Alleviating the Refugee Crisis in Lebanon through Medical Clinics in Mount Lebanon
Lebanon
Randolph-Macon College
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The goal of this project was to provide immediate medical and hygienic care to refugee children living in the mountains of Lebanon through a medical free clinic located in the village of Kfarselwan. This service was not only used to highlight the plight of the large refugee population but to also promote the coexistence between the Lebanese people and the Syrian refugees, in Lebanon and back at Randolph-Macon College.

The Davis Project for Peace was the only fundraising effort that contributed to my project. The outcome and results were quite different than what was expected, but this gave the project a sense of spontaneity that was wonderful. I completed a consecutive five-day medical brigade in Kfarselwan, Lebanon, August 6-10, 2018. Thankfully, this year was a much smoother process than last year’s Davis Project for Peace intervention. I was able to host the event consecutively and thankfully, secured doctors that were able to work on those days as well.

There were many unanticipated difficulties with planning such an event in a third-world country, especially a country where I do not live. The chaotic system in Lebanon does not progress. Year after year, unfortunately, it either stays the same or in some cases, gets worse. The characteristic of “chaotic system” refers to the government and political systems as well as the daily lives of civilians. To go forth with such an event, I had to get approval from the mayor of Kfarselwan. Because I had completed this event last year, I was able to get approval this year much quicker. There were less logistics involved.

The five days in Kfarselwan were absolutely wonderful. However, not every day was as busy as I anticipated. The first day of clinic was extremely packed; we saw more people than I expected. However, the second and third days were a little slower. My theory on that is because people naturally procrastinate—so, if they didn’t make it to the first day of clinic, they were going to wait until the last two days. And, as anticipated, the last two days were much busier than the second day of clinic. Just like last year, though the goal of the project was to alleviate the Syrian refugee crisis, I had refugee children from other countries as well as very vulnerable Lebanese children show up to the event; these Lebanese people live the refugee lifestyle and are treated as refugees in their very own country.

This event was absolutely rewarding, and I am so very thankful that I had the opportunity to do it for a second year in a row. However, I am still stuck with the same internal conflicts that I felt last year. How much of an impact am I really making? There is so much to do, and what I did was a simple drop in the ocean. So many people and children need help that it absolutely breaks my heart. Part of me allows this internal conflict to grow after every event. But, there is another part of me that fuels the positive energy. The energy that reminds me that though there are still people in need, so many people were helped in just five short days. Not only did the refugees and Lebanese themselves benefit from this project, but I believe that the people of both towns benefited, as well. I contributed to helping break that stigma, even if it wasn’t the biggest contribution. It is hard to change the mentality of the older Lebanese populations; however, with the younger generations, I was able to completely shatter that barrier between the two cultures. I also genuinely believe that the residents of Kfarselwan realized the importance of such events and the importance of volunteering our time to try and make a difference— if not “make a difference,” then at minimum help someone in need.

I was worried I would have budget constraints since medications in Lebanon are quite expensive and I had the intention of providing all of the medications needed for the patients for free—whether we had what was needed in stock or not. However, since I used the grant money for solely this project, I was left over with about $650 that I donated to the free clinic in Kfarselwan. I was able to provide all of the medications prescribed to the patients for free. I made an agreement with a local pharmacy in a village called Qarnayel (because Kfarselwan does not have a pharmacy) to charge the medications for any of the refugees sent to that specific pharmacy to my account. I later paid the bill using the grant money.

Though I am originally from Lebanon, I still found some difficulties with cultural differences completing a project in a country that I did not grow up in. While my family made the effort of taking us to Lebanon every summer, I still am susceptible to cultural barriers. The difference between the barriers this summer from last summer was that I expected them this year. I was prepared for them because I had experienced them last summer. It is definitely not easy to plan, organize and implement a project like this in Lebanon—especially when you are basically on your own like I was. Living and working in a third-world
country is very difficult and unstable. At times, much to my surprise since this was the second year I was completing the project, I was not sure if I would be able to put on an event like this on my own. However, with diligent planning, constant evaluation and lots of patience, it was completely possible.

Just as I imagined last year’s project to be sustainable and effective for the goals that I had set-out, this year surpassed my expectations. As I mentioned before, I live with this constant internal struggle feeling like I am not doing enough as a humanitarian. However, little projects like this can remind me of how effective and important such a project can be – though small-scale. Along with the medications that the children received alleviating their symptoms for the visit, they also received multivitamins and pain-relieving medications like Children’s Tylenol or Panadol (a supply for at least 3 months). These pain-relieving medications could also be used for their siblings, and this relieved my heart (just a bit). Last year I said that there was a future for my project, and this year, I will say it again. Hopefully, next year, I will land upon a grant that will allow me to do it for the third year in a row. I still was only able to get funding from the Davis Project for Peace grant. But, hopefully next year, since the project/event is well known in the villages in the Mountains of Lebanon, I will be able to obtain additional funding.

As Americans, we wake up every day and have a sense of “peace” and “freedom” within our hearts, thankfully. Not many people throughout the world are privileged enough to understand and relate to peace the way we do. Like I said last year, and I will say every year, there are certain countries, regions, and populations that live in a situation of the exact antonym of the word peace. Peace is a state of mind in which we, from within, are free from hatred, hurting, starvation and prejudice. We have to be at peace within to be able to radiate peace to those around use. It is a chain reaction: we just need to get people to get on the “radiate peace” train. Peace is being able to provide enough food and water for your family without fearing for your life at work from the local bombings. Peace is where every child is fed and tucked in bed by 9pm – not selling gum or water bottles on the streets of Beirut at midnight. Peace is only present in a world where there is no prejudice and hatred – a world very difficult to imagine nowadays. Not to sound narcissistic or cynical, though a peaceful world can be difficult to image at times – it is not impossible. Organizations like the Davis Project for Peace are making a tremendous difference around the world, one project at a time.

I believe that my project contributed to spreading peace and awareness of the situation that these refugees live in within the small village of Kfarselwan and the bordering villages in the Mountains of Lebanon. Through this project, I have learned that it is not a matter of how “big” a project or intervention was, it is the time and effort that is put into making a project meaningful. There is no sense in planning for a big project that does not resonate with many people. In order for a project to promote peace, it must resonate with the hearts of the people it is intending to help and more. I have this burning desire to make the world a better place. Often times, I feel silly, because I am one girl from small-town Richmond, VA. Other times, I feel so empowered and able to do absolutely anything and everything to spread the peace that I feel within me and hope that it radiates. I hope that the peace that I feel within me touches the hearts of those around me and encourages them to feel peace, no matter their circumstances. I received an immense amount of gratitude and support in Lebanon and it makes me hopeful for implementing it again next year.

Though an eye-opener to the rough situations in Lebanon, my project instilled the love that I have for my home country. It lit that spark within my heart – the spark of peace, love and kindness. This project motivated me to be a better person and to spread peace wherever I go, even if it’s not via a formal project as the one I completed in Lebanon. The refugee crisis is real, and it is a prominent issue in Lebanon; there are more refugees in Lebanon than there are Lebanese people. Take a minute and think about that. Let it resonate. Not only does this cause issues from a medical and public health standpoint, but also from a political and social standpoint, as well. Just as this project changed me last year, it changed me this year. I was able to aid not one nor two families, but a multitude of families in the village of Kfarselwan.

I saw the smiles on many children from all over Lebanon in the five short days I spent in Kfarselwan; this, to me, leaves a sense of hope, peace and love in my heart. We can create a peaceful world. All it takes is forming peace within and letting it radiate – one action can cause a chain reaction – always.