Revive (previously called: [RE)vive: Empowerment Workshops for Syrian Refugee Students in Istanbul, Turkey)

Syria

University of Michigan

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https://www.reviveum.org/

Background and Rationale

The consequences of the Syrian crisis, now in its eleventh year, are mammoth in both target and scope. Some of the consequences are internationally known: the destruction of entire cities into rubble and the deaths of over 600,000 Syrians\(^1\). However, some consequences are less known: the ever-broadening economic gap has plunged 9 out of 10 Syrians into poverty\(^2\), the seven million people internally displaced\(^1\), and particularly, the phenomenon of the “lost generation” of Syria. This term refers to the gap in education that many Syrian children have suffered from due to the longevity of the conflict, the destruction of schools within Syria, the scarcity of staff willing to work for little to no return. The effects of a lost generation include an absence of upward mobility, endemic poverty, child labor, and most of all, an utter lack of opportunity to rebuild as a society.

To combat this damage, we devised a summer school program for elementary and high school age children in the city of Idlib, home to the largest population of internally displaced refugees in Syria. The benefits of increased education are limitless; and studies including those completed by Harvard\(^3\) and UNESCO\(^4\) demonstrate the high statistical correlation between education and global peace and democracy. In this sense, the education of conflict-affected people does not only advance them economically, but promotes and raises a generation that can empower the societies they reside in, as well as the future of Syria, towards an environment of peace and greater civic engagement. We named our project “Revive” knowing that this project could do just that for an entire community: to use education as an avenue towards peace.

Partner Organization and Project Approach

For the past three months, our team has been in conversation with Mercy Without Limits, a non-profit organization that promotes all forms of community aid. A branch of Mercy Without Limits, called Education Without Limits, organizes education-centered development projects inside Syria with native volunteers. Our partnership with this organization has helped us identify a school in a poverty-stricken area of Idlib and given us access to their grassroots community education leaders. We aim to target the 6-10 and 15-18 age ranges.

Timeline

The program will take place in the months of June through August, so in preparation, our immediate next steps include reaching out to organizations such as the UM Career Center and the Language Resource Bank in the next month to gain resources to implement English and computer literacy parts of the curriculum. We also plan to collaborate with other organizations on campus, such as the Michigan Refugee Assistance Program (MRAP), an organization that aims to help the resettlement of recent refugees in the community. Historically, MRAP has utilized some of the same resources and materials within their own community engagement, which has been very successful. Next, we will share the selected materials and curriculum with the current staff to receive feedback and ensure it meets their student’s needs. In May, we will order materials to be shipped to the school, create and send out advertisements and sign-ups to students/families in Idlib for enrollment.

Throughout the duration of the summer school (June-August), we will hold weekly live Zoom classes (until we determine our full capacity based on number of volunteers), a weekly meeting among our volunteers to prepare for the next week, and weekly feedback from students and staff in the program to help us customize the English curriculum to their collective interests.

Project Objectives

- The objective of the elementary division of the summer school includes
  - Fill gaps in 250 kids' general education (math, language, science, social studies)
  - Rekindle a joy for learning for young kids
- Teach English language and computer skills to the high school division
  - Provide 90 students with a skills-based education program
  - Prepare them to be competitive applicants to jobs and higher education in an ever-advancing global online environment.
- Teach live English classes, with a focus on high-yield vocabulary in subjects preferred by the students, writing, speaking, and conversation
- Equip classroom necessities for compatibility with live, virtual lessons through Zoom

Sustainability

To ensure sustainability throughout the duration of this summer school and beyond, we aim to communicate with staff members consistently to assist in planning the curriculum, get feedback, and help select appropriate materials for students’ enhanced learning such as textbooks and backpacks, that will last students and staff many years to come, as a token of our gratitude for their assistance. We will maximize and empower staff on the ground by providing them with better classroom resources, including computer access. Additionally, we will repair minor damages to the building itself to make the school an inviting place where children are not reminded of the trauma of war.