

Lebanon's Myschoolpulse Brings Education to Children in Hospitals

by [Fernande van Tets](#), December 10, 2012

Not every startup idea begins with a happy epiphany. Daniele Diab was first inspired to start [Myschoolpulse](#) when her cousin was diagnosed with cancer at the tender age of 12 and had a tough time leaving school. Now, she's bringing education to kids in hospitals across Lebanon.



"We all had a very tough time for 8 months, during which we realized that it was very important for Paul to keep up with school, and to keep some normalcy in his life to divert his attention away from the chemotherapy," says the fresh faced 27 year Diab.

To make it simpler for Paul to reintegrate into his old class and not lose established friendships during his recovery, she founded Myschoolpulse, a program that offers a continuation of classwork and private study for patients throughout Lebanon.

Of the 250 children with serious illnesses like cancer that pass through Lebanese hospitals yearly, over 75% are cured, she says. She decided that she wanted to help them keep up with school, and that they need teachers as well. "We wanted to bring school to the hospital, because every sick child has the right to dream, learn and hope," Diab summarizes.

Since launching the program three years ago, Myschoolpulse has grown to employ 11 full-time teachers, who liaise with each patient's school to bring them exams that their classmates are taking. If official exams are involved, they contact the Ministry of Education.

One of the startup's central challenges has been to ensure students of all levels get what they need. And sometimes, the program doesn't just keep children in school; it introduces them to formal education for the first time. In that case, the teachers first have to assess a child's education level. "Some of the kids don't even know their year of birth," says Diab. This leads to the additional challenge of convincing parents to continue their education when they leave the hospital. "We try to help them find other services, and provide scholarships, which can support the child for up to a year."

Funding comes from fundraising events, such as an annual 5K run, and private donors. "We are in major hospitals in Beirut, and we have almost saturated the market- there are only a couple of hospitals with big children wards," says Diab.

It may sound big-hearted, but Diab runs Myschoolpulse with all of the rigor she imbibed during her MBA from Harvard Business School and stint as a trader at Morgan Stanley in London. The non-profit startup publishes all their audit accounts online, one of the only NGOs in Lebanon to do so. "We do that because we think it is important to be transparent to our donors. We want to make sure that every dollar is used as wisely as possible."

It may be non-profit, but Diab leverages her knowledge of sustainable business models to run Myschoolpulse. "You can learn lessons from business which transfer to social entrepreneurship," she says. "My previous job [as a trader] taught me about discipline and multi-tasking, both of which come in handy."

There is one key difference however: "Rather than profit, the most important thing is impact."

Like any start up, she has had to overcome obstacles along the way. One of them has been attracting committed talent. "The mentality in Lebanon is not very non-profit oriented," she explains, mentioning the lack of high profile post-college NGO program along the lines of Teach for America. Luckily, her director, Raymonde Abou, a former school principal, has a good eye for hiring hardworking teachers.

This is vital, as Diab is now stepping off the project and starting a new management job with Morgan Stanley in London in October. While she hopes to be able to give Myschoolpulse one hour a day, she's also planning an expansion. Myschoolpulse will hardly narrow its vision, with a fully-fledged school in St. George Hospital in the works, as well as plans to move into online e-learning.

"You always underestimate the amount of work it requires," she admits, but she's banking on a solid team carrying the project forward. And with any luck, a new skill set will enable her to take the project even further in the future.

<http://www.wamda.com/2012/12/lebanon-s-myschoolpulse-brings-education-to-children-in-hospitals>