

...And violence at school too

YUSSEF

“Yussef has been stabbed during the weekend and he’s in hospital”, announced the Tahaddi school children excitedly.

One week after the stabbing, I visited our pupil and got the whole story first hand. Yussef and the other boy (both 11) had been teasing each other until the teasing turned into fighting. The other boy took out a large dagger and stabbed Yussef below the rib cage. His Mom took him to a doctor who stitched up the wound but one hour later Yussef began vomiting blood. He needed to go to the hospital but Yussef has no legal ID papers. The aggressor’s family had him enter the hospital on their son’s identity card and had to find 2000 \$ as a deposit in order for Yussef to be admitted by the hospital.

By that time, he was almost in coma and doctors told his mother there was little chance the boy would live. But Yussef survived the operation. When I saw him a week afterward, he was pale and thin with obvious respiratory difficulties but still alive. He was lying on a mattress on the floor surrounded by his four siblings (one in a cast from a recent scooter accident). His father has been in prison for 3 years for drug abuse and the mother provides for the whole family by cleanings stairwells in various buildings. Yet she received me with a big smile, thanking me for my visit and offering me a cup of coffee, sharing her struggles without complaining.



Hospitality on the floor

MOHAMMAD

Mohammad’s father came to school to be told that his son was not working and behaving properly, but we had no idea we

would never see Mohammad’s father again. One hour later, this young father age 35 had a massive brain hemorrhage and died two days later. As we visited Mohammad and his family in their shack on the day of the father’s death, he and his two younger sisters were taking care of the two-month-old brother as the mother was too shocked even to change the baby’s diapers.

Yet there was no sign of sadness, no tears in Mohammad’s eyes for a father that had beaten him much more than he had hugged him.

SADEK, WALID, YUSRA...

More subtle violence occurs when parents or siblings tear up school books as punishment or out of anger; or when they put pressure on the boys to go to work for money or on the girls to get married or take care of the household.

Sadek, 12 years old, quit school to work in an underground “sweatshop”, cutting and sewing leather stripes for cloth bags, working ten hours a day for very little pay. His father is sick and needs a significant amount of money for his various medicines.

Walid also works ten hours a day, six days a week during his summer holidays, for negligible pay, but has no choice, for he, his brother and his mother need to work to feed a family of seven.

Yusra’s mother left home after a dispute with her husband, leaving behind her children, including their four-month-old son. Yusra had to stop school to take care of the household, and Yusra’s brother, that was also attending our school, went to work at a hairdresser’s shop.

ALI

A context of extreme poverty is another kind of violence done to children: Ali, 10, had not paid his 70 cent contribution for the end-of-school year outing to the zoo and the sea. I wondered why as I knew he was really looking forward to it. He finally admitted his family hadn’t the money for him to go. I advanced the money, asking him to pay me back in as many installments as he needed. The next day, he extended his closed fist toward me and as I opened my hand, he put

half the sum in my hand, and gave me a big smile. In the following two days, he brought the rest of the sum in two installments.

Sometime later, I paid a visit to Ali's family, knowing his mother was crippled and unable to walk. What I didn't know was that his dad is blind and cannot work. Three older girls are married and three other girls are still at home. Ali is the only son, the one who will eventually have to provide for the whole family.

In the meantime, they manage to survive, thanks to the kindness of neighbors and to the willingness of the husbands of the older daughters to help, in spite of their own precarious financial situations. "We survive also through my begging on the streets", said the crippled mother, as one of her daughters poured my coffee.

OTHER NEWS

Despite dramatic situations like these, 50 children finished school this year.

Several benefited from free weekly speech therapy sessions to help remedy their learning difficulties with Arabic, thanks to the generosity of the head of the Department of Speech Therapy at Saint Joseph University in Beirut.

To celebrate the end of the school year, we took the older children to Byblos, where they walked through the historical ruins with a guide. They wondered in disbelief at the age of objects dated before Christ. Then they had later a swim in the sea. The youngest went to the zoo for the first time in their life.

We have recently decided to pursue the official registration of Tahaddi

Ministries and realized that a thorough reflection on the school's vision, mission and goals was necessary in order to better meet the needs of these children. To accomplish this, we hired a consultant that helped us to evaluate and prioritize these needs. The result is a significant change in the program: a more holistic way of teaching these children will be implemented next school year.

This year we also experienced tensions among the team, forcing us to rethink the structure of the school and redefine each other's roles, including the need to let go some of our current teaching staff, in light of our strategic priorities.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our children for their future. Thank you for praying for new and motivated teachers, for financial support as the school develops and

for creativity in teaching the children next year.



Some of our first-year children

For the first time, our annual camp will be organized this year by the "Grain de Blé", an experienced Christian organization specializing in camp ministry with a diversity of Lebanese children. This will be an opportunity for our children as well as for leaders from different churches to get to know each other. Meanwhile and for the children to keep track of time - the camp will be from the 24th to the 28th of July- we organize twice a week fun activities at school with volunteers that discover a part of Beirut they never thought would exist.

Thanks for praying for the children and all those that give part of their holiday to spend time with them.