



The ECAL Chocolate Project

Le projet Chocolat de l'association Libanaise pour l'épilepsie



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Abstract

It is a sad fact that challenged people or those categorized as Special Educational Needs (SEN) people in Lebanon are stigmatized, get a lot fewer chances to be educated, and thus do not get fair chances for employment. Among those, epileptic people are the least to get fair treatment. Surprisingly, the Lebanese government has had statistical figures indicating the percentage of SEN people. However, neither the Ministry of Education nor the Ministry of Social Affairs has so far mentioned this category in their agenda for future plans. This has led activists to establish NGOs, one of which is The Association for Care of Epileptic Patients in Lebanon. Once established, ECAL researched the size and the economic situation of epileptic population in Lebanon, studied their needs, and set appropriate plans for that purpose. ECAL found out that to support epileptic people, ECAL had to start income generating projects and found that the Chocolate Project would serve a lot of objectives.

keywords: Lebanon- Association- Epileptic patients- Project- Chocolate.

Résumé

Il est triste de constater que les gens avec besoins éducatifs spéciaux (BES) au Liban sont stigmatisés, ils ont moins de chances d'être éduqués et donc n'ont pas de chances équitables pour l'emploi. Parmi ceux-ci, les personnes épileptiques sont les moins à obtenir un traitement équitable. Étonnamment, le gouvernement libanais a eu des données statistiques indiquant le pourcentage de personnes BES. Toutefois, ni le ministère de l'Éducation, ni le ministère des Affaires sociales a jusqu'ici parlé de cette catégorie dans leur agenda pour les plans futurs. Cela a conduit les militants à créer des ONG, et l'Association pour les soins des patients épileptiques au Liban (ECAL) n'est pas différente. Une fois établie, l'ECAL a étudié la taille et la situation économique de la population épileptique au Liban, a étudié leurs besoins, et établir des programmes appropriés à cet effet. ECAL a découvert que pour soutenir les personnes épileptiques, l'ECAL a dû lancer des projets générateurs de revenus et a constaté que le projet de chocolat servirait beaucoup d'objectifs.

Mots-clés: Liban- Association- Patients épileptiques - Project- Chocolat.

Introduction

The Association for Care of People with Epilepsy in Lebanon (ECAL) is an association distinguished for its

energetic, expert and professional administration as well as members who are devoted to a good cause: Helping Epileptic People become more independent and facilitating their growth with decent jobs". To this end, ECAL has launched a number of projects, starting from the making and selling of accessories, to the loom project, and meanwhile, training all ECAL volunteers and visitors on carving on copper, cocoon patchwork, canvas and embroidering; carving on soap; drawing on glass pottery; preserving seasonal vegetables and fruits; and painting on carpets and cushions. The last two projects were the Chocolate Project that includes making baskets from straw, filling them with chocolate, and wrapping them for sale; and the Embroidering Workshop Project. ECAL is looking forward to a project, the clientele of which is not limited to epileptic people and housewives only, but also the growing generation whose needs should be addressed; a project that would at the same time generate good income to support epileptic people.



Figure 1: Map of Lebanon and its situation in Asia.

ECAL Chocolate Project

For the association to sustain its support to epileptic patients who come from very poor backgrounds, ECAL's administrative committee decided to start the project, "ECAL Chocolate". The target population are people from all the different social strata in the local area first and a wider area later. Chocolate is used by all people in the same occasions, and all that the Association needs to stress are good and competitive prices.

The anticipated impact of the program was based on three main assumptions:

1. First, people who knew about the association were so much interested in supporting it. Through the chocolate

program, the association would guarantee people's support in the form of buying the produce first then making money donations second.

2.The association would ensure the best quality of produce that would compete with that in the market at the level of its prices. That is, the profit per unit will be calculated carefully in a way to guarantee selling the biggest amount of produce that would give more profit in the long run.

3.All the members would be participating in the promotion of the program and would be the first group of people buying the produce and then marketing it.

After all, chocolate is a multipurpose item used in many occasions (child birth, marriage, religious as well as social events, festivals, etc.). To overcome any potential challenge to the implementation of the program, the association scheduled and followed up a number of events, prepared produce ahead of time to accommodate the needs of customers, and contacted them before each event.

The Association for Care of Epileptic Patients in Lebanon had five main objectives for the program. Within one year,

1.The association should provide at least two new jobs for parents of epileptic patients.

2.The association should provide chances for more parents to participate in the program and gain some money on the basis of their work, whenever needed.

3.Having promoted its produce, the association will have access to the market and thus increase the selling of its produce.

4.Based on selling, the association is expected to gain more income to support the epileptic patients and cover for the existing financial deficiency.

5.he association will be able to allocate a fixed area in its exposition in Khan Al Ifranj that is located in the touristic area in the downtown area of Sidon, the capital of South Lebanon, for selling its produce.

To meet the above objectives, the association provided for a training session on the whole process of making the chocolate. One of those parents of epileptic patients proved to be qualified and thus was employed. Less qualified parents were assigned tasks that did not require high qualification (wrapping and packaging) and thus gained some income. These people participating in the program along with all the other members started promoting the association's produce. And since chocolate is an item that is bought by most of the people in different occasions, the association could present the produce in different packaging and wrapping quality & styles and in different quantity packages in a way that suited all budgets. To this end, the association, as expected, could sell enough amounts at the start to support epileptic patients for a better extended period than previously.

In addition, the association's open exhibit in Khan Al Ifranj is an excellent location where epileptic patients' produce of fake jewellery, sculpting on copper and coloring on glass produce is exhibited for selling (Figure 2, 3 and 4). The exhibit is visited regularly by native as well as foreign tourists. And it has become noticeable that those people

are interested in the quality of produce and always show more interest and thus buy more items when they know that the aim is to support epileptic patients. For this, to promote the produce of the Chocolate Project within a wider range of customers, the association assigned a fixed corner for the display of its produce in Khan Al Ifranj. This led to more profit and thus more chances for ECAL to sustain our support to the epileptic patients.

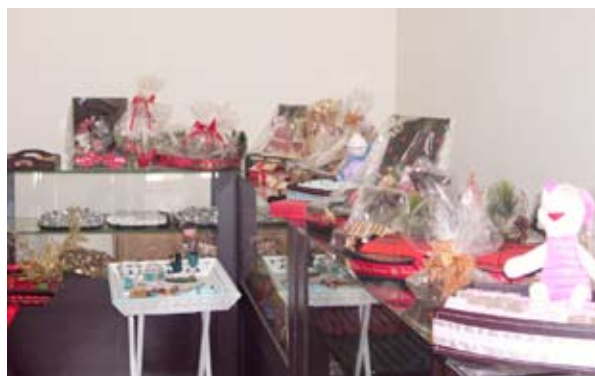


Figure 2 : ECAL's chocolate display area, the attraction to all ECAL visitors..



Figure 3 : Chocolate tray design for gifts, tailored to suit customers' demands



Figure 4 : Chocolate tray design for the birth of a baby girl, as demanded by a customer

The administrative committee was aware that the project would cost more than the Promising Strategies Award

would cover because of site preparation. However, they decided to proceed because the Association's mission dictated that supporting epileptic patients should not be halted no matter what. To them, starting a project that was worthwhile, even under some debts, would lead to fixing a source of income to many people.

Success indicators:

To assess the effectiveness of the program, the association kept track of a fixed schedule of events (Teachers' Day, Mother's Day, etc.). In the first occurrence of each event, the association estimated the ECAL Chocolate cost-effective, and found that the project produce was still demanded, yet that did not necessitate any new job assignment.

Partnerships:

With respect to partnership with other organizations or entities, there was no such form of partnership per se. However, the Association expected some more funding sources, namely those that conditioned their support. That is, they would willingly fund the association's programs that would be running all the year round. For this, there were two funding sources, namely big business people. The amount of funding and sustainability depended to a great extent on ECAL's starting the program and that epileptic patients being the target beneficiary of the program. Another form of indirect partnership was the fact that the association has good relations with NGOs, and schools. Those committed themselves to helping the association by allowing ECAL to participate in some of their annual occasions and to exhibit ECAL produce for selling. As such they would help promote the association's name, work, and increase its gain.

Sustainability indicators

The nature of the program and its promoted objectives are strong reasons for it to continue beyond funding from IBE. In fact, the association is determined to continue with this and every new program as long as (1) the demand for ECAL produce is ongoing, (2) there are few donors who will help the Association, (3) ECAL's main goal is to provide sustained support for epileptic patients, and (4) the government has not listed the association on its fiscal plan of expenditure.

The Impact of ECAL Chocolate

The association, now known for producing the ECAL chocolate, is selling chocolate produce to individuals and institutions. The local Church was one of the new doors open to promote ECAL chocolate for the Easter. As a result, the association was gaining more income, yet it could not support more epileptic people because the project cost was, as mentioned earlier, much more than the amount of the grant. However, based on demand rate, the association anticipated that the financial deficiency would be covered in the near future.

In general, the project proved to impact positively

- 1.The number of visitors to the Association center
- 2.The number of buyers
- 3.The number of parents accompanying their children and working in the center.
- 4.The association's chance to come up with two good causes for donations: the Holiday small gifts and the new portfolio with sample produce that the Association can pass on to new donors.
- 5.The local community's positive attitude and efforts to welcome the Association's team and listen to what they want to say.

With time, the selling rate during Mother's Day was increasing, first because the variety of produce became larger and second because the team gained more experience at promoting the Association's produce. This has motivated the Association's team to think of a new project that would lead to achieving the set goals.

Conclusion

ECAL is planning to launch a language center that also offers technical and vocational training (TVT) for epileptic patients as well as all people interested in arts. If ECAL finds partners for this project, ECAL would be using human as well as materials resources professionally to become independent and able to support epileptic patients around the year without any worries.