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United against the invisible enemy: testimonies of some HOPES students and alumni on their commitment in fighting the Corona pandemic

The outbreak of the Corona pandemic added to the many problems Lebanon is already facing and deepened the political and economic crisis the country is suffering from since a while.

To the surprise of many observers, Lebanon handled the Corona challenge extremely well and numbers of infected and diseased remained low.

This was due to a series of partly harsh measures (lockdown, partly even curfew) imposed by the government, the discipline of many citizens in following them and a great variety of initiatives and activities by the people which helped to face this unprecedented challenge. Also recent and former students of HOPES engaged in manifold ways in such activities.

Here are a few examples, told in their own words:

«Inspired by the achieved success of the lenti DNA vaccines controlling HIV infection, we were able to design a prototype vaccine against coronavirus. Today, we are waiting the grant to proceed further with this project and to test the efficacy of this vaccine in inducing an immune response not only against Covid-19 but also against all human corona viruses. My message is to never give up, to stay safe and to stay proactive.» Diana, Master Immunology student at the Lebanese University. Recently she has been in France for an internship concerning innovative lenti DNA vaccines at the Pathogenesis and Vaccination Lentiviral Laboratory (at the Grenoble University) in France.

In response to the COVID19 crisis, Ahmad and Mostafa launched the **"I am a Human"** initiative together with some of their friends. They gathered food supplies like rice, oil, pasta, sugar and lentils and distributed food baskets to families in need.

Both Ahmad and Mostafa are holders of Masters degrees respectively in psychology and History at the Lebanese University and alumnus of the Lebanese University and the HOPES project.



They both explained their initiative saying **«Together with some friends, we launched the initiative "I am a Human" meaning I have the sense of humanity. The objective is to fundraise to be able to help vulnerable families and people who do not have the ability to get any food. Within these difficult times, we made food baskets of rice, oil, pasta, sugar and lentils and distributed them in very marginalized areas of Lebanon.»** Ahmad



«In the context of these difficult times due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we volunteered together with some friends to distribute food baskets to people in need under an initiative that we called "I am a Human" meaning I have the sense of humanity. We reached to our friends and acquaintances to gather food supplies and distributed 25 baskets to families in need. Next week, we will distribute 48 additional baskets and we will continue in this endeavor» Mostafa

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«My colleagues and I at the 4th year of Medicine at the LU are making a study around the impact of Social Distancing and home isolation on general health and psychological status of residents in Lebanon. More than 3000 people participated in a survey that we prepared which studies different aspects of our lifestyle including the effect of this pandemic on our stress level, how we are spending our time at home, our salaries, our sleeping, the numbers of meals we are eating.

Today, after working on the subject, we say to everyone social distancing, staying home is the best way to fight this virus and to go back to our normal life even if we are living stressful situations at home. I would like to thank the HOPES project who continues to encourage us to give our best to the community»
Lea, 4th year of Medicine at the Lebanese University



Ibrahim together with other volunteers collaborated with the municipality of the village they are residing in and formed a Guarding and sterilization unit. This unit consists of 3 committees: the first one fundraises and helps vulnerable families, the second committee sterilizes the streets and public places, the third committee has the responsibility for awareness raising and securing check points to take the temperature of the drivers, sterilizing all cars and making sure preventive measures are taken. He explains **«Thankfully, we do not have any infections in our region because people are committed to the preventive measures. This is a period that will not last long, we Syrians and Lebanese ,will win against this virus united»** Ibrahim, MA in History at the Lebanese University and alumnus of the HOPES project who graduated in 2019-2020

«During this difficult period, I have participated in an initiative with my colleagues at the psychology department at the Lebanese University to provide psychological support to the persons who have coronavirus, or their families and to people quarantined. I am part as well in the health committee responsible of the public hotlines to provide support and recommendations. On another hand, we made whatsapp groups to provide the needed support to parents and children, and the students at schools. We are in a difficult period and we are going for a more difficult period and we will need to provide support even after the end of coronavirus». Ismail, MA in psychology at the Lebanese University

«In the context of this worldwide pandemic, we mainly worked on raising awareness and providing health recommendations to help reduce the spread of the virus.» Amer, MA in History at the Lebanese University and alumnus of the HOPES project who graduated in 2019-2020

«From the beginning of the epidemic in Lebanon, my colleagues and I at the faculty worked hard to raise awareness about the corona virus. We spread knowledge about the nature of the virus, its danger and most importantly how to avoid contamination. And we explained the importance of social distancing in this critical period. We also posted videos explaining the correct hand washing technique and the main signs and symptoms of the virus in both Arabic and English languages. Our work was mainly on social media (facebook, whatsapp group chats). Till this day the only proved cures for corona virus are prevention and social distancing, so stay at home, stay safe.» Nour, 5th year dentistry at the Lebanese University and HOPES scholarship holder since 2018.