



# SEED NATIONAL

*Back to the future*

**‘Education costs money, but then so  
does ignorance.’**

**Claus Moser**

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## KEY DETAILS

Project Title: **Back to The Future**

Project Department: **Educational**

Implementing Organization: **SEED (Socio-Economic Enhancement and Development)**

Name and Designation of Key Contact Person: **Nazih Fino, Founder and Director**

Country of Project Implementation: **Lebanon**

Geographic Location of Implementation: **Al Hay Tanak & Nejme, Tripoli**

Duration: **3 years**

## Project Description

The Madad Education project started out as a one-room library in Hay Tanak run by volunteers who helped students from the neighborhood with their homework before and after school. The project has now expanded into two centers with 4 classrooms each, one in Nejme Square and the other in the original Hay Tanak location. The project also now is run by hired teachers who run classes for homework support, for children who have dropped out of school from two years ago or more, as well as for young children to help prepare to enter formal education. The community here consists of nearly 65% Syrian, 35% Lebanese, under 1% Palestinian, and we work with all members of the community regardless of nationality.



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This report was written by Emily Hale, Center Coordinator

## Needs/Problems

### *1. Educational:*

o Our center originated as a library/homework support center in response to the realization that many students in the neighborhood were in need of homework support. Many of the parents themselves had low levels of education, they were often illiterate, and they were for the most part unable to assist their children with their homework. Over time of running this project, we were able to observe the literacy, both in Arabic and French (most schools in Tripoli run French education programs) and numeracy levels of the students. We found that regarding Arabic literacy, many of our students who are enrolled in formal school are very low, and some are completely illiterate. Additionally, as most schools in Tripoli teach in French, and as about 65% of the residents in the neighborhood are from Syria where lessons are given in Arabic, they have no previous knowledge of French and they are therefore completely lost in their classes. Most Lebanese students we have low levels in French, as again the parents often not highly educated and know little to no French themselves. We see that many students are memorizing lessons and are being passed through school, but they still don't have basic literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, we have many children in Hai Tanak who are not attending school at all due to either having decided to drop out of school, parents having been unable to afford to keep their children in school and have had to take them out, or having been denied entry into local schools (applicable especially for Syrian children). When these children do not have classes available to them, we have seen that they are often forced into child labor, and without proper education and at least basic literacy and numeracy skills, these children are left with few employment options for now or the future and little chance for success in life.

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## Needs/Problems

### *2. Psycho-social:*

We have observed that many of the children and families of Hai Tanak are in need of psycho-social support. Many students lack basic social behavior skills, and both in classes and as a result of our presence in the community, we see in addition to the psychological and emotional stress and hardships characteristic of living in extreme poverty, we witness many incidents and encounter evidence of domestic violence and child abuse cases. In addition to this, we also have cases of students and families who have been traumatized by war.





## Needs/Problems

### *3. Physical health, safety, & environment*

During our time working in Hai Tanak, we have come across many cases of health problems including seizures, and malnutrition. In general, students have very little if any knowledge of good hygiene practice, of how germs spread, or of nutrition and healthy lifestyle habits. In summer, many students are constantly thirsty, giving rise to the concern of clean drinking water availability. Many students also pay little attention to keeping themselves or their surroundings clean, which is evident in the amount of rubbish lying on the ground throughout the neighborhood.



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## Solutions

Our solution to these issues has been to create a safe learning space in Hai Tanak which is therefore easily accessible to all children of the community. Education is our main focus, but we also strive to develop students' social skills, conflict resolution strategies, and psychological well-being. The vision is not only to improve academic performance but to imbue a passion for learning in each child so that they too can value education much in the same way that we do. We find this is something lacking in formal schooling since the focus is on grades and performance. However, if we can make learning fun again, then we will increase the chances of a child continuing in education and becoming independent students. What is more, we can also see that many children in Hai Al Tanak have a tendency to respond to conflicts by using violence. This only perpetuates the cycle of violence through generations, and our goal is to curb this method of conflict resolution to promote the use of more positive conflict resolution strategies for the future. Lastly, when unable to access education, we see many children here end up being sent to work or spending time on the streets. This environment has caused tensions in the past since when young people are not stimulated, they often turn to violence.

## Solutions

### *What we have so far:*

Previously, our center was run based on the work of volunteer teachers. However, while this program was still helpful, it was not reaching its full potential. Volunteers were not able to come every day and therefore they were not able to get to know the students or the students' needs. The students were in turn not able to build quality relationships with the teachers and therefore no real psycho-social or behavioral support was developed. Now though, through increased funding and partnerships with international NGO's, we have been able to hire professional teachers who come every day. As a result of this regularity alone, students and teachers have been able to get to know each other, teachers know the students' academic levels and educational and psychological needs, students have developed trust in their teachers, and as a result we've been seeing improvements in both students' academic and psychological, and behavioral development. We are also able to now provide healthy meals for the students. Considering what we know the very poor quality of the food that they generally eat, and how little they generally eat, providing them with at least one healthy meal a day is a major positive step.



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## Solutions

### *What we still need:*

1. Most urgently, we need on-site psychological counselling to be available for the students. We do not have the funds to hire a counselor, and given the challenging behaviors of the students attending the school, frequent violent episodes erupt in classes, and we need someone professional to be available to address these issues on a regular basis. We have many extreme cases of students with severe psychological trauma, and only with immediate and consistent counselling will we be able to effectively address this.
2. Regular medical attention is needed for some students in the neighborhood, however, most have very limited access to health services. As previously mentioned, several students suffer from medical conditions such as seizures, yet our staff are not trained in how to handle such a situation should one ever arise. Basic medical emergency response and first aid training for teachers and staff is still very much needed.
3. At the moment, we have funding for teaching homework support lessons (lessons in Arabic and, BLN classes for students who have dropped out of school (Arabic and math), and ECE lessons for young children to prepare them for kindergarten (Arabic and French). However, we have had many students request English lessons and yet we have no funded English language programmes. The desire among children in Hai Tanak to learn English is very high, and several very driven students have taken to attempting to learn English on their own. In the center, teachers and staff use English daily to communicate, and the students often try to participate using the few English words they know. Creating a funded English program for these students would be addressing a key point educational interest for the students, and its value in today's global economy is clear.
4. Lastly, to ensure sustainability of the project, we are in need of two things. First, when we are nearing the end of our project, we will need to set up a teacher training program to train members of the community to become facilitators who would need to be committed the continuation of holding activities and lessons in the center. Second, and perhaps most important of all, if we want to ensure that anything we've been teaching the students stays with them in the future, especially relating to abuse, behavior, and conflict resolution, we need urgently need to begin long-term programs for working with the parents. We see daily that the way many of the community members interact with each other involves rough hitting. This is of course especially true in the case of conflicts, but very hard hitting and rough behavior is also very prevalent even in play. Therefore, while we may be teaching students to be polite, patient, respectful, and to always use non-violent behavior, at the end of the day, they go home to something often very different. We urgently need funding for PSS and positive parenting sessions for the parents and older siblings of our students.

## Positive Findings

We have implemented our current programme in phases, starting with homework support classes, for which we have just finished our first cycle. Our target was to have 15 beneficiaries for each class resulting in a total of 60 beneficiaries. For a student to be counted as a beneficiary, they must have been considered to have 'completed the cycle', meaning they attended at least 75% of the sessions. Our results were for our 4 homework support classes as follows:

- Homework AM: 15 beneficiaries
- Homework PM 1: 20 beneficiaries
- Homework PM2: 18 beneficiaries
- Homework PM3: 14 beneficiaries.

Total: 67 beneficiaries.



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## Positive Findings

Not all students who attended our homework support class were able to attend the full 75% attendance requirement, and therefore were not counted as beneficiaries. If we look at how many students were coming to our center's homework support classes, we had up to 33 students attending per class, over double our target. Some reasons we found for lack of achieving 75% attendance among our students were:

- Some were working after school and could only attend every now and then.
- Some parents made their children stay home sometimes to help in the house.
- Our cycle ran past the end of the academic year. After their regular schools finished for the year the parents stopped sending their children to homework support class as they no longer had homework. The children were sent to do summer jobs instead.
- As summer approached the center started becoming unbearably hot.
- Once Ramadan started, many students would not wake up for class or they were fasting and were too tired to come (we had students as young as 3 fasting).

Many of the students that were not counted as beneficiaries were on track to complete at least 75% attendance but then after the school year finished and Ramadan started, their attendance dropped significantly. We still achieved our target, but if these two situations had not fallen in the cycle, we would have far exceeded our goals. This says a lot about the education needs for Hai Tanak.

## Positive Findings

Although this project centers on an academic focus, we have modified our program to suit the educational needs of our students. We recognize that many of our students struggle with mainstream educational practices and either have dropped out of formal education as a result or are on the verge of dropping out. We have therefore set up our program to rein still confidence in our students and provide them with a style of education that can reengage them in learning. Consequently, we did not conduct any formal examinations in order to test each child's ability, and as a result, we cannot give concrete evidence for specific improvements. The reason for this was to avoid any unnecessary stress and pressure on the students and encourage them to enjoy coming to our center each day. Almost all of our students are very interested in learning, however, as previously mentioned, they struggle with formal education. We wanted to encourage their interests without pushing them away with the fear of constant examinations. For our BLN students, we will hold a final examination, to test how much from our curriculum they have learned, however we did not start with a formal assessment. Instead, the teacher assessed their levels informally through observing their abilities in initial reading, writing, and numeracy activities given in the first days of school. From there, the teacher has been differentiating the lesson materials according to various academic levels of students in the class, however, as we originally expected, the students are all generally very low. Regarding homework support classes, again, we did not give them any placement tests, but instead we grouped them according to grade levels.

Our homework support classes consisted of the lessons being split with the first half of the lesson being just focused on improving their basic literacy and numeracy skills, and then in the second half, they started their homework. In that first half of the class, again, the teachers assessed students levels though activities and then tailored their lessons plans and activities according to students various levels.

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## Positive Findings

Many of our homework support students could not read or write at all in Arabic or French, despite being in formal education. Though we never gave tests, we witnessed many of these students coming into the cycle with no ability to read or write and coming out of the cycle having basic literacy skills. As opposed to the previous phase of the library project in which homework support classes only focused on helping with homework, in this new program, we have been able to focus on developing students' basic skills, and not only have we seen proof of academic improvement, but we have also seen a huge increase in students' confidence. These students still have a long way to go in order to catch up to their academic grade levels, however, this was an incredible start. They will continue with us in the next cycle, and teachers will be able to continue in this manner to build students' skills according to individual levels. By strengthening their academic abilities, we hope to have reduced the likelihood of failure in school and hence improve the opportunity for finishing their education.

In addition to homework support classes, we have implemented ECE (Early Childhood Education) classes for students aged 3 to 6 who are not in formal education and BLN (Basic Literacy & Numeracy) classes for students aged 10-14 who been out of school for at least 2 years. Both of these classes are still in their first cycle and are expected to finish this cycle around mid-August.



## Positive Findings

Whilst we recognize that more attention needs to be paid to this vulnerable area, the introduction of a structured learning environment has proven to be a good way to start. The children who we have enrolled in our program have been able to have more structure to their day and something which they clearly look forward to. A final but very significant positive aspect of this project is that anyone from the community is welcome to come to center, regardless of their nationality. Elsewhere in the region, there is a lot of tension among different nationalities, particularly between Lebanese and Syrians. Since the war, tensions have increased as refugee crisis has put a strain on resources and services, and those who end up more neglected begin blaming the other nationality. This neighborhood, as previously stated, consists of mixed nationalities, primarily Syrian and Lebanese, yet we see very little tension between the two groups. In our center, the students are mixing daily and form friendships regardless of nationality. Our center is providing a space for bridging the two groups together, building intercultural competence, and for eradicating the potential divide and discrimination from an early start.



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## Challenges

1. Students are often very early or very late to class and lack a solid concept of time. First of all, many students do not have clocks at home, and we've found that even parents are frequently unaware of what time or even day of the week it is. As mentioned before, we gave the children no formal exam, however, we played games consisting of questions to test their general knowledge. These questions included how many days of the week there are and what are they, how many months are in a year and what are they, how long is an hour, if it is 9 o'clock now, what time is in half an hour, in one hour, etc. Most of the students did not know the answers to these questions. They guessed there were between 3 to 15 months in a year, and most thought half an hour meant between 5 to 20 minutes) Therefore, when we say that they are early and they need to come back in half an hour, or they are late by half an hour, they have absolutely no idea what that means. Since discovering this, we have been working teaching the students these fundamentals, but building a concrete concept of time takes a while. It will be very valuable for the students to understand these concepts, and clearly they will not learn this at home, however, it currently continues to remain a challenge.
2. In summer, the center is excruciatingly hot, and spending prolonged time in some rooms has become hazardous for students' and teachers health. It is possible to make adaptations to the room to create a cooler environment, such as lifting the roof to give a space where hot air can escape and breeze can enter between the top of the walls and the ceiling, creating larger windows, and installing a cover for the roof to block direct sunlight from hitting the metal roof. However, these steps will require further funding.

## Challenges

3. For some students, attendance continues to remain a challenge. Since having paid teachers who come every day, we've seen an increase in dedication from the students compared with before when we had different volunteers coming daily as now they know their teachers, their teachers know their names, and they have a stronger attachment to their classes. However, for some students, it is difficult for them to come every day. In a few cases, this is due to lack of dedication, however, for the most part we have the opposite issue. We see that most students are overly dedicated and we constantly have students trying to come to our center and to other classes when theirs is not in session. The main issue lies with the parents and with the community's economic situation. We most commonly see that either the parents keep their children home sometimes to help with housework (especially common among our female students), or the parents send their children to work. This can mean they send their child to work at a job independently or the parents take their children along with them to help work at their jobs (both of these scenarios are more common among our male students). In the summer months, we see this increase, especially among students who are enrolled in the school year in formal education.
4. The need and desire among our students to attend our center is high in Hai Tanak. We often find that the space we have is not sufficient. We function the best that we can, but ultimately, we need more space. Some rooms are as small approximately 3m x 4m, which is not adequate for a class of 20 or more students. In addition to this, as more in the community hear about our center, we receive more students who are interested in attending. However, we are confronted with our space issue in that we are already at capacity. The goal is to be able to address the educational needs of every child in the community who is interested in learning, yet in order to do this, it is clear that we will need further funding to support expanding to an appropriate size as the number of students increases.

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## Future Plans

In the previous phase of our center, under the Alsindibad library & homework support program, classes were run from September 2016 to February 2017. Then starting in April, we implemented our current expanded program, and the plan is to run this program in the center for a minimum of two years. In this time, we should see students who attend formal school become more self-sufficient regarding homework and better able to handle their coursework independently. For students who have dropped out, they should become better equipped to rejoin school or at least they should come out having basic literacy and numeracy skills to help them better survive in the world. Lastly, for young students who have not yet joined formal school for the first time, we will should see them ready to enter kindergarten once they finish our program, and we should see them adjusting well to formal education. We will continue to stay in touch with the community and visit on occasions. For those who have difficulties in registering in school, we will be made aware via our community focal points and be on hand to help. Once the three-week period is over and children are registered in formal education, we will begin our next project at Al Sindibad Library- the After School Club. This project will operate in much the same way as the Library Project; maintaining the values of informal education, fun activities, and social development. It will run from October to May and will offer teaching and homework support to supplement the school curriculum, this is of course in contrast to the Library Project which ran throughout the summer to prepare for the return to school. We will devise a schedule once we have registered the 20 children we plan to enroll. We hope to offer classes in the morning and afternoon in order to accommodate children in both first and second shift schools. We will invite those who were committed to the Library project to enroll in the After School Club and we will also use the data from our outreach activity in Harat Al Tanak to select new students.

## Sustainability Plan

Cycles of abuse and lack of education tend to easily carry from generation to generation. We copy what we have learned in our experiences as children, and when those experiences teach us to respond to problems with violence, we are likely to continue that trend. Likewise, when our parents did not reach a high level of education and are therefore are not able to assist us in our education, we will likely not to reach a high level of education, nor will be able to assist our children either. In poorer communities, there also tends to be many people who seemingly have a feeling of hopelessness. Often, outsiders will say they are 'lazy', but from what we have witnessed, they seem to have given up. Our goal is to break these cycles of abuse, lack of education, and hopelessness. We strive to build basic academic skills, a sense of social responsibility, an understanding of conflict resolution and how to appropriately interact with others, and confidence in our students to ensure that they then pass on what they've learned to their peers and younger siblings. We can see students who have been unable to succeed in school feel motivated to learn once again. We see students whose home lives are complicated and not the most pleasant atmosphere come to our center and spend all day every day enjoying themselves, enjoying just being happy children, and enjoying learning. Through this we can see hope returning to them and we intend to reignite this hope in the community as a whole.

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## Sustainability Plan

Once our current students have acquired basic academic skills, attitudes demonstrating socially appropriate behavior, and an adherence to peaceful conflict resolution, they will be able to assist their peers, younger siblings, and in the distant future, their children with their studies. They will also be more likely to use positive methods of interaction amidst both conflict and play rather than physical violence. In addition to this, we envision the center to be running in the future without our involvement, on a minimal budget, and ideal to have our previous students assisting in the facilitation of classes. Regarding the budget, this is already possible since the center has already been fully furnished and equipped. The only other necessary costs would be for the rent of the room and overhead costs which would be covered by fundraising. The upkeep of the center and coordinating of lessons and activities would be provided by the community by interested members of the community to whom we would be giving teacher training. And again, as stated before, they would be assisted by our previous students. Already, our center has become a very welcomed part of the community, and both the community and everyone in the center both feel supported by each other. Our students have clearly developed a strong attachment to our center, which is made evident through their strong desire to spend time both during and before & after their class sessions. It has clearly become a safe space where they feel comfortable and happy to be, and this is a clear indicator of how much the place means to them. Considering our positive relationship to the community and the students' attachment to the centre, we have strong reason to have confidence in that if at the end of our project, we provide a very organized and gradual exit, the community and students would have the drive to sustain it.