

Creating and implementing a 10 day health program for children of the Littlest Lamb Orphanage.

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History of the Littlest Lamb Orphanage

Intro:

On the outskirts of Africa's largest city, immediately adjacent the harsh Saharan desert, is a safe haven for many children who have been displaced from their families: the Littlest Lamb Orphanage. That such a safe haven can exist in Egypt's tumultuous social and political climate is an absolute miracle. Under Sharia law, the major governing principle in Egypt, adoption is not a legal option for these children, resulting in an estimated 4 million orphans in Egypt, 75% of whom are living on the streets. Furthermore, Egypt is a country with extremely close family ties; not having a nuclear family negatively sets one apart from society. As a result, orphaned children bear an extremely high burden from social stigmas, a burden no child should have to bear. Nearly ten years ago, Littlest Lamb founder Mira Riad made it her mission to start a cultural revolution aimed at changing the way Egyptian society perceive orphaned children.

The 2007 trip

For Mira, it all started during a 2007 trip to Egypt with her parents. While most 1st generation American immigrants would usually visit family members and, Mira's mother put a twist on each trip. Since Mira was a child, her mother would take her to the poorest areas of Egypt to let her experience the extreme poverty that exists only outside of America. This always shocked Mira, but what left her most uneasy was the state of the children living in the orphanages she visited. On the 2007 visit to an especially distressed orphanage, Mira asked a friend who was traveling with her if they could do a better job for the kids of Egypt. 'Of course,' her friend answered. "Then we must." And that's exactly what she set off to do.

Conception of Littlest Lamb Orphanage

One thing that anyone who meets Mira will come to appreciate is her drive to accomplish whatever she works on. The orphanage was declared official only four months after her 2007 trip, when the 501c3 was filed and a board of directors comprised of Egyptian businessmen, doctors, mothers, and psychologists was formed. In 2008, just one year later, ground was broken in Egypt. Despair would soon strike the project, however. Two years after construction began, the orphanage's licensing was revoked by the government after rumors began circulated that the orphanage was hiding a church inside (permits for constructing new churches are very difficult to pass in Egypt). Mira describes this as the direst moment in the history of the orphanage because, within a year losing the license, Egypt revolted against ex-president Mubarak and the country was in a period lawlessness. It seemed to her like the orphanage would never reopen, but by the grace of God, and even under the incompetent rule of the Morsi presidency, the orphanage was given its license back a year later. In 2015, The Littlest Lamb Orphanage finally opened up its doors and has been operational for one year.

Layout of the Littlest Lamb Orphanage

Littlest Lamb originally began as an all-girls orphanage, but due to certain circumstances now accepts children of all genders. The house has a capacity of 150 children, with about three kids per room, 4-5 rooms per apartment, and 14 apartments in the home. Each apartment has one caregiver who looks out for the children. Littlest Lamb contains its own pool, garden, pasture where animals are raised, cafeteria, and industrial kitchen. The children eat an exceptional diet and are treated incredibly well, which is certainly far from the norm for any Egyptian child. Children are given sufficient attention by caregivers, councilors, and staff, and are loved just as much as any child I've ever seen. The mission of the orphanage is not to house as many children as possible. Rather, the goal is to give a selected group of high performing children the tools to become significant players in the Egyptian political, industrial, and social realm. Thus, kids at Littlest Lamb receive the best quality food, healthcare, education, etc. that Egypt has to offer.

My 10 day project

As part of my Brody Scholar Summer Enrichment Project, I desired to develop and conduct my own outreach project. When creating this program, I took advice and instruction from academic resources, professional contacts, and friends with experience working with children with traumatic experiences. The age range of the children I worked with was 4-6 years old. With the necessary funds and support from the Brody Foundation, I was able to implement and execute a successful health awareness program for the children of the Littlest Lamb Orphanage.

Days 1-3: Fun activities to build trust and rapport

The purpose of the first three days was to create a bond with the kids so that more difficult topics down the road would be easier to discuss. We did really fun things like hand/finger paintings. Tie dye by the poolside was a hit with the kids. We created bird feeders using toilet paper rolls and peanut butter and put the materials in the craziest places around the house. We also played with water balloons in the pool, played with bikes around the house. Another really exciting craft was creating a penguin, a very exotic creature to Egyptian children, as one may imagine, using light bulbs.

Day 4

On this day, we tried to give the children an idea of what it meant to exercise in a fun way. We played games in the pool...essentially chasing each other around. We played games on the bikes and competed in fun ball games indoors.

Day 5

On this day, we taught the kids the importance of and how exciting healthy eating can be. There was an amazing program where kids made snowmen out of hardboiled eggs, carrots, and peppercorn. We made banana sushi using Nutella and pita bread. Lastly we made grapes shishkabob using grapes covered with yogurt, which were frozen overnight for a cool snack the next day. The kids were then given a lecture on "good foods vs. bad foods" and were allowed to sample the good foods (kiwi, apple, mango, etc.) and the bad foods (soda, candy, etc.)

Day 6

We took a break and let the kids enjoy a day at a waterpark down next to the orphanage. The kids enjoyed being with one another outside the orphanage, however Egyptian waterparks are very strange in their structure, as you might expect out of a Middle-Eastern country.

Day 7

Children went to church and spent the day in educational activities structured by the Littlest Lamb Staff.

Day 8

Children were introduced to a difficult concept on this day, as they were challenged to really express themselves. The first activity was asking them to draw a picture of their faces on a pre-made head silhouette. This was a fun activity that prepared the children for the next activity, which was creating a collage of things that define both themselves and their interests using magazine pictures. In an effort to teach the kids how to talk to their peers confidently, each kid shared their idea in an encouraging environment.

Day 9

This day was devoted solely to health screenings and health maintenance lectures for the kids and adults of the orphanage. Kids were checked for cranial nerve function, heart and breathing rhythm, endocrine function, and reflexes. Same treatment was given to the caregivers.

Day 10

On this day, we finished with a fun activity of flying kites from the roof of the orphanage, after which I prepared for departure. Goodbyes and presents were left with the kids and I headed off for four days of venturing around Cairo on my own accord.

5 Major Takeaways From My Trip

1. A big question for me has always been how God, who is the source of all good in the world, can allow for such bad things to occur, such as the living conditions of orphaned children in Egypt. The answer became very clear to me: God does not cause the suffering to occur and he gives us plenty of resources to attend to every single life on Earth. It is also out of His love for us that He gives us free will, but because we don't rush to help those who are struggling, it's our by our choice that these kids suffer. We can and should set out to make a difference in the lives of those who are struggling.
2. I will continue working with the Littlest Lamb Orphanage and have a second service trip planned for December 2016, and I hope to be a part of the orphanage as they continue their mission for many years to come.
3. Authentic Egyptian/Arabic/Mediterranean cuisine is absolutely amazing. The problem with Egyptian cuisine is when they try to make Western dishes. Perhaps the worst thing I ate while in Egypt was a very well marketed Reuben that sounded and looked amazing on the menu. The sandwich turned out to be literally inedible. Swallowing my disappointment, I decided to save the meal by ordering a chocolate lava cake, because, well, it's a chocolate lava cake!...turned out to be a premade bunt cake with Hershey's chocolate syrup poured into the middle crater. Mind you, this restaurant was playing Sinatra Christmas classics on the speakers in June, but I didn't take the hint.
4. The Brody School of Medicine, the Brody Scholars program, and the Brody family are legendary entities now at the Littlest Lamb Orphanage.
5. The littlest Lamb Orphanage will raise a generation of leaders that will eliminate the societal stigma surrounding orphans.
6. ****BONUS: When flying through the Cairo International Airport, avoid traveling during the month of Ramadan, when thousands of pilgrims are traveling en masse to Saudi Arabia for hajj. If you do travel during that time, make sure you don't get into the security line that's designated specifically for those making a pilgrimage....like I did. It is absolute madness.