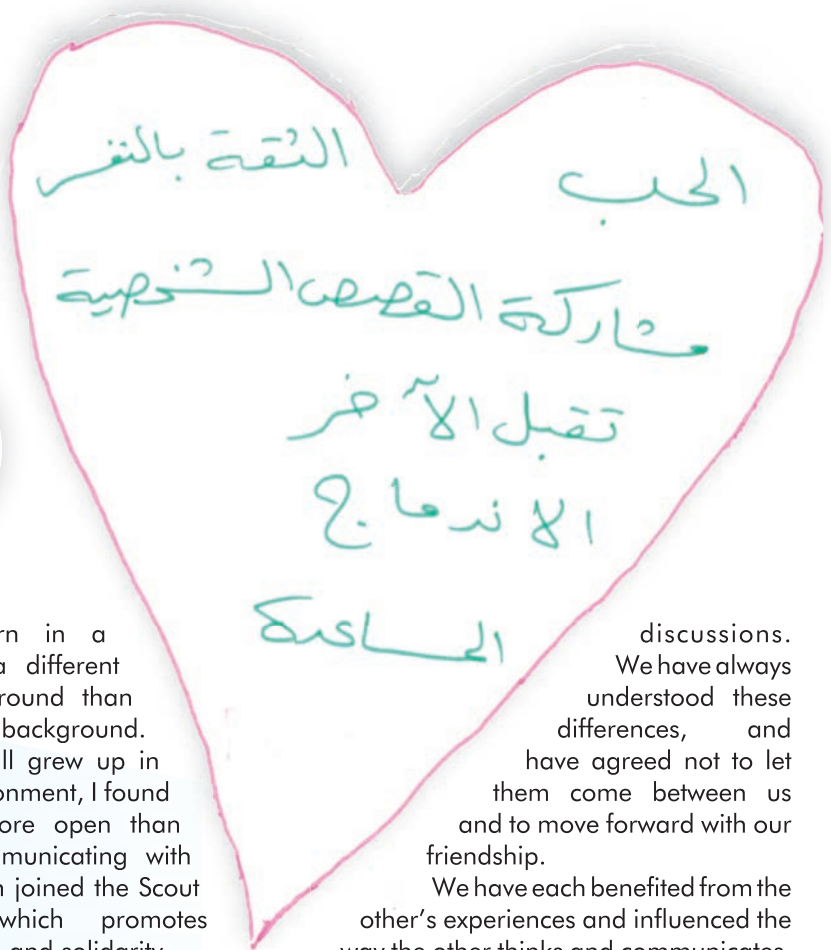
With no forewarning, I pulled on the hem of his shirt and gave him the correct answer.

He looked astonished. He wrote the

answer down without saying a word.

After we finished the exam, he came towards me with a cup of tea in his hand and thanked me, then said in a sorrowful voice, "You're the Palestinian, right?" "I've been seeing you all as enemies."

Then, "I'm having a dinner party tonight at my house, and you're invited!" he continued. "I'll be waiting to see you there."



I was born in a village from a different cultural background than my family's background. Although we all grew up in the same environment, I found that I was more open than others in communicating with "others". I even joined the Scout Association, which promotes communication and solidarity.

But what affected my outlook the most was moving from my village to the city as a young adult.

After my move, I made several friends from a rich mix of different backgrounds. These friends have influenced me a lot, and without them, I would not have the knowledge and cultural understanding I have now.

One of these young people – now one of my best friends – differs from me in their political leanings, ideas, affiliations, and sectarian background. What makes our friendship stand out is the quality of our

discussions. We have always understood these differences, and have agreed not to let them come between us and to move forward with our friendship.

We have each benefited from the other's experiences and influenced the way the other thinks and communicates. The early years of our friendship have been one of the most important periods of my life, because it taught me the importance of communication and finding common ground between people of all backgrounds.

After this experience, I decided to join a Lebanese association concerned with social integration between individuals of different groups. For one event, a large and very diverse group of people gathered in one place. This was the first time I had been in such a setting, and I feared that many



potential problems might arise.

But later, the different participants each began communicating. It helped that to relieve my anxiety before the meeting, I had added everyone invited to a WhatsApp group to help us get to know each other.

I received many responses to the initiative, which brought us all closer, and we learned a lot from each other on all sides.

Through this event and this group,

I made a Palestinian friend for the first time. I became fully aware of the difficulties Palestinian refugees face in Lebanon, and how their rights were being taken away, and I felt that I had to support her. Now, I try to emphasize the importance of integration to everyone I meet. I also set up groups to expand my social involvement, and to help raise awareness of the importance of integration in achieving social cohesion – and therefore peace.



Layal
Beirut

21 years old
Syrian

نقدر نشوف هذا

قوتنا والديحاية

A woman's life begins when she realises that what defines her is her relatives. Her father, mother, brother, uncle... And that what connects her to them, other than blood, is power. That every one of her family members thinks they are authorised to interfere in her life, and to shape it to the mould they find nice, decent, and conservative.

When a daughter tries to unbind or break this authority, her family can use this as a reason to break ties with her, reject her, or class her as an enemy.

I was 10 years old when my father forced me to veil, delivering what I experienced as the first religious scar to my body – "a piece of cloth to cover the head".

I tried to understand what was going on, and why they were covering my head the way mom does. But I couldn't understand.

I heard them saying, "This is more

beautiful. If you remove it, God will punish you, and so will we. I feared them, but I didn't fear God. I didn't know who He is or why I should know Him. But they forced me to do this.

I grew up to become a university student who reads a lot, who tries to learn and understand everything around me, who asks questions, is curious, and who has no fear.

And there, at the university, I met a guy. It was the first time I had had a male friend; I got to know him in secret, without my parents' knowledge, because this was not allowed. To them, this friendship was a forbidden thing that degraded me and my beliefs.

At the beginning of our friendship, I feared his behaviour. I had never imagined having a male friend; I'd been taught that the only relationship I could have with a man is marriage. He was an



intellectual and loved reading, the same as me. We used to talk about the way I have to face the patriarchy imposed on me. He was very understanding and generous, and he treated me in a very different way to how my parents would have thought.

Gender was no longer an impediment to building friendships, even if they had to be hidden from my parents.

To me, giving in to my parents' authority would mean building a scarecrow in my mind, an object of unnecessary fear that only creates many boundaries between me and the world.

“Are you familiar with stereotypes? What do you think of them? Do you think they can be broken down?”



In the absence of social/emotional teaching that is supposed to provide for social integration, religious authorities govern society. This is despite the advocacy of many for abandoning sectarian restrictions and reforming society away from divisions based on religion, race, ethnicity, and other divides faced by Lebanese society. This reform would contradict the interests of the ruling authority. While most of the Lebanese parties are of a religious nature, and since those in power are comrades with those parties, the fading of sectarianism among the Lebanese people reduces their access to power.

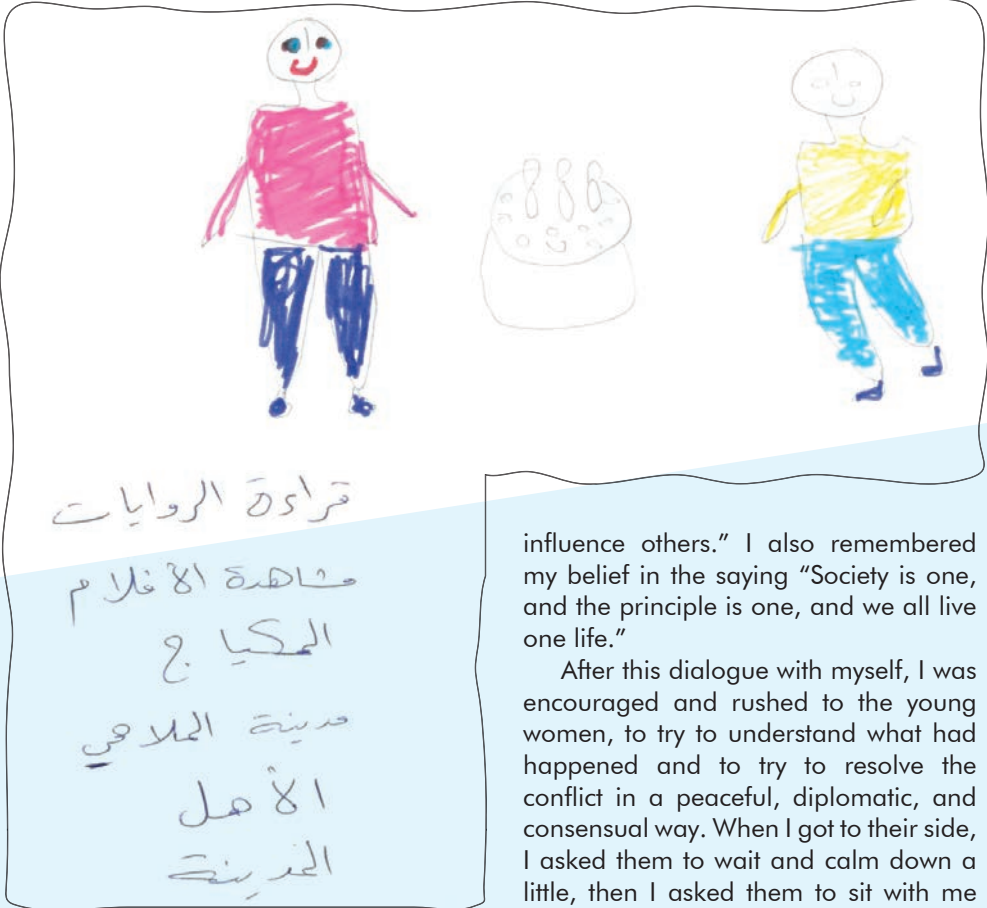
After the Taif Agreement ended the Lebanese Civil War, contrary to its goal of establishing sectarianism, it created a kind of social disintegration in the souls

of the Lebanese. With this came ethnic and religious extremism towards other citizens and towards some ethnic groups living in the Lebanese territories.

One day in January 2020, I was sitting in the cafeteria of my university, and I noticed a conflict between two university students. The first was in religious dress, and the second was in contemporary dress, and this conflict was based on their refusal to dress like one another. I asked my friend, "Who are these people, and what happened to spark this conflict?"

He said: "The first is Shiite and the second Christian. As for the cause of this conflict, it is unknown."

I sat thinking about the overall situation of Lebanese society as I observed the argument. Earlier that



day, I had read a book called *Islam, in Its Two Messages: Christianity and Muhammadiyah*. In this book, this author writes, "We are all Muslims to the Lord of the worlds. Among us are those who submit to God through the Qur'an, those who submit to God through the Bible, and those who submit to God through wisdom." Then my thoughts went to my family, which includes members of different sects, and I said to myself, "I am a member of this community, and it is possible for me to

influence others." I also remembered my belief in the saying "Society is one, and the principle is one, and we all live one life."

After this dialogue with myself, I was encouraged and rushed to the young women, to try to understand what had happened and to try to resolve the conflict in a peaceful, diplomatic, and consensual way. When I got to their side, I asked them to wait and calm down a little, then I asked them to sit with me at one of the cafeteria tables away from the crowd.

I asked them, "Why are you fighting?"

One of the young women said, "Her dress and behavior are not appropriate for the university. That is why most women wear Islamic dress." She added, "The sharia stipulates that every girl who is not veiled is unfit for society."

I answered her: "Why rush to judge other people? Contemporary clothing is not a valid reason to judge." There was silence as the girl thought about my questions. Then I continued, "The sharia stipulates respect for others regardless of their race, religion, or religious identity,



and this is mentioned in Christian teachings as well as Islamic law.”

To my surprise, she added, “If we do not follow this teaching, sectarianism stands in the way of the development of our society. In that case, are we worthy of a sophisticated and developed society?” I was surprised by how she approved of my opinion and of the idea of abandoning these restrictions for the benefit of our society. At that time, she got up and apologised to the other girl, acknowledging the difficulty of breaking out of the traditions of society and challenging its values.

It is well known that reform in Lebanon is up to the individuals themselves. The individual is part of society, and society makes up the state. In addition, the reform project is a long project that is fraught with conflicts and disasters that could impede this development process.

The primary idea that must exist

in our minds is that we are all human beings. We are all equal, and we all have differences, whether they are political, religious, or ethnic.

Our society should be like an oil painting, with multiple colours. Once again: “Society is one, and the principle is one, and we all live one life.”

“ **In your opinion, what could help strengthen social cohesion in Lebanon?** ”



التوقف الطائفي
والتمييز العنصري
حجبك و تعبك الآخر و
تساوح القلوب

Agop
Beirut

23 years old
Armenian-
Lebanese

I grew up in a welcoming family, and my parents taught me to accept everyone regardless of the conflicts within society.

Between 2005 and 2007, many Kurds migrated to Lebanon in search of better job opportunities that would enable them to support their families. The majority came to Burj Hammoud, and many problems occurred between them and the Armenians. One day in the afternoon, a simple dispute between a Kurd and an Armenian developed into major violence. The Armenians began to pursue the Kurds living in Burj Hammoud, using their hands, then knives and stones. This made the area unsafe for both Armenians and Kurds.

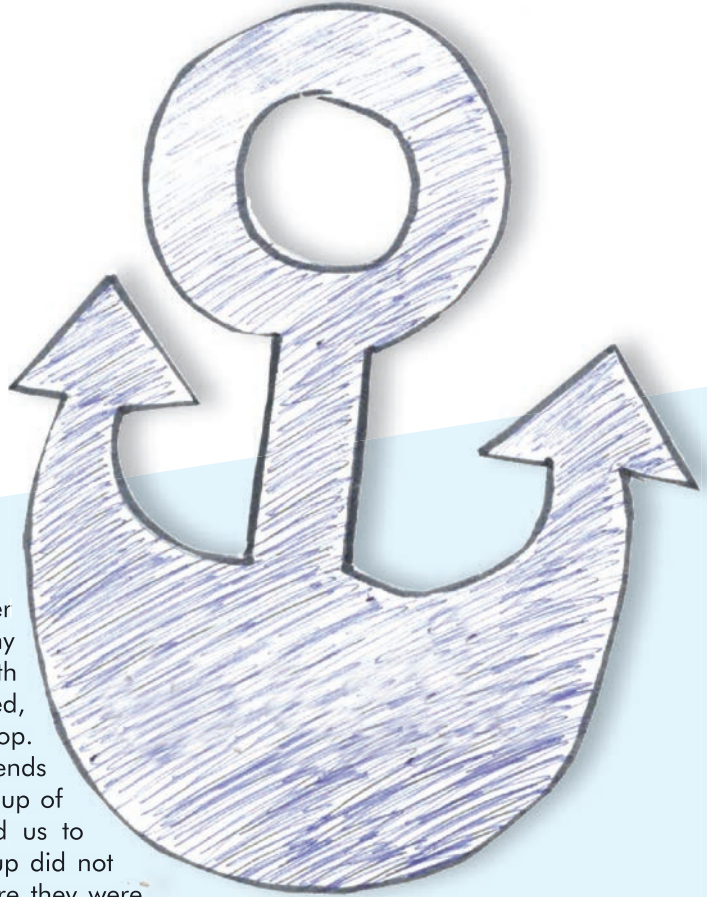
My father had many Kurdish workers in his business, and he had built unity and a family spirit among all his employees from different nationalities and religions. This family spirit created a bond of trust and interdependence. On that day, although my father held an important political position within our

own community, we closed the business to protect and defend our employees in case any of the Armenians tried to attack them.



Ara Beirut

24 years old
Armenian-Syrian



Late on a summer Saturday night in 2019, my friends and I were filled with the spirit of fun. We danced, sang, and drank non-stop. At midnight, one of my friends chanced upon another group of his friends and introduced us to them. The rest of our group did not know who they were, where they were from, and how or why they were here. And with an open heart, we got to know each other, and we danced and sang as if we had known each other for a long time.

The next day, my friends and I woke up and remembered how beautiful and fun the previous night had been. I said, "We do not know them, indeed we do not even remember their names. But I know that we were together; we were with each other, as if breathing as one, enjoying our time." We looked at one another in silence.

What this moment taught me is that

society is diverse and contains many sects, religions, and parties, but in the end, we are people of flesh and blood, we resemble each other. And if we do not stick together, we cannot progress and move forward.

Life is about dealing with people and living with them despite our differences. My advice, from a brother to every brother and sister who reads this story, is this: love life as it is and live it with each other and hold each other's hands, even if you do not know anything about each other. Because we need each other, regardless of our differences.

Mayssa
Beirut

23 years old
Armenian-
Lebanese

♡ اشتري سيارة.
♡ اتييني بنت.
♡ سافر على البلدان الاجنبية.
♡ يكون عندي بيت صغير عالبقي

In summer 2016, it was time for young people to decide. Many students were preparing to enter the university. Some intended to travel, while others did not specify their next step. As for me, I knew what I wanted, but I did not tell anyone about my decision. Not long after, it was time to submit university applications. My parents did not know what subject I intended to specialise in. It was difficult for me to tell them that I wanted to act.

Since I was young, I had thought about acting, although I thought maybe I could not succeed in being an actress. I do not know why, but I was always ashamed to be honest with them.

But I encouraged myself. Then I told my parents that I knew they wanted what was best for me – and I tried to convince them that acting might be an area in which I could excel.

One day, I was with my mother in the car when she parked on the side of the road.

"Mayssa," she said, "are you sure

you want to act?" I told her I did, even though they chose only ten students for the acting department.

"If you do not succeed, you will not be able to join any other university," she said. "The time for registration is running out."

The admission exam was on 4 September. I was very nervous. Maybe I am not good enough, I thought to myself.

The exam lasted for four days. It was very tiring, but for the first time I felt that I belonged. Finally, I presented my performance before the committee, and I was pleased with it.

Two days later, the results came out. I was the first in the group, despite my doubts about my abilities.

And then my life began.

What I have learned is that we must always trust our abilities, no matter how much we are criticised. Thanks to my mother, who trusted me, I found a world I never imagined I would enter. Every time I lose my strength, I remember this day.

Nora Beirut

21 years old
Lebanese



I wake from my nap to the sound of my aunt calling for me and my cousin to come and eat. It is 5:27 p.m. on a Tuesday.

Mujadara. A delicious meal, followed by a glass of juice on the balcony of the second floor. In our poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the southern suburbs of Beirut, the sound of children playing ball on the road can be heard, followed by the silence of our balcony. The poor still enjoy a childhood far away from electronic devices – a sight both heartwarming and heartbreaking. At a few minutes past six o'clock, I feel the handrail shaking where my head rests against it. I look toward the light. "Do you feel what I feel?"

"Yes." She does not finish her sentence. Later, she tells me she was going to boast that we had felt an earthquake for the first time. Instead, a terrifying sound interrupts our conversation. Did an enemy strike hit the Al-Kafa't roundabout? Pink smoke billows over us from behind the building opposite. Panic pervades the entire

neighborhood. My aunt's husband is close to the explosion. My uncle also lives there. Is my grandmother okay?

The radio is cut off. I do not want to live in a war. My family in Alay must be worried about me. I do not know how long it is before they announce that the explosion was in the port of Beirut.

By ten o'clock at night, I know that all my acquaintances are fine. There is no time for emotions; work on the ground has become the priority.

I sit in a box, surrounded by food rations and first aid, heading towards Mar Elias-Beirut to sort the supplies and prepare the location to receive a large number of those affected. The next day, I head towards Gemmayzeh. Long days pass as we sweep the rubble caused by the blast that blew up the city of life. We sweep up and put away our youth as we transport the injured. The streets are filled with pallid faces, faint voices – and something much, much better.

For here is the Beirut we have always dreamed of. United without divisions.

Taha
Beirut

20 years old
Syrian

Society is formed of individuals. Each one of us is an individual who seeks belonging, which is a right for every one of us.

Social cohesion can happen if – and only if – every single individual is afforded his or her own liberty and integrity.

Let's close our eyes and imagine: a whole society led by only one voice. The first thing that pops into my mind is Dolly, the cloned sheep. Literally, there would be one character and every other person would be a copy of that character.

The most basic social unit is the family: parents, and their children. I experienced a rough childhood. I was forced to bear my father's character; he wanted to see himself in me. How selfish is that, right? I was forced to cut my hair in the way he wanted it cut. I didn't have the right to say "no", or to introduce my own ideas for how I could

grow as a person. It was as if he pulled me behind him, leaving me to struggle in his shadow.

Could Beethoven have created his sonatas if every key in his piano – white and black – all played the same sound?

It is the same for our society. Each one of us is a different key that makes this living instrument flourish and become more elegant.

How could you be part of a community similar to the one in the previous story? What role would you choose to play in a community like this?

Do more activities that gather all people from different backgrounds. Focusing on our beauty and uniqueness.

**Wesam
Tripoli**

20 years old
Lebanese

10 January 2015: A date that looms large in the imaginations of the people of Tripoli in general, and the people of the Jabal Mohsen area in particular. This is the date of the explosion – or rather the tragedy – that hit the people of Jabal Mohsen.

At eight o'clock in the evening, a huge explosion at a cafe in Jabal Mohsen rocked the city of Tripoli. We, the people of the area, rushed to the site of the tragedy to find out what happened. We were shocked by what we saw.

What was that? A river of blood on the ground. Rubble and bodies filled the place. Oh my God, was I dreaming or what? I rushed to help the wounded, and to remove the rubble to see if there were any survivors. News spread everywhere about the identity of the suicide bomber who blew himself up and caused this tragedy. We learned that he was from an impoverished neighbourhood right next to Jabal Mohsen; the two regions had witnessed violent conflict between them during the civil wars in the region. Anger

and hatred began to spread among the people of Jabal Mohsen towards this impoverished neighbourhood. Then, others from the neighbourhood came to Jabal Mohsen to say that the terrorist did not speak for them.

But their actions did not end with this apology. To our surprise the next day, a large number of the people from that area came to the scene of the explosion, to stand hand in hand with the people of our area and to help remove the devastation and destruction caused by the explosion. All of them put their differences behind them and came to stand in solidarity with their neighbours.

I was very surprised at first by the courage and social awareness of these people. I said to myself, "It is the political regimes and the sectarian agreements that have contributed to the disintegration of the children of the same city and their separation from each other." And may those who aim to sow discord and hatred among the children of the same society never succeed.



Khawla
Tripoli

20 years old
Palestinian

I cannot describe the bloody and painful scene that I saw on 4 August 2020. In the Beirut explosion, the bride of Lebanon was hit in the heart by a sharp bullet. Her young men and women, her children, and her religious leaders all bled. The tragedy that occurred broke the hearts of the world.

Shortly after the incident, a civic organisation gathered a group to go to Beirut, remove the rubble, and clear the place. Although I am Palestinian, this did not make me hesitant to extend a helping hand to the affected. I was one of the young volunteers.

The first destination was the Nuns' Hospital in Gemmayzeh. It felt strange that I, a Muslim girl, was in a Christian hospital collecting rubble. The nuns welcomed us with open arms at the hospital door. We prepared supplies, headed to the seventh floor, began the clearing and cleaning. Meanwhile, all I could feel was that we were one soul, sharing the aches and relieving the pain of others from different nationalities and customs. I am proud of what I did. I will never regret extending a helping hand to them, because humanity has no religion or nationality.

Reyad
Tripoli

22 years old
Lebanese

توفنت على ا اسرقاء هر د
دنگونت شخسية مني هر بر د
جعلتني اكون هر بر د
من قبل



On 12 July 2006, war broke out between Israelis and Lebanon. The homes of defenseless civilians were being bombed, and they had to flee from their areas, escaping from death. These people headed north, and some of them came to our village, which looked and felt completely different from theirs. The differences were regional and religious. One of the villagers was from a group that was being specifically targeted; there was a need for security and housing for these families.

The villagers dealt with the displaced people decently and ethically, showing respect and solidarity despite the differences between them. They received the new arrivals no matter their situation, brought them the

clothing and food that they needed, and welcomed them into their homes both morning and evening.

The displaced people were shocked by their good treatment at the hands of people who had never expected to even meet them. The villagers thought nothing of the distance between the regions and their differences in creed, identity, and religion.

After the tragedies and danger passed, these people returned to their areas and homes. Today, they and the people of the village still communicate and visit with each other.

This connection shows the solidarity and cohesion that can bond members of different groups, even in the shadow of the discrimination that exists within society.



Maryam
Tripoli

21 years old
Lebanese

When I was 16 years old, my 24-year-old sister was on the phone every day from morning till night. Sometimes she didn't sleep, and most of the time, when she was talking on the phone, she cried. My sister and I sleep in the same room. When I went to sleep at night, I noticed this happening. But I never told any of my family about it. We had ten people living in our house. No one knew about it but me.

One night, my sister was talking on the phone again and crying. Suddenly my mother came to my sister and asked what was wrong with her. My sister replied that it was nothing. Despite much insistence from my mother that my sister tell her, my sister did not say anything.

That's when my mother suspected there must be an important issue behind my sister's crying, and she would not be

silent about it. My mother told my father, and that's when the problems started. My father started looking through my sister's phone.

He discovered that she was talking to a fellow student in the university, who was from a different religion, as if they were lovers. During the conversations, my sister had been crying about something that had happened to the man in his personal life. Now problems occurred every day. My family began a long campaign to make my sister forget the man. It will never happen, no matter how hard you try, they told her – and they also made constant threats. Then, we all noticed that my sister seemed to have dropped the topic, and the problems seemed to subside. But this was an illusion.

One morning, my sister ran away from the house without anyone from the



family knowing.

We thought she had gone to university. In the afternoon, the house phone rang, and it was my sister.

"I went with him," she said. "We love each other very much, and we are going to get married."

My father, upon hearing the news, nearly had a stroke. We did our best to convince my sister to come home, but she refused. A week later, she was married without anyone from her family present. For the next two years, we didn't speak to her.

Throughout the two years, the mayor of our municipality and the mayor of the village in which the young man lives did their best to reconcile our families. But my father's decision was strict: he would never talk to her again, for as long as he lived.

Suddenly, we heard the news that my sister was pregnant. Upon hearing the news of her pregnancy, the heads of the two municipalities and the youth of the two villages, despite our different religions, did their utmost to reconcile our family with my sister, even if it was for the sake of the baby. And the reconciliation was accomplished.

Since that day, my sister has visited us with her wonderful family. We have visited her, too, and we share in their joys and sorrows. The young man who is now my brother-in-law is one of the best people I have known in my entire life. He is a person who is ambitious, loves life, and most importantly loves his family very much.

Bigotry does not stand in the way of love. True love always wins, no matter the differences between the two parties.



Sali
Tripoli
20 years old
Lebanese

The story began when we escaped from our house in the city to the village, because of the clashes between Jabal Mohsen and Al-Tabbaneh.

On 23 May 2013, at 2 p.m., my brother decided to return to his military service at the request of his subordinates, due to the poor security situation. At 4.30, my brother was ready to join his army. He bid farewell to us, and we did not know that it would be the last goodbye.

When he left the house, the place was silent, as if fear was spreading throughout our hearts.

At 5 p.m. the phone rang. But instead of hearing that he had arrived in good health, we received the news that he had died after being hit by twenty-three bullets, because of his religion.

In my childhood, I had a cautious personality. I was afraid to risk anything, even to buy a doll. But when my brother was killed, all the scales turned. This incident gave me the strength to

break the impotence of fear and plant confidence in my heart. I resolved that treating patients will be the key to the door of my future, and I will not stand to the side because life will go on and stops for no-one. And if God wants something for you, he will make it yours no matter the circumstances.

In conclusion, strength does not come from a vacuum. It is an outcome of a situation that may have shocked the soul, but also awakened the confidence within us.

“Have you ever been in a situation that helped you discover your own strengths, as in this previous story?”



Around the time that high school exams started, I experienced some situations that changed the way I think about others and taught me not to judge them.

But then once, I suddenly fell on the ground while I was walking. No-one came to help me except this girl my friends had insulted and said was bad. I felt in that moment that my friends would not have tried to help this girl if she had been in my position. I took her hand, saying I never would have expected her to help me.

her. This incident showed me that one day my friends would speak as badly of me as I had seen them talk about others. I cut off my relationship with them, and she became one of my best friends. She is very dear to my heart, and we are able to agree with each other despite the great differences between us. She respects my traditions, and I do hers.

35

إلغاء الفهرية - زيادة التوعية
محبة الأخرين
تقديم المساعدة
بمواضيع الزواج المبكر
والمساواة بين الجنسين

إلغاء الطائفية

Abdo

Tripoli

19 years old
Syrian

My story began in 2011, when the war broke out in Syria.

I am from Homs city, where the uprisings and demonstrations first began and then developed into attacks with weapons: bullets, cannons, and missiles. I bore all these pressures when I was only eight years old, and because of the poor, deteriorating living situation, I had no choice but to flee abroad with my family.

In 2013, I emigrated to Egypt, which was our first, transitional destination. I did not know what would happen, but the most important thing was to escape from the smell of death that spread in the alleys of our neighbourhood.

I settled in Egypt for about four years, and I got to know many friends and considered Egypt my second home.

In 2017, I moved to Lebanon to open a new page in my life. I met new friends whom I could describe as brothers, and I loved Lebanon as I love Syria, my mother country.

In the summer of 2021, I found out

about the Storytelling Club. I felt a drive to participate in this activity. I was a little nervous not knowing who would be participating in this club, but I did not let that feeling control me too much. I got ready and went to the meeting place.

Upon entering, we had to undergo a quick test for COVID-19. I stood up and at first felt nothing, but then felt a sudden drop in pressure and I fell to the ground. The young men and women ran to me and helped me get up and feel better.

When this situation occurred, I felt that I was among friends I had known for a long time. The nervous feeling I had before arriving was gone as soon as they stood next to me like this.

This attitude showed me the beauty of the help and the human spirit they had. We seemed like one family.

My story shows that you can live and meet friends anywhere, as long as humanity exists and life – which will not stop for anyone or anything – continues.

 A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing on a white sheet of paper with a yellow pencil. The person is wearing a black beaded bracelet on their right wrist and a silver metal watch on their left wrist. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden desk and some other papers.
 **Mark
Tripoli**

19 years old
Lebanese

My story took place in 2017. It is a story that changed the way I think. It tells how I re-engineered in my mind a true image of Lebanon, and of the ideals it was built on, for as His Holiness Pope John Paul II said, "Lebanon is more than a country. Lebanon is a message."

I was born in Zgharta, in North Lebanon. I learned since childhood to open up to others, albeit in a simple way. I belonged to my town and my country, thanks to my upbringing by my parents. I joined a football club in Zgharta and defended its colours, and I do not deny that I was playing with all my heart, believing that I was raising the flag of the family and the town high.

Things were fine until a dispute broke out in the club, at which point I had to leave. I pointed my compass towards Tripoli, the capital of the north, in May 2017.

This was a period in which Fayhaa

witnessed security upheavals and political turmoil. My steps did not receive everyone's support, but the blessing of my family, especially my father, was sufficient. In addition, I had the support of a high-ranking figure with an ideology that crosses sects and borders. I followed him, and our stories were similar, leading from a mountain den to the Lebanese coast in Tripoli, the source of knowledge and scholars, and the common North Mosque.

My career did not have a serious success, so the relationship with all the people of the North and Lebanon started from Tripoli and served the interest of all individuals.

Will we find someone who appreciates the love that exists and is firmly rooted in the conscience of the people? It proves to the whole earth that Lebanon is the home of all who love!

Tina
Tripoli

22 years old
Syrian



My story began at the club where I worked, and it involved a young woman who was a trainee there.

There was a problem at the club. A young man started talking about the new girl in an inappropriate way. The next day, she came and asked me what he had said about her. I answered her truthfully, although I knew it could cost me my job. I wanted to help her at any cost.

We faced all the pressures and difficulties that occurred together, and she became a friend close to my heart. Our belonging to different sects was no obstacle to our friendship.

° المرح حب الاصدقاء

اختصاص قهوة

رققاني

اص بابا

ماما

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Laura
Tripoli

22 years old
Lebanese

Beirut, 4 August, at 6:10 p.m. the ominous day, the most difficult day I have faced in my life.

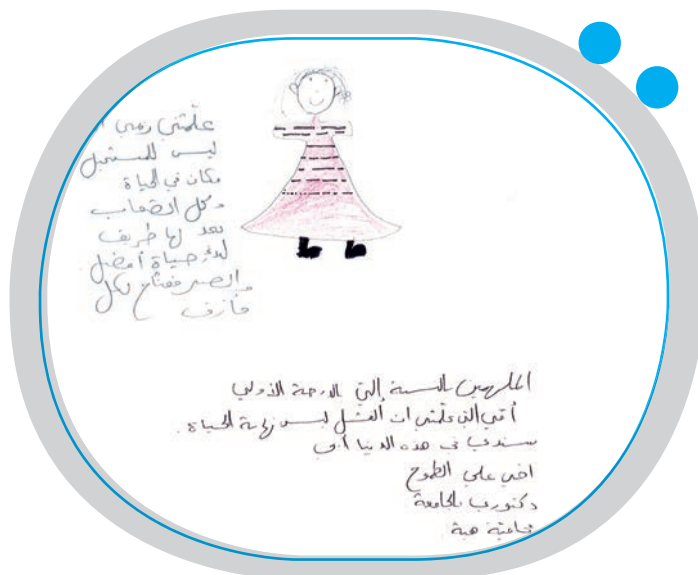
My family and I were in Beirut, visiting my relative. While we were near the port, we saw smoke and many people standing around. Then, in the blink of an eye, we were on the ground. In a place far from our residence, where we knew no one, and where everyone was on the ground. I got up to check on my family, and for a moment I looked at those around me, men and women, everyone helping the other, helping them because they were brothers and sisters. On this day, no religion, politics, or nationality could separate one person from the other.

This day was one of the defining days in my life. I experienced death and life in one day, even in an instant, as I feared the loss of one of my family members.

**Where were you
when the Beirut blast
happened? What did
you lose, and what did
you gain?**

Touny
Tripoli

22 years old
Lebanese



In Lebanon, we live in a country that is going through difficult economic conditions.

A month ago, I was standing at a gas station waiting for my turn. A young Syrian man, around 20 years old, was working at this station. While I was waiting in line in my car, a customer arrived who started being argumentative and trying to fill his car by force. The worker asked him kindly to go back to the line and wait for his turn.

When the driver realised that the worker was a Muslim, he tried to bully him, then he got out of his car and started cursing the worker and tried to hit him. At that time, I was no longer able to control my nerves, so I got out of the car and went towards the two young men. I kept them away from each other, and said to the driver, "Why do you harm this worker? He is just doing his job." And I stood beside the worker.

We live in a country that humiliates the poor, so every human being must

put himself in the place of this worker in order to be free from these limitations and to see every person as a human being like ourselves.





**Kanaan
Beirut**

21 years old
Palestinian

The story began on 4 August, which was a quiet day until it became a tragic one. This was the day when the catastrophe of Beirut occurred, shaking Lebanon and all its residents, whether Lebanese or foreigners. At that time, social networking sites were buzzing with the news that an explosion had destroyed the bride of Lebanon and its suburbs. The assistance teams began to appeal and ask for help from all governorates at various levels, whether for housing, clothing, food, or even for the healthcare system.

A Beirut hospital appealed for blood donors because of a shortage of blood units of various blood types. When I heard this, all I saw was delegations of neighbors and friends, rushing to the hospital in my refugee camp to donate blood. Eventually, there were too many donors for the hospital, so the donors were sent to nearby hospitals.

The following day, delegations from civil institutions and youth groups within the camp, armed with cleaning tools,

set out for Beirut to take the initiative to collect the rubble and glass on the ground. The Palestinian Civil Defense organised groups to search for the missing and help reunite families.

The tragedy that took place in Beirut was painful, but every drop of blood that was shed created a new life in Beirut. Most importantly, a helping hand came from all nationalities, religions, and cultures, which assured me that humanity erases all differences.

**What is your wish
for Lebanon?**



**Rose
Beqaa**

16 years old
Syrian

I moved with my family to Lebanon because of the war, when I was nine years old. This step was very difficult for me at such a young age. I did not know anyone; I had no friends or neighbours.

In time, I began attending school after overcoming many difficulties, and I began to get to know friends and the community more. We changed our place of residence a lot, and I also moved schools often. And every time we moved I was afraid to face society, because I was bullied a lot because of my nationality and my religion.

When I turned 12 years old, we moved to a Christian area. I also studied at a Christian school for three years, sharing my thoughts as a Muslim in that time and seeing myself as different from Christians and the Christian faith. I was young and did not understand how to speak properly, and I was exposed to bad words and bullying in the neighbourhood, which made the situation worse. All these things affected my personality, and I was always thinking, "Why am I being bullied?"

One day the principal of the school came to our class and announced a holiday on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday. So I asked him – because of the prejudices in my mind as a result of bullying – do Christians celebrate this occasion? He was disturbed by the question, because he had always taught us not to differentiate between religions. So the English teacher, who loved me and always advised me, intervened and helped me understand that the neighbourhood children had left a distorted image of Christians in my mind. After that, the principal of the school understood the reason for my question, and now I love and respect all religions.

At school, they treated me well and did not discriminate against students based on their religion. With the help of the school and of those around me, I was able to overcome my fear, the pain of bullying, and the stereotypes I had developed from my past experiences.

All these years later, I love Lebanon so much, and I have volunteered in many organisations that have further changed my views and thinking about myself and society. Thanks to everyone who supported me, today I am able to be a confident girl.





Louna
Beqaa

15 years old
Syrian

In 2019, my sister got married at the age of 14. She wasn't mature enough for this, and she didn't know how to take care of housework. Her husband promised us that he would take care of her and teach her, and for various reasons my parents had no choice but to accept this marriage. After my sister got married, she lived near our house, and my mother and I used to go to help her. She gave birth to her first son a year after her marriage, and after the first boy she gave birth to two other children, and she did not know how to raise children. It is correct to say that she was "like a child raising children" for a long time, and there were a lot of problems between her and her husband.

My family and I had to leave our place of residence and move away from my sister, and the marital problems increased between her and her husband. She did not know how to cook or take care of the children or the house well, and an argument broke out between

them, which we did not find out about until later.

At that time, I was shy, ashamed a lot, and spoke only to my family members. One day, a woman visited us who introduced herself as a volunteer in an organisation opposed to child marriage that included members of different nationalities and sects. She invited us to help her in this volunteer work. Then she told us about her own experience, how she had been married at a young age, suffered a lot, and went through very difficult circumstances. When she began to speak, I did not pay much attention, but as she spoke I became interested, and I was surprised by how taking part in this campaign had made her more courageous. We talked, and got along, and I decided to volunteer in the association, especially because in my family there is a girl who got married at an early age. Since I joined the campaign, my self-confidence has increased, I have become more



connected with the community, and I heard many people's stories, which have made me stronger.

This simple meeting, and this campaign, have changed my life and the lives of many, and raised awareness of this issue, as well as the importance of social cohesion in confronting these outdated customs and protecting the rights of children and adults.

One day, I visited my sister to spend a day with her and to help her. Her husband came back from work and a disagreement broke out between them, and he beat her in front of me. I was disturbed by what happened, and despite my young age I confronted him, telling him that what had happened was very wrong, and reminding him how he had promised us that "he would take care of her." I went back to my house, and I told my mother about what had happened, but she did not take any initiative because of the circumstances we were going through. After a while, I

visited my sister again, and I asked her if there had been any development, and she thanked me a lot for what I had done. Her husband had developed a lot in this regard. He became more interested in her and more understanding, and he no longer assaulted her.

I was very proud of myself that I was able to confront him despite my nervousness, and I became stronger after this.





**Michal
Beqaa**

15 years old
Lebanese

One summer day in 2015, my friends and I went to the football field at the Evangelical Church in Rayak. There I met people who were strangers to the area, namely Fayez, a boy my age, and his brother Fadi. I asked who they were, and I learned they were Syrian refugees.

At first, I rejected them. I considered Syrian refugees a danger to society, and I did not like their presence among us, so I decided to beat Fayez. I waited until he separated from his older brother, then I went and began to provoke him. He appeared upset and afraid, as he was alone, but he gathered his strength and attacked me. We hit each other, hard, until one of the officials stopped us, demanded that we apologise to each other, and told us about the importance of love.

Indeed, after this episode, we were reconciled, and my view of him changed.

I discovered that he is similar to me in everything except for nationality. I now have a Syrian best friend who I do everything with, and our relationship has only grown stronger with time.

**Think about your
best friend. What
character traits
does he or she
have?**



**Jina
Beqaa**

16 years old
Lebanese

One day in July 2021, my friend and I went to a training program. There we met some new people from different nationalities and religions. After the program, my friend and I sat at the table with several girls I had met there. As we talked, my friend turned the conversation to religions, and I asked one of the girls about her religion, to learn about it and its values.

At the same time, another girl made an unrelated joke that made us laugh.

The girl who was talking about her religion thought that we were making fun of her. The conversation at the beginning

had flowed easily, and then she suddenly refused to continue, saying that we had mocked her. Personally, I was very upset, and I couldn't express myself. I knew laughing was not the best course of action in such a situation. But then, I explained to her why I was laughing and that she had misunderstood, and she accepted it when she understood what had happened.

Wonderfully, we went about our day and we became friends despite our differences. This experience has taught me not to misunderstand others without hearing their point of view or their input.



Leena
Beqaa

16 years old
Lebanese

In 2019, a tall, beautiful girl of Syrian nationality, 17 years old, knocked on our door. She came to ask for help, looking for an opportunity for full-time work in a home.

My grandmother told her that she did not need help, but when she insisted, my grandmother decided to give her a one-day job. When I learned this, I was one of the first to object. How can a strange girl we do not know break into our house from morning to evening?

I decided to cause her to make some mistakes, so that my grandmother wouldn't let her work the next day. But to my surprise, my grandmother turned a blind eye to these mistakes and allowed her to work in our house. And when I learned this, it was as if a black cloud descended over my head, and sadness filled my heart. I did not like it, and do not ask me why, as I do not have the answer. There was no

reason for me to ignore her, because the girl was kind, but unfortunately I did.

Days passed and I did not speak to her even once. Then one day, when there was no one else in the house, I fell down the stairs. When she heard me cry out, she ran to me, her hands trembling and her eyes shining with fear. "Are you alright?" she said. "Can I help you?" Then, she extended her hand towards me to help me. At that time, I could not describe my feelings, but all I know is that I no longer felt pain in my body, but rather regret in my heart.

From this, I learned a lesson that I will never forget for the rest of my life: not to rely on prejudices. If I had not mistreated this girl, I would have had no regrets and wouldn't have had to apologise to her. I am now convinced that differences can build a high wall between two people, and that for us to move forward, this wall must be demolished.



Hossam

Beqaa

14 years old
Lebanese

In 2011, a Syrian family migrated to Lebanon due to the war in Syria. They lived in a house near to ours. The family remained isolated, refusing to go out and get to know others, and we did not know why.

After about a year, the children of this family went out to play, playing only with other Syrian children. They tried to get close to us, but we refused, especially me. I thought they were not educated and were from a terrorist group, and I rejected them. On one occasion, I happened to be with a child of this family; we talked, and he spoke to me with morality and understanding. He spoke against these terrorist groups, and his thoughts matched my thoughts. He entered my heart and I saw that I had been prejudiced toward him and his family. From then on, I helped

him integrate more into society, and I started telling him about our traditions.

**Do you think
achieving equality
among all people
would strengthen
social cohesion?**

ليبي الله يكون في قلوبنا
والصالحين ودمهم العفو عني
التحليل الهمم الى العترة
وهكذا يكون بلدي راحة

**Zina
Beqaa**

21 years old
Syrian

In 2014, at the age of 13, I came to Lebanon because of the war in Syria. I was greatly relieved when we arrived.

When we arrived in Lebanon, we asked about schools to continue our education. We found a big difference in the curricula, and our relatives requested that we not continue studying in Lebanon due to the difficulty of the curriculum. I was sad and cried, because my dream was to continue my studies and to become a doctor. I am the only female in our family pursuing her studies.

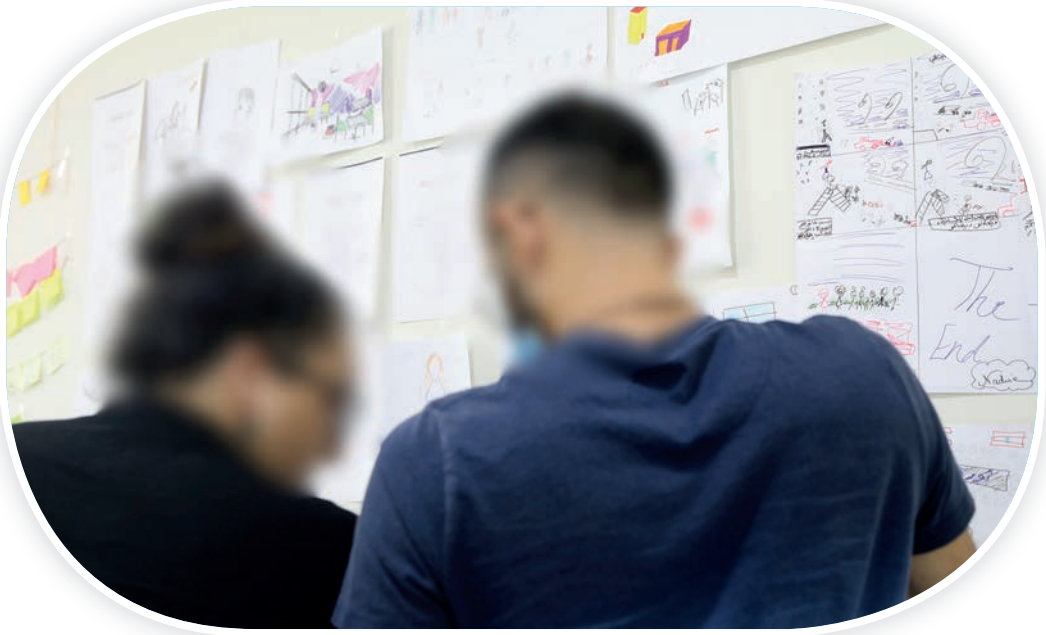
Until this day, I remember so well the dialogue between my uncle and aunt and my father and mother. They asked my parents not to allow me to complete my studies, because they believed that “the girl, in the end, will be for her husband’s house” and that studying is too expensive and will not benefit the family. The only option available to me then was marriage,

because our society marries girls off at a very early age, believing that the husbands will raise them.

I panicked and cried a lot, but I did not give in to this choice and the talk of my relatives. I confronted everyone and told them that I wanted to pursue my education and did not want to get married.

They were shocked at my reaction, for they were so used to me being a daughter who heeded her parents’ commands. Even I was surprised by my behaviour, by how I had the strength to defend what I wanted in light of my dreams, ambitions, future, and life.

I insisted on my opinion, searched for schools, and worked hard in English-language reinforcement courses. Then I found a Syrian school on the Syrian-Lebanese border, in a village called Kafaryabus. I was glad but worried that my family would not accept it. Indeed they were not satisfied at first and were



afraid, but my insistence changed their opinion.

For three years, I went daily from Lebanon to Syria for school, and in this way I could continue studying. I succeeded in the baccalaureate with high marks, with which I could enter the School of Laboratory Medicine.

My family's status has changed. Now, my family pride is based on my knowledge, and my own pride increased when I saw my mother's tears because of my achievement. In general, my mother was the only one who believed in my abilities from day one.

I am currently studying, active in the Campaign Against Child Marriage, making independent decisions, and taking responsibility for myself. I have become a model for many of my friends.

My advice to the youth of today is

to believe in your dream, dare to say no, and do not allow anyone to steal your life and dreams – even if they are your parents. Had I agreed to what my parents wanted, I could have been married with children. A child with children will not add anything to my community.





**Khalil
Beqaa**

16 years old
Syrian

In 2012, in Syria, I was at school, and it was time to go home at the end of the day. An army bus passed by the school at the same time, and suddenly we heard a terrible explosion near the school. We later realised that the bus was booby-trapped.

Until this day, I cannot forget the horrific scene in front of me; the body parts everywhere, my feeling of great fear; and how I cried with intensity. My father came to get me quickly, and I continued crying.

After a while, when I was playing in church school on a Sunday, I fainted. We did not realise the reason, until after we consulted several doctors. The first doctor who diagnosed me was found murdered not long after, before my treatment was completed. So we visited another doctor, who diagnosed me with epileptic seizures caused by

the trauma I had been through. I then underwent treatment.

My family and I moved to Lebanon in 2014. At first, I was rejected and ostracised by the community where I live. But after several months, I made friends. A fight broke out between me and a group of children after we met once at a festival at the church, and as a result people noticed that I was shy, and they approached me despite their previous attempts to bully me.

Later I joined a boarding school and being there helped me a lot in getting over what happened to me, being independent, and taking care of myself.

All these events made me a stronger person. The support of my neighbors – despite their rejection of me at the beginning – and of my family has had a positive impact that helped me overcome what I experienced.



**Jacob
Beqaa**

15 years old
Lebanese

Six years ago, when I was nine, there was a party in my village, and everyone was invited.

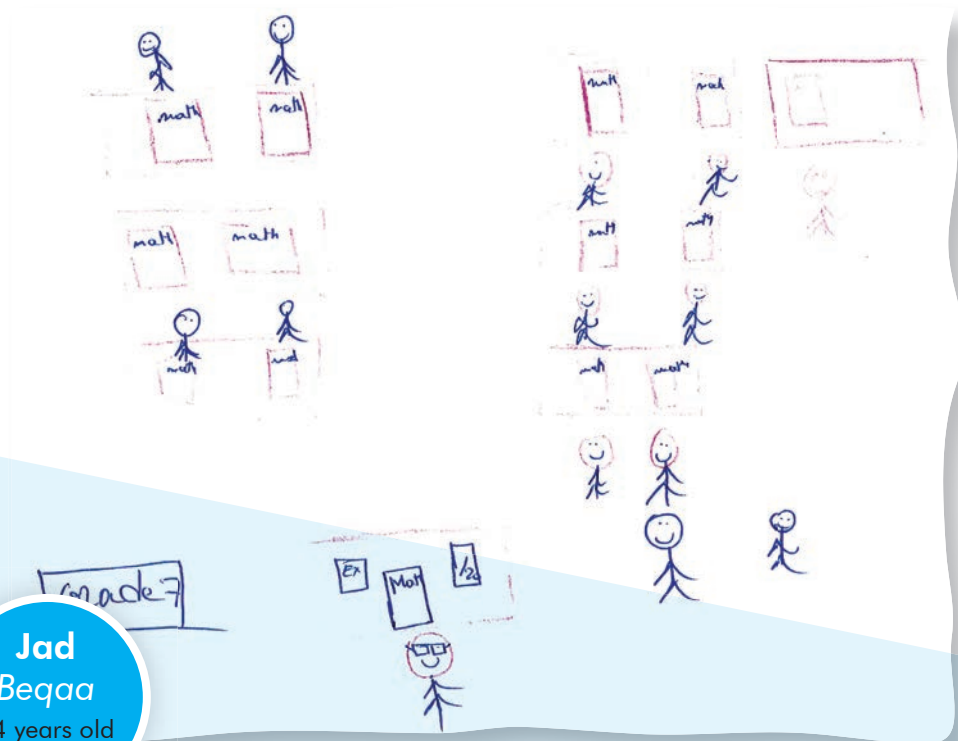
The party was at 9.00 pm. As people were arriving, a group was standing there, bullying and discriminating against everyone joining the party.

It was not the first time I had seen them bully others. I got so angry. My

friends and I went to talk to them. They did not want to stop. We started fighting, but after that, we talked.

They realised that what they were doing was wrong. They became more welcoming, and we became friends.

Everyone should contribute to social cohesion. Hand in hand, we can fight discrimination and rejection of others.



Jad
Beqaa

14 years old
Lebanese

Punch me and then love me!
Once I was in the school playground when someone came and pushed me hard, I tried to stop him, and we exchanged punches. The supervisor came and solved the problem. When we reconciled, we became best friends. After getting to know each other, there was great harmony between us. What I hate he hates, and what I love he loves.





**Sahar
Beqaa**

18 years old
Syrian

On 1 May 2020, I met the brother of my mother's work colleague by chance. I had a prejudice, a false one, toward this person because of the region he comes from. I thought I did not like the beliefs of people who belong to that area.

But later, we worked in the same place, and we met often. One day, we went to a restaurant, chatted, and found common ground, even though he was a man and different from me in his region, habits, and way of thinking. This talk revealed we have many things in common, and now we share our thoughts more and more, and we are as close as siblings, and he always helps me be happy.

Every person has many elements and characteristics that make up his or her identity. What are the elements that make up your identity?