

Kan Shab Wa Shaab by Bushra

My GSP is called Kan Shab Wa Shaab. It aims to integrate senior citizens who are residents of elderly homes in Jordan both in their internal communities and the outside community, meanwhile enhancing intergenerational work.

What problem does your GSP seek to address and what community are you trying to serve?

The problem that my GSP seeks to address is that of isolation and wellbeing of senior citizens who are residents of elderly homes from the Jordanian society. Old people feel useless as they age, and start to convince themselves that they are a burden on society because of the lack of their wellbeing. Being put in a home, with limited access to the community or to opportunities to productively contribute furthers their feeling of isolation. They also feel neglected by their families, which results in their feeling of loneliness. In addition, care homes are not culturally normal or encouraged in the Arab world, which leads to a greater feeling of isolation. There is a gap between their generation and our generation, which I am trying to address through Kan Shab Wa Shaab.

Why do you believe that it is important to address the problem you are trying to solve?

Jordan, heavily loaded with Arab culture and customs, is a country that does not provide state and institutionalized care for elders. At the same time, most residents of elderly homes have been neglected by their families. They feel unwanted and uncared for. So, they are left with little connection with others. There is also so much to learn from these senior citizens, and we cannot afford to miss out of their perspective on society. Their wisdom can contribute to the larger good of our society. They can act as our mentors and friends.

What is your proposed solution (GSP)?

I set up Kan Shab Wa Shab, "s/he was young and grew old", in order to address this problem. First, Kan Shab Wa Shaab bridges the gap between youth, the volunteers, and the elderly. It does so through regular visits, which provide room for building genuine connections with these elderly. We use various fun activities to engage with the elderly. For instance, this happens through an intergenerational book club, board games, storytelling, and sometimes just chatting and attentively listening to them.

Second, Kan Shab Wa Shaab supports the senior citizens we work with in their own entrepreneurship projects. That way, they feel integrated in their own internal community by contributing to it. For example, Abu Mahmoud in Darat Samir Shamma, the elderly home that we have been working with thus far, runs his own minimarket at the home. Saleh takes care of a greenhouse farm at the periphery of the house. One of the female elderly showed interest in knitting, and Abu Nasir likes to cook and share his food with others. We want to support them in their pursuit of serving, and contributing to their internal communities.

Third, Kan Shab Wa Shaab aims to integrate these elderly with the outside community. For instance, we plan to take them to concerts in the city, picnics, etc.

How is your project uniquely situated to improve the lives of your target community?

After doing my research, I found that most service projects related to elderly (especially in the Arab world) involve mostly visiting them in the allotted time. A group of volunteers would visit the house once a year or so. What we try to do in Kan Shab Wa Shaab is to build real connections and friendships with the elderly through regular visits. That way, we substitute for the some of the connection that they are yearning for. In addition, we engage the elderly comprehensively by ensuring that they are active members of their community. Kan Shab Wa Shaab provides a comprehensive approach to solving the problem of the lack of their integration.

Who are your collaborators and what roles do they play in supporting your GSP?

I started along with 5 other volunteers. I have since recruited a team of 35 volunteer students from my high school. In addition to visiting the elderly, each volunteer contributes to the project in one or more of the following areas:

1- Communication:

Internal (1 volunteer)

Communicating lists of volunteers and coordinating them for transportation.

External (2 volunteers)

Communicating with the elderly house.

2- Materials (2 volunteers):

Getting materials and items necessary for activities and events.

3- Planning and organizing (3 volunteers):

Planning and organizing activities and events.

4- Media and publicity (4 volunteers):

Working on the Kan Shab Wa Shaab logo, facebook page, making videos, taking pictures, and posting pictures with corresponding quotes.

What is your vision for your project? How do you define success?

Success to me comes at different levels.

First, I will know that Kan Shab Wa Shaab is successful when it has a significant social impact on the individual (both the elderly and the students). In other words, if it improves the wellbeing of the elderly through the understanding of these elderly and establishing intergenerational connection.

Second, the sustainability of Kan Shab Wa Shaab, which happens through lasting relationships with this home, a student set up that continues even after I leave the country to study abroad.

Third, the applicability of the project. It will become successful when it becomes a model that can then spread to more homes. At the greater level, it is successful with increased interaction intergenerational, respect for elders, and integration of elderly in homes back into society.

How do you plan to support a sustainable venture?

As of now, I have created a plan for the Kan Shab Wa Shaab that goes along with the mission and vision of my project. I have a basis of volunteers, and the tasks needed to run the team. I also have thought about the qualities for the leader next year after I leave the country. I am thinking of ways to make it self-sustaining without the need for constant funding.



The photo on the left has the winter gifts that we got the elderly. Each of the bags had a shawl, winter slippers, light blankets, hats, and gloves for the senior citizens at Darat Samir Shamma. As for the image on the right, it is the volunteers and Abu Mahmoud (the old man in the middle) in front of his mini market which I hope to support him with!