

The Helping Hand - Collaborating across divides

Kauthar is a Syrian girl living in a tent with her family near Majdal Anjar in Beqaa here in Lebanon. One day when she was at school, she was asked by her teacher if she could help me. "I like helping people", she said, she smiled, and was ready. And I needed help. Handing out woolen clothes knitted by women in Norway to people in the neighborhood with poverty - in a fair way and with dignity - is not possible for me to do without help. My Arabic is not good enough, and I do not have the local knowledge needed. Kauthar did a brilliant job with translations and she arranged that everyone received what they needed and also what they liked. She helped us to understand each other.

I've been following Kauthar's development since the first day she helped me. Her talents and skills are blossoming. She knows she is useful, that she can contribute a lot, she knows she is needed in both the small and the big world she is a part of.

As a psychologist, I know that many young people – like Kauthar - need some support to trust themselves and develop good coping strategies - in addition to actual possibilities to contribute. Good problem solving strategies are important for everybody. When faced with tough life situations, as displaced adolescents very often are, psychological training can increase hope, be crucial for courage - and can save lives.

I have already seen that by playing through scenarios where adolescents – gamers - help different friends in the game to dare to speak, express their opinions, deal with bad memories and learn from traumatic experiences, adolescents can learn what it takes to participate and contribute with their good ideas in real life. I have seen a girl who, after playing this game for 45 minutes, raised her hand and said *"Wow, with this Helping Hand, This problem solving system, I can solve all sorts of problems!"*

Parts of what people are struggling with everywhere are the same: To feel they are of high value, to feel loved, to believe in themselves, to cope with bad memories. People who are able to tell with words what they are feeling and thinking, cope better. My years as a psychologist have shown me - time and time again - that it makes sense to train youths in emotional problem solving skills. How to relate to your own and others' feelings and thoughts CAN be trained - and it should be trained! Research has also documented that it is efficient.

Right now, there is a huge mental health gap. Young people with well-educated parents in rich parts of the world have completely different opportunities for support than young people with parents with little education and money in the poorer parts of the world.

If we apply modern technology and give access to everyone - it's amazing what can happen and change in the world. Most young people in Lebanon have access to a smartphone. It is

my great hope that our game actually reaches youth across economic divides. To achieve this, there is an urgent need for collaboration. The Corona pandemic makes it easier than ever before to talk about emotions and coping strategies, and to reach out with digital interventions. Now is the time to continue to collaborate with young Arabs to make the world better!

I am wildly proud about the game we have created – and want to express my gratefulness.

Thank you Innovation Norge and the NORAD funding, Visjon2030

Thanks to Attensi and Gyldendal

Thanks SO much to SAMS og MAPS here in Lebanon

Thanks to all language people involved, especially Guro Gjuvsland and Sherin Awahab.

And **Thank you**, young boys and girls who have contributed with good ideas, courage and optimism in this game development.

The world needs you!!