

## **Chapter 7 pathway notes**

### **Designing creative projects with young adults: Peace-building in Lebanon**

#### Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: A pathway from Lebanon

### **Purpose**

These pathway notes support chapter 7 of the book: *Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: Learning and development for a better world*. The chapter profiles the World Vision Lebanon (WVL) peace-building initiative 'Play and Learn'. WVL facilitates this project among young adult volunteers with support from the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL). World Vision has been active in Lebanon since 1975 when it began providing shelter, food, and medicine for people affected by civil and regional conflicts. In the 1980s, World Vision Lebanon (WVL) initiated its development work among various communities and denominations, mainly through institutional projects and small grants. More recently, the 1990s saw the introduction of Area Development Programs (ADPs), with a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustainable community development. ADPs are planned, designed, and executed in partnership with the communities that WVL serves. For more details about WVL's work please visit: [www.wvi.org/lebanon](http://www.wvi.org/lebanon)

GULL welcomes affiliation with any organization working with marginalized young people and the purpose of these pathway notes is to assist those who are using or developing a similar approach. For more details about how to affiliate with GULL please see: [www.gullonline.org/affiliate](http://www.gullonline.org/affiliate)

### **Background**

World Vision estimates that more than a quarter of the Lebanese population live below the poverty line and so marginalization and vulnerability are widespread. This analysis is supported by the fact that children and youth are dropping out of school to seek work so that they can contribute to the family's income. The rapid urbanization of Lebanon is also contributing to increased physical poverty and this is reflected in the trend towards high density residential areas, overcrowding and lack of access to basic goods and services. Rural poverty is also prevalent, especially in the North, Bekaa and South of Lebanon, where people depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. Socio-political isolation and marginalization also contribute to and are the result of poverty in Lebanon. A sectarian divide exists in the country leading to a spatial division and seclusion of the different religious communities. Palestinian refugees living in camps and informal settlements in Lebanon are among the most marginalized groups in the country.

Given the backdrop of several wars and the country's on-going instability, many of Lebanon's young people lack hope for a safe and secure future. Child labour has become more prevalent and young adults – now among the most vulnerable age group in Lebanon - have become more exposed to the street hazards of substance and drug use, delinquency and street conflicts. As one response among many, WVL with GULL established a pilot initiative to encourage young adults from different community and faith backgrounds to work together and the next section outlines the piloting approach. The pathway design draws on GULL's narrative format to encourage reflection, self-examination and personal change with participant support in the form of a learning coach. WVL's young adult volunteers seem especially drawn to peace-building initiatives based on the creative arts – notably music and theatre – featuring songs, plays and puppet shows written and performed by the young people themselves. In view of this, the pathway also integrates WVL's on-going creative projects that have been developed and are led by WVL's community volunteers.

### **Pathway implementation**

The development pathway incorporates two parallel strands of activity – the first being personal development and the second, technical development. The objective is to encourage participants to form a new habit based on daily reflection and review and so making time and space for this activity is a skill that can only be acquired by experience and with the support of a personal mentor or learning coach. Participants are also expected to acquire and develop technical skills related to WVL programming and in this context, its peace-building curriculum and projects. This means that participants learn as they reflect on their daily volunteering activity (e.g. participation in creative peace-building projects) and by using and applying the technical skills gained from training and other facilitated inputs made by WVL field staff.

## **Pathway mid-point reflections by members of the WVL with GULL lead team**

To recognize the effort and attainments of more than 60 WVL volunteers engaged in the 'Play and Learn' (P&L) project for young adults and also WVL's 'Mother Action Group' project, a WVL with GULL mid-point celebration and recognition event took place in Beirut on Sunday 3 November 2013. As the P&L participants had written songs, designed and made puppets and written their own puppet shows, they performed their creative projects at the celebration event.

The event itself was a powerful statement about the possibilities for religious and ethnic reconciliation based on these and other initiatives that have been designed, written and performed – as a collaborative, peace-building effort – by young adults from both Christian and Muslim communities. The following reflections on the event and on progress to date were offered by Rita Chalhoub and Elissa El Hassrouny – both members of the start-up to mid-point WVL with GULL lead team.

### *Elissa's observations*

As we travelled towards the hotel in the centre of Beirut where the celebration and recognition event was to be held, our volunteers kept asking me about the venue and who would be attending ... they wanted to know all the details! As we arrived at the hotel I could see that they were very happy – for most, it was their first visit to the capital city of Lebanon. I told them to enjoy the day and the experience of meeting other GULL participants from different parts of the country. I knew that they were excited about the recognition and certification elements but more than that, they were excited about the entire journey: For example, they wanted to know what a hotel is like – the details were very important – and they were excited about wearing a graduation gown. They said: 'We are going to wear a gown – it will be like events we've heard of on television!' One of the volunteers told me that she had dreamt about this opportunity because she does not have the funds or qualifications to go to a local university and the fact that she was going to wear a gown at the event was so important to her. So, I can say that our volunteers were proud and very happy – that made me feel joyful too.

The event itself was a powerful testimony of what can be accomplished using an action learning approach. At the end of the event, I told my group that they should be proud of the outcomes so far, that it was only the beginning and that they must build on and sustain their action learning via the continuing WVL with GULL pathway. I wanted to further motivate them and so I told them to 'go for it' – and not to stop.

### *Was there a personal highlight of the event from your perspective?*

Yes, one of my group of volunteers spoke at the event in front of more than 100 people. Normally she is a very shy girl, yet she found the courage and confidence to stand in front of all those people and she made her speech without reading from her notes. As she was leaving the event, I heard her say to her mum, 'I know that I made a huge step forward today, because I managed to give my speech in front of so many people'. In my view, that's a great achievement and I glimpsed changes in many other young volunteers too as they spoke, sang and performed their creative projects at the event.

### *As a WVL with GULL facilitator, what did you learn?*

When I joined WVL, facilitating for GULL was one of my assigned tasks and as there was so much interest among the volunteers, they continually asked me questions. So I undertook an in-depth study of all the GULL documentation so that I could better understand the vision and process. After that, it became much easier to explore ways in which we could customize the generic GULL materials for our context and language. Some of our volunteers were both shy and nervous about sharing their personal life experiences and journey, but with time, everything has changed. Now, I am observing so many positive developments and after the success and affirmation that the mid-point event provided, I have encouraged them to continue. I also think that the GULL process is helping me to achieve my objectives in a more organized and systematic way.

### *Rita's observations*

Prior to the mid-point event, I had some doubts about the pathway design but I have come to realize that the GULL process works! The event gave me an opportunity to observe the faces of the volunteers and their friends and family and I could see that they were very proud.

They were so happy that formal recognition by GULL meant that they could wear a gown and when I saw the participation of the parents and the professionalism of the various speakers – I said to myself ‘this works’ – I can now see for myself the impact of GULL and the importance of self-directed learning. This impression was reinforced by a speech delivered by a 16 or 17 year old girl. She said that she is married and that she has children already but because of her life circumstances she is separated from them. Yet, despite this hardship she was working to develop herself and her family’s prospects via the WVL with GULL pathway – for me, that is a powerful testimony.

## **Summary**

As the reflections highlight, public recognition at an event that celebrates and certifies evidence of learning and change is a powerful way to appreciate the efforts of community volunteers and it is clear that a systematic development pathway helps participants to sustain their work in difficult and often dispiriting circumstances. Norma Wakim WVL with GULL team leader concludes: ‘Given the success of the event, I know that the existing WVL with GULL groups of volunteers and staff will feel motivated to continue and we will aim to widen access so that more volunteers can participate. We plan to do this by asking every continuing volunteer participant to support three new community volunteer participants. This will help them to consolidate their own learning to-date and further strengthen the confidence of the continuing participants. Additionally, we will ask our staff to reach out to new staff members and volunteers and we have decided to pilot GULL at the WVL national leadership team level where we will focus on one of our key strategic objectives. The aim here is enable the leadership team to experience self-directed action learning and to share their own insights with each other on a monthly basis. We are also planning to integrate GULL with our WVL project models and we will work to ensure that we have buy-in from the technical specialists and staff who are implementing these projects.’