



THEIR RIGHT TO LEARN

Series of Stories

Milestone 1: Unfolding

During a general assembly meeting held by Khaddit Beirut, one of the attendees mentioned an unfortunate conversation with a school's principal. A father could not enroll his daughter in school in 2020 because he couldn't afford a laptop. It compelled Hala, a chemical engineering student at the American University of Beirut, to act. Hala immediately contacted Dr. Najat Saliba, one of Khaddit Beirut's co-founders, to tell her she wanted to initiate an educational technology support project. This conversation encouraged her to turn her vision into an actionable project. Alongside Celine, Khaddit Beirut's coordinator, they reached out to colleagues and formed a team of 15 students; this is how Their Right to Learn was born.

After lots of brainstorming, Phase One was initiated: they placed a station in front of AUB's main gate to collect devices. The donors would fill out an online form containing questions about the devices and drop them off at the booth. Then, the electronics would be refurbished and distributed to students in need in universities and schools. However, they faced a problem: barely any people filled the form and contacted the team. The immense amount of effort being put in by the team was not being invested correctly. This is because the team members were waiting for people to come to them instead of reaching out to donors.

Due to this minor setback, the group recollected their thoughts and decided to alter their original plans. The students thought they poorly spread the campaign. Hoping to fix this, they commenced Phase Two: reaching out to companies, electronic stores, banks, and malls to interest them in donating devices. In addition, they targeted AUB alumni associations via email and Instagram. Despite all the efforts to make this work, no one showed interest in giving away electronic devices. This was possibly due to the current circumstances Lebanon was going through.



Meanwhile, the team was tackling another challenging question: how could they narrow the number of recipients of these devices from a pool of numerous students in need? They realized that catering to many students would be challenging, considering very few people filled the online form in Phase One. After thoroughly planning it out, the group decided to partner with the same six public schools that Khaddit Beirut's Education Initiative is assisting. The plan was to give the devices away to the students in dire need. However, while doing the need assessment, they realized that the problem students faced with devices was way out of proportion. This meant that not only did the majority of the students need devices, but so did the teachers. It was noted that some teachers had no other choice but to conduct classes on WhatsApp. In addition, some students had no other choice but to share one device with all of their siblings and even borrow their grandparents'.

As with all great endeavors, every step of the way brings its load of challenging barriers. Team members became aware that a device donation is obviously not enough to provide access to technology. They asked themselves questions concerning Wi-Fi and electricity availability, the proper use of the device, and even the accessibility of software on the electronic devices. The group could not offer these devices to students without being sure it was a long-term solution. This is why they proceeded to contact internet companies looking for internet packages and computer shops for maintenance. However, a conclusion was reached: giving out devices took more planning, considerations, and adjustments than initially thought.

The team was faced with a bump in the road; this meant that they had to find a plan B. They definitely needed to recollect their thoughts and make considerable changes to the campaign and strategy.



Milestone 2: Endurance

Even after going through a rough patch, Their Right to Learn's team didn't let this bring them down. They pushed themselves even more to find a more suitable solution. After brainstorming for a while, a light bulb lit above their heads; they realized they had targetted the wrong audience. This is because they were fixated on Lebanese citizens who were already submerged in a severe economic crisis and COVID-19's devastating consequences. This realization led to Phase Three's initiation in early 2021: they aimed their target at the Lebanese diaspora, companies, and foreigners outside Lebanon. In addition, the team reached out to various interactive Lebanese influencers such as Ghayd Chammas (*El3ama*), Beirut City Guide, and Oleksandra El Zahran (*Polleksandra*). The influencers would help promote the project and share it with many people with the help of their large social media platform. Plus, the team decided to include monetary donations to encourage numerous people to donate, even if they didn't have a device to give away. The contributions would be made on Khaddit Beirut's website to ensure an accessible, equal, and quality education. All these modifications and additions of the strategy and campaign contributed significantly to the Third Phase's success. As a matter of fact, the initiative collected a few hundred dollars from donors through the website. It also reached many people worldwide, including a certain Lebanese residing in the UK who would later help fund a bit more than a thousand dollars.

With the help of the need assessment done in Phase Two, the group got a clearer picture of the end goal. The plan was to take advantage of their partnership with the 6 public schools and help them gain their independence while securing devices for students. Three hundred devices would be collected and provided to the schools and lent to students during the academic year. They were hoping the process would be similar to an exchange program; at the end of the year, the students would give back the electronics to be passed on to the next generation. This procedure would ensure sustainable, secure, and long-term support. Then once it is safe enough for the students to go back to school, these six schools would establish computer laboratories using the devices.

The problem was that they were running out of time. Slowly but surely, the country was easing COVID measures, people were getting vaccinated, some schools were settling



for hybrid learning... The team hadn't collected enough devices: they still had too much to do and not enough time. They made a decision: the goal would be solely focused on installing computer laboratories. They would work hand in hand with Khaddit's Education team to redefine community school by giving them independence and supporting a whole community. These laboratories would be used outside school hours. They would help improve technology literacy for students and teachers and include IT learning in their extracurricular activities. The two initiatives would combine their forces to establish a long-lasting cooperation bridge between schools and donor groups.

As things got clear, the team became more and more encouraged and motivated. This initial success would pave the way towards a series of ongoing achievements.

Milestone 3: Global Support

As "Their Right to Learn"'s team made progress and moved forward while formulating their strategy, they managed to spread the word across all social media platforms and reach masses of readers. One of the readers, called Judi, plays an essential role in raising funds for the initiative.

Judi Diab is a 23-year-old Lebanese currently living in London. She's an architect working at David Chipperfield Architects, a multinational firm. In September 2020, Judi was working on a marketing campaign with Khaddit Beirut's Environment Academy. Around the same time, she stumbled across a tweet on Twitter posted by Dr. Carmen Geha, one of Khaddit's co-founders; the tweet asked people to donate their devices for a good cause. Judi immediately contacted Dr. Carmen to let her know her interest in helping. She had spent the last five months in Lebanon; this meant she was aware of the struggles her country was going through. She wanted to be as involved as she could to help make a change. Dr. Carmen put Judi in contact with Dr. Najat, Dr. Rima, and a few other professors, who later explained all the details behind "Their Right to Learn"'s initiative.

After having a few meetings brainstorming ways Judi could help, she proposed to create a "GoFundMe" page that would help raise monetary donations. This fundraising platform would help connect Lebanese citizens in dire need and Lebanese people living in



London who wanted to help but didn't know how to. She shared and posted the page to her friends and family and social media platform. However, she feared that this call for donations would get lost in the sea of NGOs, initiatives, and charities asking for help on Instagram and Twitter. She resorted to directly spreading the message to her friends, family, and colleagues on WhatsApp, asking them to share it too.

At first, the donations came in slow; she had collected 50 pounds at the end of the first day. People were a bit skeptical because they weren't sure about the cause's credibility. In addition to explaining all the details as clearly as possible, she started using a specific trick: being personal. Judi claimed that this contributed considerably to sharing the message and convincing her entourage to donate. She received messages from people across the globe who were so involved and impressed in the campaign: her Palestinian friend in Boston, her British coworkers, her Malaysian friend's family, etc. Judi claimed that the most unexpected people showed support; this brought so much joy and rewards to her and the team. Eventually, the donations totaled a whopping 1200 pounds.

With the collected sum, six laptops were bought and distributed accordingly to the six collaborative public schools. Dr. Najat, Dr. Rima (an Associate Professor of Educational Administration, Policy and Leadership in the Department of Education at the American University of Beirut), Celine, and Stefanie (a second-year doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis) visited the six schools individually. They donated a device per school as a symbol of cooperation between the institutions and Khaddit Beirut. These donations could give them a head start for the whole process; they had the liberty of doing what they wanted with the electronic device. It was up to the establishments to lend it to a student or even a teacher in need.

In addition, Refinitiv, an LSEG business in the London stock exchange, donated three laptops. The team was fortunate enough to work with Thaki: an NGO that ships, clears, and refurbishes devices and sells them to educational institutions. Thaki refurbished and renovated the three laptops donated by Refinitiv.



Their Right to Learn and their partners are still working hard to this day to secure more devices that will be donated and installed in computer laboratories in the six public schools. By doing this, they are ensuring, slowly but surely, that each child gets the proper education and care that they deserve.

Milestone 4: Continuous Battle

Following the explosion that shook Lebanon's capital, Dr. Najat reached out to her community on Twitter, pleading for help from the Lebanese citizens. Dr. Wassim Al Hajj, an associate professor of computer science and associate dean for students for the faculty of arts and sciences at AUB, saw the tweet and immediately got in touch with Dr. Najat. He was eager to use his expertise in computer science to contribute in any way he could. Following an agreement, he joined Khaddit Beirut's team, where he is currently responsible for the IT aspect in all initiatives.

After visiting the schools, the Education team concluded that the entirety of the school's morale was very low. To help battle it, Dr. Wassim and the team are working hard on providing the six public schools with IT literacy and independence by installing computer laboratories. The goal is to help educate the teachers and students. To do so, the team conducted a needs assessment. They concluded that they would tackle the challenge by equipping the schools with computer laboratories and providing an IT course to the students and teachers.

Dr. Wassim grouped an excellent team of six US-AID student volunteers. He describes the recruiting of these team members as the simplest task; the students were self-motivated and very excited to help. He supervised them to create a curriculum and teach the material to interested school students as an extra-curricular activity. This course will instruct the students on basic informatics needs (like office and google tools), front-end web development to create simple websites, and programming on Python, a programming language. The material will be given gradually: they will start with the basic information and slowly increase the difficulty year by year. In addition, the team is planning on offering another curriculum to teachers to strengthen their IT literacy. The teachers will attend training where they will learn



to tutor the course and replace student volunteers. By doing so, Khaddit would be reinforcing long-term sustainability and the resourcefulness of community members.

In the summer of 2021, this is where the project stands, at the intersection between the Education Initiative and Their Right to Learn:

Lifting the schools' morale is crucially important. That is why we are trying to help as much as we can: to give hope. They are keen to better themselves. As of now, we can even list a few achievements. The team went to the schools, did workshops, and trained the teachers to grow new information technology skills. The feedback and appreciation that were given by the school show there is room for hope and improvement. More success is yet to come during the school year: the team is ready. They put a curriculum together and submitted a grant that would help afford the equipment. Hopefully, the impact will be significant, and the schools will progress with time.

As the condition worsens day by day in Lebanon, Lebanese citizens are deprived of basic needs. Receiving a proper education is a human right to which Khaddit Beirut is battling to provide access.