

## News of the Educational Centre

### The gift box that Ahmad made for Mother's Day stayed on the table...

Ahmad is this smiling boy who comes to greets me every morning with a joyous "Good morning, how are you today?" He is also the one who has a special love for flowers and plants and cares for them each day.

Ahmad, it's for you this morning that we planted sunflower seeds, «Because once it flowers, it will be like Ahmad's face», said the children, a face full of smiles and sun.

It's now been one month that your laughter no longer rings in the school courtyard, that your voice is missing each morning, coming to welcome me.

The flowers know nothing about this, they are watered by others.

Ahmad died, crushed by a car under which he had been asked to check out some wiring. You see, Ahmad worked after school, 6 hours per day, 6 days per week, for a pittance.

Ahmad died on Mother's Day in Lebanon, March 21. He left without saying goodbye to us, leaving his gift on the table. He was supposed to give it to his mother the next day as we had the Mother's Day celebration at our Center. Ahmad died the first day of spring; he died also on Good Friday.

I saw him on Thursday evening in Intensive Care, his head swollen with bruises, in a coma. His father said to him: "Wake up, Ahmad! Miss Catherine has come to see you". Ahmad never re-awakened.

This morning, the children met around a large poster where we put pictures of Ahmad, in his classroom, in the courtyard, on his birthday (he was 11 last October) and at the time of our last children's club.

Ahmad had a very spontaneous faith; he loved to sing and was always ready to pray.

Ahmad is with God.

One month later, we still have his three brothers at our Centre, to speak about him and help us remember.



Ahmad in the schoolyard (center)  
Ahmad during a children's club (yellow shirt)

### Review of a school year

This school year 07/08 was difficult in more than one way for the children of our Centre and for Lebanon. There was Ahmad's death, then a couple of weeks later one of the fathers of our children was shot dead when he tried to stop two young men who were fighting. For fear of revenge that this murder was likely to bring, the families belonging to the aggressor's clan fled. This caused also the departure of 10 of our children who never came back. Their houses and their belongings were burned.

Then there were the troubles of this last May, political events because of the absence of a President which lasted several months. They took the form of street fighting and pillaging, opposing Sunni and Shiite Muslim groups and brought fears of civil war. The neighborhood where the Centre and the Dispensary are located being mixed Sunni and Shiite, certain families that we know well were attacked and had to flee. The Centre, like nearly all Beirut schools, was closed for 10 days, because the principal roundabouts of the city were blockaded by tons of earth and rubble.

Beirut, with its one million inhabitants includes neighborhoods more or less vulnerable on the politico-religious level. The area where we work is a very sensitive neighborhood and potentially dangerous.



↑ Shanty on fire during the troubles of May 2008

Three days before the re-opening of the Centre and once that access to it was less dangerous, we went to visit the families of the children with our teachers. It was so good for the families to see that we came to them, in spite of the precarious situation, and that we were going to re-open.

### Five days of active vacation!

After all these events, the July camp came as a wonderful gift after this eventful period. 37 children and adolescents took part in these five days of active vacation. « We only let them go with you because we trust you », the parents told us. What an honor and what a responsibility!

What a luxury for these children who are deprived of everything. Though the camp is very rudimentary, the surrounding nature is beautiful; space is unlimited, though a part of the neighboring mountain is prohibited because of land mines.



A tasty hot lunch ↑



top left : Handcrafts activities



Reflection Group ↑

### A nice way to finish the school year

The school year ended well, in spite of all these events, with a conference given to the parents on education, with exams and year-end activities. We plan to open a new class this coming year in our new facilities and to organize computer classes although our computers, used machines given by a local bank, did not survive the daily electricity cuts and fluctuations that we experience here and stopped working.

This year 2008/09, we have already registered 30 new children, though registration was only open for the brothers and sisters of the current children attending the Centre. The enrollment for this year is already 65 children and we must unfortunately refuse quite a number of applicants this year for lack of room.

Armande Helou, who taught art to the older girls and organized camps these last three years with Catherine, accepted to take more responsibility and help in the direction and administration of the Centre, two days per week. This is a precious and much-appreciated help!

To be able to take a hot shower in a closed room and specially equipped, to sleep in bunk beds, in a bedroom especially made for this, to have well-balanced days of activity with reflection, games, cultural outings, rest – all these are special moments so much appreciated and awaited by all the children.

Reading activities with an author of children's books and environmental protection learning took place at the end of the year in collaboration with the association T.E.R.R.E. We did not renew the contracts of some of our colleagues and new teachers were hired. In all, it will be a team of 7 or 8 teachers and a speech therapist, in addition to Armande and Catherine, which will begin the school year in September with a month of training and preparation before the children return on the 25th of September.

### For your information:

#### The urgent needs of the Centre are the followings:

25 tables and chairs to equip two new classrooms,  
Two teacher's desks, Two whiteboards, 8 computers,  
1 table for the new teachers' lounge (which moves from the kitchen to a classroom which will also serve as a library.. **Estimated cost: US\$ 7500 or €5350**

And why not let us wish for a more peaceful year than the last school year? We can dream, can't we!

Thank you for your support which takes diverse forms – spiritual, financial, friendship – it is precious!

### Tahaddi medical news

**Finding personnel pour the Tahaddi dispensary in Hayy al Gharbeh is not an easy thing. Here is the job profile ... whoever has ears to hear...!**

#### He or she must be:

- > Well qualified, for one of the core values of Tahaddi is professionalism. We do not want to use the indigent condition of our patients as an excuse to give them inferior service<sup>1</sup>.
- > Accept to work in a medical office discreetly located in the middle of a shantytown, for we want our patients to be able to come there on foot.
- > Be able to speak Arabic, at least on a basic level, even if at the risk of feeling inferior to the patients in level of communication, for this is the only language that our patients understand<sup>2</sup>.
- > Be flexible in adapting whenever the supply of electricity or water is missing. From January to March 2008, we had no electricity. We have to repair constantly and the Lebanese Electric Company refuses to come into our neighborhood because of the high level of delinquency.
- > Be ready to take the decision several times each year to go (or not) to work because of a precarious situation in the area: strikes, demonstrations, terrorist acts, etc. Each one must decide for him or herself and respect the decisions of others.
- > Be efficient, kind and patient with people who can give nothing in return, neither money nor anything else. The local staff is paid, but Lebanese salaries are low, and for the most qualified staff, the temptation to emigration is of course very strong.
- > Be prepared not to lose heart if he or she does not see the desired results or what might be hoped for working in better conditions. Certain patients, because of fear or fatalism, refuse operations or to allow their children to be operated if they are not aided financially. This year, for example, we worked very hard to help a young mother with severe kidney insufficiency to receive free access to dialysis. Once hospitalized for the placing of a catheter, however, she became afraid and fled the hospital.

For all this, we all need your thoughts and your prayers, and we thank you for your support.

1) "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine", says Jesus, "you did for me" – Gospel of Matthew 25 :40  
 2) "Humility comes before honor". Proverbs 18:12.



↑ Omar, 4 years, cardiac

### Current team

Here is the current team, in the order of seniority:

**Agnès** French, family physician. Initiated consultations at the Tahaddi dispensary in 2001, after having for several years (since 1996, with Catherine) given itinerant medical care in the shantytown. She divides her time between consultations, home visits, prison visitation and coordination of the Tahaddi medical work.

**Zeina** Lebanese, dispensary assistant since 2002. From the neighborhood, Zeina knows the families very well and takes care with efficiency and kindness the welcoming of the patients, file management, purchase of equipment and medicines. Since 2007 she works with Jihan in leading a community health education exercise for the neighborhood women.

**Dani** Lebanese, family physician, was trained at the French university hospital, Hôtel Dieu de France in Beirut, works part-time with us since 2003. Presently, he gives two extra afternoons per week in our new dispensary in Nabaa, and works nearly every day with Tahaddi. He is ver much appreciated for his humanity, his simplicity, his perseverance, his respect of the patients and also for his medical competence.

**Amina** Palestinian, has worked since 2005, making coffee, doing cleaning and caring for the tiny laurel rose garden and where cat families regularly take refuge. Amina lives in the shantytown with her two children, Walid and Zeinab. Her husband is in prison for 5 years for drug traffic. Amina and a second spouse who also has children take turns bringing to their common husband cigarettes and food from their small income, often being the object of his verbal abuse. Amina, like many women of this neighborhood, is remarkable for her courage and her determination to give her children an opportunity to leave this life of poverty.

← Left: Zeina - Right: Amina





**Jihan** Lebanese, midwife, has worked self-employed in a modest facility where she has been caring for pregnant women and childbirth for a very modest sum (\$100-\$150). We often send her our patients. With working conditions become intolerable, patients unable to pay medical fees nor able to pay hospitalization when complications arise, Jihan worked hard to continue this service to the poorest families. In 2006, a woman whose children attended the Tahaddi school, died during childbirth, following a hemorrhage. Jihan, shocked, ceased all activity, but accepted then to work with us part-time, to do the OB-GYN follow-up with the shantytown women. For practical reasons and for security, she no longer delivers children. We follow regularly the women during their pregnancy and attempt to find a hospital which accepts to deliver them for a modest price. This is often quite difficult, especially for those without legal papers, and certain women will go all the way to Sidon, 30 miles away by public transport, after they have begun labor, in order to find a cheap solution with a midwife who accepts to take them.

*« Certain women will go all the way to Sidon, 30 miles away by public transport, after they have begun labor, in order to find a cheap solution with a midwife who accepts to take them »*

Fortunately, for those who have Lebanese nationality, a new government hospital opened its doors in our area and accepts our patients for a very low price, with the aid of the Ministry of Health. Since 2008, Jihan leads with Zeina the above-mentioned health education courses. These sessions are a real success, an occasion for women to get together in a welcoming context where they can share their concerns and learn better live together. A recent outing by bus took them to a river resort and this was the highlight of their year !

**Christie** American, nurse, has been living for several years in the Middle East with her husband and came this year offer her volunteer help to the Tahaddi dispensary. She comes regularly twice per week, from Nabatiyeh in south Lebanon. She does well in Arabic and has been able to establish an excellent contact with the staff and with the patients. Christie will be giving birth to her firstborn in January and then plans to return to part-time work with us.

**Nadia** Jordanian-American, is the most recent addition to our team, and already we wonder how we could have done without her! Born in Jordan, she lived several years

in the USA, where she completed a Master's in public health, then worked for several years in medical NGOs caring for underprivileged populations. She recently married Martin Accad, a Lebanese-Swiss friend, professor of islamics in Lebanon and in the USA. Nadia and Martin share their time between Beirut (8 months) and California (4 months). Nadia began work part-time for Tahaddi in June. In just a short time, she helped us finalize the official registration of Tahaddi with the government, helped organize the first board meetings, launched the new dispensary in Nabaa and coordinated the two dispensaries during Agnès' absence this summer.

**Mohammed** is a young Lebanese physician who just completed his studies in family medicine in July 2008, after several years of residency in the USA and in Lebanon. Very competent and relational, he gives one half-day per week this summer and we would be very happy to keep him longer-term.

As you can see, our team is getting stronger little by little, in its great majority composed of young and competent Arabic speakers.

Some of them are committed to personal faith, each one respects the commitment of the others in tolerance. All are motivated by the love of their neighbor.

The Tahaddi dispensaries, in keeping with that which all of Lebanon wishes to be, are places of listening, cultural dialogue and tolerance, permitting each one, even the most underprivileged to live a better life.

We are still looking for a physician who could replace Agnès as medical director beginning in summer 2009. Now you know the profile of the candidate we're looking for!

**Thank you for being a part of our action, by means of your financial support, in thought and in prayer.**

## Walls...

**21 May 2008:** The walls of the old prison of Barber Khazen crumble under the bulldozers. That day, I was visiting there with Joelle, to present to the prison director her book on the five years she spent behind these walls. It was an intense moment of emotion!



Joëlle signing his book ↑

It is the story of her life which resolutely changes direction, here, before our eyes. A few days later, a new opportunity for testimony of her experience before 200 people took place at the official launching of her book by the publisher, at the French Cultural Center in Beirut. There was a round table on the theme **"Birth of a book, rebirth of a life"** in which several organizations participated, including Tahaddi.

Joëlle recounted the victory of life after the white death from heroin and five years of prison spent in abominable conditions. She gave thanks to God who gave meaning to her life. A question came from the audience: *"Don't you feel that you have simply replaced one form of dependence with another?"* Joëlle thought for a moment, then gave such a good answer: *"Yes, certainly, for only total dependence on God can liberate us"*. Even in this *"high place of doubt"* that a French cultural center can be, her answer was applauded! The local press was there as well, and over two months, Joëlle shared more than a dozen times in newspapers and on television, in Arabic and in French.

### News of a former prisoner:

Abir, 30, spent 8 years of her life in prison as an accomplice to murder. Converted to Christianity and baptized in prison by a priest, she was released 18 months ago and began work in a retirement home directed by Catholic sisters. Unfortunately, her prison past which had been kept secret caught up to her and became a scandal for her colleagues. Abir, now called Marguerite, had to leave, humiliated. Temporarily housed by Joelle and reassured by her that one can testify to the truth without having to hide one's life long a past which has been pardoned, she now lives in a home for young women and tries to make a living with housekeeping, cooking and making costume jewelry. Since June, she works each Sunday in our church, welcoming and serving coffee, as well as cooking. She feels well accepted, but is having difficulty finding her place in a society which has rejected her for so long.

Her book **«Les murs ne font pas la prison»** (Walls do not a Prison Make), published by Tamyras [www.tamyras.com](http://www.tamyras.com), was presented in a pre-publication premiere at the congress **«Femmes 2000»** in Lyon in May 2008, where the book was very well received. We hope that it will be able to be distributed in France and in Lebanon, for this testimony brings hope, in particular for families of drug-dependent youth and for each one of us (if you'd like to correspond with Joëlle, you may write her at: [jige358@hotmail.com](mailto:jige358@hotmail.com)).

The women of the Barber Khazen prison now benefit from new facilities, larger and better adapted. The cells house 10 persons on bunk beds and, for the first time, each one has her own bed, thus her own personal space, helping preserve a sense of identity. Tahaddi gave a new washing machine and several clotheslines on the occasion of the opening of the new facility. There is now a courtyard where we can meet for our weekly sessions of games, songs, Bible reading, prayer and sharing. This area is too hot in the summer time and will be too cold in the winter, but it is a much appreciated meeting place, a privileged place where women can leave their cells and meet by affinity groups. The new director is a young man, very open and relational, and very favorable to the work of the NGOs. He even gave two copies of Joëlle's book to his superior officers!

### News from inside the walls :

Elena, a Ukrainian prisoner, will complete her six-year sentence in January 2009. Pray for a good release preparation in these last few weeks. It will be a significant emotional and cultural shock. She will be deported directly to her country, where her mother, brother and her daughter, with whom she has corresponded very regularly all these years via the assistance of Tahaddi, will be waiting (we scan her letters each week, send them by e-mail and bring her the answers).

The Barber Khazen prison is also about 30 foreign women – Filipinas, Sri Lankis and Ethiopians especially, who have in general committed no other crime than to flee horrible conditions of servitude, and then find themselves without proper residence papers. Between January and May 2008, 27 Ethiopian women committed suicide (most often on jumping from the balcony of the buildings in which they are locked) and this led the Ethiopian embassy to suspend the coming of new domestic workers to Lebanon. This situation is beginning to generate negative publicity in the country and certain human rights groups are trying to improve the conditions of these foreign domestic workers. This is also one of the essential roles of Tahaddi, to respond to this commandment of the Word of God: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all the destitute"* Proverbs 31.8