



## **Virtual Storytelling Clubs for Syrian Refugee Children in Luxembourg and Ireland: The Day I Became Strong in the Pandemic November – December 2020**

We have conducted two STC workshops during the months of November and December of 2020. The first one took place in Luxembourg and the other one in Ireland. In the preparation phase we went through an election of the educator and the facilitator of the workshop on the bases of their expertise and the active presence in the targeted community. For the selection of the educator, we considered the importance of having a professional background in working with Syrian children and refugees, with a creative and therapeutic approach, knowing that telling a story is a form of therapy. And we chose to have a facilitator within the targeted community that is qualified with high communication and problem resolution skills, with expertise in social work and a knowledge of the children's schedule and conditions in order to maintain the trust and the ease when conducting the workshops.

In Luxembourg, the refugee children were selected by contacting the Red Cross, and in Ireland through Douri's focal point which reached the children through schools.

Both workshops were conducted through the video conference platform Zoom. We mainly followed the handout. The method suggested is clear and functional, yet in some sessions we modified some steps in order to cope with the cultural background of the children. For example, when we tackled the emotion "fear" or even the concept of "death" we mentioned some Syrian proverbs that serve the meaning, since the children were Syrians. And as some of the children come from an Islamic background, we were open and able to incorporate their believes, as a personal way of coping with difficult situation. For example, in the Luxembourg STC, one child mentioned that when he felt fear for the life of his grandfather diagnosed with COVID-19 in Syria, the child turned to pray a lot for his grandpa and to read Al Quran, the holy book in Islam, to help him cope with his fear. We as a team took that as a personal coping mechanism against negative emotions as fear, and we discussed it in the group with openness and a secular approach. Some children shared their own strategies to feel less afraid, like talking to friends or family, meditating etc.

On a technical level, we found that crafting emoji cards on a bigger scale and using them throughout the sessions helped with capturing the children's attention and enhancing the interaction from behind the camera.

Some of the experiences shared in the club were very touching. Some of the children opened up about difficult situations and their negative emotions, and they expressed that they didn't have a safe space where they can interact with peers and discuss personal issues and feelings.

We noticed that some children knew each other outside the club, some of them were friends yet on one occasion, a boy and a girl who had their differences from before the STC, went into a disagreement

in the session when we asked the children to mention something they like about each other, so we as a team had to dedicate an extra time in order to resolve the problem, using an inclusive approach where diversity of opinions are welcomed, helping the children to identify what is happening with them emotionally and mentally when they get into a conflict, and giving them tools to share it in the group with respect to each one's feelings.

With the majority of the children we observed a development in their capacities to express their heart and mind in front of the group, and how they gradually opened up and were able to gain confidence in themselves, their peers and us as facilitators. We noticed that children who had the capacity to do so were more able to develop a critical thinking, and to adopt the method of how to face a difficult situation and come up with solutions to what faces them. And we observed that their capacities to do so is linked with their social and specially their family context. For example, kids who were supported and encouraged by their parents throughout the sessions, whether by providing the space (a calm room) or with the needed equipment to connect to the Zoom meeting. We found that these children were more open, focused and participative than children who didn't have the family support.

A challenge was the language, since the children are refugees and in the process of integration to the new society and the new language. We noticed that children talked several languages. During the session we used Arabic, yet when it comes to writing, the majority of the children had difficulties in writing in their own language as well as the language of the host country.

We noticed that children in the Ireland edition of the Storytelling Club were uptight, because they come from repressive social context. The majority of them was shy and didn't make use of their creativity, they were distracted. One child of this group mentioned being hit by his father, and when he shared a difficult situation with another boy in school, he tended to be aggressive in his solutions.

In both editions, considering the hard time that the world is going through in regard to the pandemic, we observed the need in the children to have a constant access to a space like a Storytelling Club in which they connect, learn, exchange with their peers, for it represents for them a safe environment to talk about their emotions and to feel supported in order to cope.

*Report by Yusra Amounah  
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## A Story by Malak from Luxemburg

One day in the pandemic I was alone on the balcony watching the view of the sun, the birds and the butterflies, I looked around and there was my ball on the floor. I wanted to play so I took the ball. At that moment my younger brother came and told me: "I want the ball; I want to play now!" My brother was very angry, and I was bored but confident that I won't let him play because I am the one with the ball in hands and not him. We kept fighting over the ball, he got sad because I wouldn't allow him to play.

I noticed that the sun had started to come down, this day was coming to an end. Suddenly I felt sad that I was keeping the ball to myself, and making my brother feel excluded. So, I decided to share the ball with him and we began to play together happily, my brother expressed his happiness saying: "Yuppie, Yuppie!" and me saying: "Yeah Yeah Hooray!"

I learnt to be nicer with my brother and share my toys with him, especially during the pandemic when both of us are locked in the room feeling down most of the time. Being nice to others at hard times is rewarding to me and helps others to feel better and I advise all kids to do so as well!



### A story by Abdulla, Ireland

During the pandemic me and my younger sister had to stay home all the time, and sometimes being with each other every day all the day might be provocative, especially that we share the same bedroom. So one night, me and my sister went to sleep, I was feeling bored, and I felt like I want to have fun in a way or another, so I decided to scare my sister knowing that she cannot sleep with the door's room closed, and that was exactly I what I have done, I closed the door and switched off the light, and started to make scary sounds, so my sister felt afraid and she asked me to open the door. When I felt how scared my sister was, I decided to open the door and make her feel better by throwing a party for two, so we listened to music and we danced together, and had fun before sleeping. Through this situation, I learned that making my younger sister scared won't entertain me as much as sharing good times with her and having fun together.



### A Story by Louai, Ireland

My name is Louai, and I live in Ireland, and what I really love to do is play outside with my friends. Sadly, covid-19 spreads around the world, and we had to stay home to protect ourselves from the contagiousness. During the lockdown I felt sad and really bored for not being able to spend time playing outside home, so I started to think about other activities that can help me cope with the new situation, for that I started to read books during the pandemic, I really liked it, it felt like I was meeting people and learning new things in a fun way, I felt happy that I was able to develop a new hobby that helped me while feeling bored and overwhelmed. During the lockdown I learned how to find solutions to my boredom.

