



A Virtual Storytelling Club for Syrian Refugee Children in the Beqaa / Lebanon.

January 2021

Supported by funds from the PRIX JEUNESSE Foundation, I organized a Storytelling Club with seven Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. The activity in the end took place via Zoom. We had set more than one date to implement it physically, but we were unable to do so due to the constantly changing Covid-19 regulations by the Lebanese government, such as curfews and restrictions in regard to social gatherings.

I had coordinated the activity with three different groups of children. The first two groups withdrew because they did not have the appropriate technical tools to participate online. I conducted the virtual Storytelling Club with the third group of older kids aged between 10 and 15 years who are already studying online.

The STC took place on three consecutive days. I followed the concept of the storytelling club handout, with few modifications related to the activity sequence. The leading theme of all sessions was "The Day I Became Strong in the Pandemic".

We met online in the evenings, from 7 – 9 pm, which was challenging for the children, as it meant meeting at the end of a long day with school and homework sessions in the afternoon, but the children chose these times.

Also, I set a time for each child (30-45 minutes on WhatsApp) to write his/her story because the children found it difficult to do so in the group setting, especially as their internet speed is weak. We will arrange a time when they finish the school exams to invite their parents and friends to listen to their stories.

Observations/challenges:

1. Most of the children immediately understood the basic concept of the activity because they had already attended a storytelling club, dedicated to children of missing persons in the prisons of the Syrian regime.

2. Children suffer from online learning and do not like it and their teachers are not cooperative. At the beginning it was difficult to make them interact enthusiastically, so I prepared colourful presentations, and I added some fun mental games to stimulate them (such as puzzles, finding differences between pictures etc.).

3. Every child was excited to talk about his experiences in the pandemic time. But most of the children were not eager to draw.

4. It was difficult to motivate children to write about the problems they encountered in the quarantine because their life problems related to asylum are much bigger than any challenges related to the pandemic, as many of them live in small tents. Their parents either work for low wages or are not working at all, which leads to a series of daily suffering related to livelihood, material and moral stability, and security.

5. One of the children knew that his father, who was arrested nine years ago, is still alive, and he included that in his story, but he hesitated to read his story in order to be careful with the feelings of other children who still don't know anything about their missing relatives. But after encouragement he read it to everyone and gave the rest of the children new hope.

Report by Yisra Al-Haj Hussein

A story by Rayhan, Lebanon

Since the home quarantine began, I started asking myself several questions, is it possible that I will not be able to meet my friends, and will I not be able to go to school, and are we going to start online classes? Indeed, what I was afraid of happened. I started studying online, and I began to feel more fear because the lessons became incomprehensible as they were before. And in addition to the problem of online study, there is the permanent boredom problem, and there was no choice but to create activities myself to remove the boredom. I began to invent many things, like reading stories, making handmade things, drawing, and many other things.

But the thing that helped me the most to overcome boredom was the Storytelling Club, through which I was able to use my time for better things and improve my skills. I now write stories about my problems through quarantine and solve them and draw them through quarantine. That is what helped me through the quarantine to get rid of the boredom, and here lies my strength, for I know that my power is complete when praising and using my mind with good things without my time lost, so all thanks are to myself and the Storytelling Club.

