



OUR 30 YEAR

A visit to the Home of Tenderness



“THEY ARE HAPPY”

she thought! And it's contagious...

One day, a very beautiful young girl came knocking at the door of our “Home of Tenderness”.

- Hello, my name is Maria, I heard about Anta Akhi and I would like to know you closely. Can I visit your Home?

- You are welcome, answered Rania cordially. I will call Layal who takes care of welcoming visitors. She will explain to you the heart of our action..

In the meantime, Maria walks into the large multipurpose room and notices lots of smiles. “They are happy” she thought! And it's contagious...she is pleasantly surprised when a song of welcome greets her, immediately taken up by another song of Anta Akhi:

*Enta khayyé w ana bhibbak
Ana b'adrak w enta mhim bi nazari
Chou ma 'melet maéé
Chou helwe el hayet maak
Sawa mnefrah w men farreh
Sawa mnefrah w men farreh.*

*You are my brother
And I love you
I appreciate you and you are important to me
Whatever you do with me
Life is beautiful with you
We live together in happiness and make others happy
We live together in happiness and make others happy*



Maria, all touched, but with a large smile, follows Layal who joins her eagerly. She takes her time to greet the youth by thanking them for this warm welcome which puts her directly at ease, as if she were at home!

At the end of the introductions, she turns to Layal and asks her:” They are happy! And they make me happy! Are these all the persons you take care of? Are there others?”

And Layal begins to explain to her that our “Home of Tenderness” is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and that we have different types of welcome for our 165 youth, depending on the family situation and the severity of the disability:

26 Permanent or semi-permanent

19 During the week

36 During the day or weekend, including:

- 13 youth follow a self-development program
- 23 youth follow an existential Training program

5 Support at home

80 Spiritual accompaniment/specialized catechesis

Maria was surprised:

- You wouldn't believe that Anta Akhi could take care of so many people...

- There are others too: all those who preceded us in the heart of the Father. You will find their photos in the tree of the small chapel, very close to the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

Maria entered the small chapel. She was very touched. She knelt down and said a little prayer to Jesus, entrusting to him all those who had passed away. She noticed in front of the altar two large images.v



- Who are they?

-Philippe and Elie left us this year, said Layal with great hope. We miss them but we know they are alive in the heart of the Father.

- That's for sure! Replied Maria in an affirmative tone that does not accept ambiguity. But I think they were all accompanied during their experience. I see it on the faces of all the youth. Besides, what do you do with them during the day?

- Lots of things, said Layal with a caring smile. It is true that our youth have severe disabilities, but their lives are not limited to their disability. They are not productive, as the world sees it, but their life has great value, and we are here to help them discover it.

Layal calls Norma who is passionate about her "work"; besides, she does not consider it as such! For her, it is a mission that moves her deeply. After the introductions, Norma explains:

- Our "youth" follow a program that meets the requirements of:

- Daily life
- Health
- Development
- Spiritual life

➤ DAILY LIFE

Daily life is a must, especially for people who live permanently in Anta Akhi. If the needs of daily life are not the purpose of their life, just as it is no one's purpose in life, the time devoted to them is no little. For our small community, it is necessary to spend :

2h: in the morning between toilets and breakfast

2h: at noon between lunch and bedtime for a nap

2h: in the evening for the baths

What a **healthy person** would do in **1 hour**, a **person with disability**, in community, would do in **6 hours**. Is it a waste of time? No! These requirements teach us all, patience and respect for the limits of others, and our own limits too!

Charbel and Pauline, physical therapist and nurse, join the small group to explain to Maria the situation of the youth in relation to their health. Pauline speaks:

➤ HEALTH

Health, is the big worshore of this year! The regression is important for most of our youth: this year, speaking just of the **45 youth** youth welcomed in residential, semi-residential and during the day, we had:

86 consultations

with **17 physicians**, dont **18 emergency consultations**

70 paramedical examinations

5 hospitalizations

Maria, we only mention these figures in order to let you know the severity of the handicap, and what it requires. This severity often increases with age and our youth first suffer from it: it is not easy to see his own physical and/or mental abilities decline.

And for the team as well, this regression is hard: to see someone suffer, or undergo the moods of others, make greater physical effort, or be alert not to forget the medication, ensure a presence day and night, or be present in case of emergencies...





all this requires resourcing to prevent the collapse of the team. For this, training is provided to the life companions working with the young adults with disabilities. An existential training that helps them in their journey with our young adults, and of course, a necessary medical training for monitoring the youth's health. This year, we carried out 27 medical training sessions on different topics, including hygiene, covid, taking medication, and diet among others.

And it's Charbel's turn to speak:

-We want to delay the regression while trying to preserve a good quality of life, through the following methods:

- Respiratory physio
- Physiotherapy
- Snoezelen therapy
- Hydrotherapy
- Equine therapy

The last two therapies are offered to us by the centers that welcome us for free! And we are very grateful for that; however, Anta Akhi must provide the costs of accompaniment, transport and my presence as a physical therapist, continued Charbel with a smile.

A total of 1303 therapies were carried out with the help of 9 interns from the Lebanese German University LGU, a Lebanese volunteer, and life companions from Anta Akhi who helped in carrying out 398 therapies.

Before resuming their actions with the young adults, Maria asked Pauline and Charbel :

“Nous ne voyons ni un pied ni une main à soigner, mais une personne humaine, dans toute son entité, à soutenir.”

- You are present for the youth, knowing that whatever you do, their health will deteriorate. What is then the purpose of your action?

She guessed their answer, but she wanted them to express it so that they always have in mind the meaning of their action.

- We see neither a foot nor a hand to take care of, but a human person, in all its entity, to be assisted.

And Norma continues :

- The world wonders: isn't it better for them to die? Why all this care? Why should Marcelle suffer so much and put on a breathing mask 14 hours a day? Why should Ghassan have a machine that helps him breathe whether he's asleep or awake?

Our answer is clear: we cannot stop life. We cannot let someone die. We can help him live better. We want to alleviate his suffering, and our presence at his side is important so he can know that he is loved. And with this deep conviction, he can face his suffering. Obviously, some moments are harder than others: some youth let themselves go to negative thoughts, but we are there to support them and help them accept what they cannot change.

If Ghassan, suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, has exceeded his life expectancy by 8 years, it is because he loves life! He is no longer autonomous; only his eyes, his lips and his little finger can still move, but he appreciates all the moments he lives in community. Besides, he gets help from a lady to write his life story!

Yes, we firmly believe that every life is worth living, as a celebration, despite the severity of the handicap. A life well assumed, makes the child of God grow in us and helps the growth of each person who meets us.

Maria let these words burst into her heart. She thought that, as a matter of fact, the more a person see life with a simple and confident look, the more you discover its meaning and thus overcome the difficulties of the journey.

She wanted to know more, and she wondered if the activities carried out during the day were beneficial to the youth. Because in fact, with few physical abilities, what can you achieve? And it is Maguy who arrives with her good humor. As a day referent, she closely follows all the activities that take place:

- Our 45 youth, who live permanently in Anta Akhi, and who come during the day, are divided into **4 groups**, depending on the type of disability : **physical without mental retardation, physical with slight retardation, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation.** Each morning, they participate in **3 different activities**, lasting **40 minutes** each. This requires creative work from Samira, my colleague who prepares the activities, and a great openness on the part of the life companions to manage time and put into practice the newly acquired knowledge. All these activities have specific purposes. They help in personal, cognitive, and social development. Those carried out this year are as follows:



YOUTH WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY, WITHOUT MENTAL RETARDATION OR WITH SLIGHT RETARDATION:

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE
■ Arabic Language	Maintain reading, writing and analytical skills
■ Good Manners	Know how to behave in different situations.
■ Personal Development	Know how to manage your emotions, know yourself and work on yourself (self-confidence, communication, etc.)
■ Catechesis	Study the Acts of the Apostles
■ Logic	Cognitive development and analytical skills
■ Preparation for schools	Transmit the values of our Home
■ Expression	Express difficulties, anguish, fear, joy...
■ Music Therapy	Express feelings
■ Choir and songs	Serve masses
■ Games	Work in groups, analyze, have fun
■ Culture	Know what is going on around the world



YOUTH WITH MENTAL RETARDATION

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE
■ Good Manners	Know how to behave in different situations.
■ Logic	Cognitive development and analytical skills.
■ Catechesis	Study the Acts of the Apostles.
■ Games	Work in groups, analyze, have fun
■ Art Therapy	Relaxation : benefits for the mind and body, stimulation
■ Plastic Arts	Prepare gifts for the team and visitors



YOUTH WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES AND PROFOUND MENTAL RETARDATION

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE
■ Snoezelen	Relax, calm down, feel and be stimulated
■ Stimulation	Create a bond of trust
■ Outing	Change of environment and relaxation

The life companions lead most of these activities. But also, this year in particular, **10 people** volunteered throughout the year to lead **9 activities**, once or twice a month:

DANCE, MUSIC, ZUMBA, ART THERAPY, LEGAL INFORMATION, PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, SAINTE THERESE WORKSHOP, ARCHEOLOGY, MEDICAL INFORMATION.

And so as not to forget anything, Norma continued :

- This program of activities is conducted for 9 months. During the summer, we take advantage of the holidays.

- Yes, it is so important to rest! Said Maria.

- This period is not for rest, resumed Norma smiling. We have to prepare a whole program of activities and outings. But the most engaging is the preparation of the “summer camp” outside the “Home of Tenderness”. This was the highlight of the year. And after 3 years, we finally “camped” outside our “Home of Tenderness”, in two different places: two weeks in the convent of the Mariamites in the village of Deir Chamra, and another two weeks in the Foyer Champagnat in the village of Faraya. This break was very necessary for our youth who were confined for 2 years, due to Covid. But beyond that, a change of framework is always important for someone’s mental and physical health. And thanks to our friends and especially our volunteers who help us cover the costs, we manage to do that change.

Maria had spotted the action of the volunteers at 2 different levels: a presence of love and financial assistance. She knew deep down too, that these volunteers carried this “Home” in their prayers. She looked at Norma and Layal and couldn’t help but say thank you to all those people who seek by all means to please the youth and make their daily lives fruitful :

- Thank you because you witness that together, it is possible to achieve great things with small means. I can clearly see that it is through love that you are creative: yes, that is indeed the creativity of love...and these volunteers, how did you find them?

Maria had touched a sensitive point in Layal who became even more enthusiastic

-We believe that the volunteers and all the people who pass by our “Home of Tenderness” are not there by chance. And it is Jesus and Mary, who we call “Set el Beit”, Mother of the Home, who send them to us! Yes, we pray regularly with a lot of faith: “Send us people according to your heart.”

LORD JESUS,



*Lord Jesus,
By the infinite love you have for your Father,
And all the tenderness you have for your Mother,*

Send us people according to your heart,
*To carry with us the mission that you entrust to us,
So that Anta Akhi remains forever a sign that radiates your Presence.*

Send us people according to your heart,
*So that you can daily reign over everyone,
So that together by our lives we proclaim that you are our king,
your Mother our Queen*

Send us people according to our heart,
*So that the joy of your Good News, your Word,
your Gospel, radiates from this Home,
and of all those who are part of this family, your family*

*Mary, we are your part, Mother of Jesus,
Send us people according to your heart,
And the means to keep them with us,
To join us in the service of the Living Body of your Son, the Church, in its members,
those "given into the hands of men".*

Send us people according to your heart,
*So that we do not cease to be at the service of the Glory of your beloved Son,
Of his Father, our Father, in the Spirit of Holiness.*

We thank you Mary for granting us what we ask of you with faith and trust, Because you can do what you want, and you love us.

VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

Maria was praying with Layal. She liked the fact of calling Mary, Set El Beit! But nothing made her happier than this confidence in the divine intervention that she perceived in this Home. She asked Layal:

- So all those who pass the door of the "Home of Tenderness" are according to the heart of Jesus?

- Those who are not made for this Home, will leave it. We only pray that their passage be fruitful, whether in the short term or in the future.

Speaking only about the volunteers, some, like you, knock on our door. They heard about us through friends, social networks, also through the civic engagement course that we have been running at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik since 2016-2017. Moreover, we animate it with the youth who are the best spokespersons: the message that we want to transmit, some able-bodied persons transmit it for hours, while our youth with disabilities, who have been accompanied since childhood, transmit it through their experiences. Sometimes, they don't even need to say a word: a smile, a small wave of the hand, is enough to understand that these youth, even if they have multiple disabilities, live happily and make those around them happy. The whole thing is to welcome love; irradiating it is natural.



So some volunteers are Lebanese and others are not. Most of the non-Lebanese volunteers come from France and spend one month to two years, or even longer, in our "Home of Tenderness".

Here is some information to better assess our action of the year:

	LEBANESE VOLUNTEERS	NON-LEBANESE VOLUNTEERS
NEW	65	16
COME FROM	Come from different backgrounds	Nantes seminar Œuvre d'Orient Catholic Cooperation Delegation
HELPS IN THE UNITS	Accompaniment Logistics Medical Communication and projects Human environment Self-financing activities and donations	Accompaniment Communication and projects Human environment

We also welcome interns. This year, 12 came from 4 Lebanese universities and did their internship in psychology, physiotherapy and human resources.



TESTIMONY OF LOUIS-OMER

Volunteer seminarian



“Where to start? It is difficult to find the words to tell what I experienced in Anta Akhi, it was magnificent. Words cannot really say what I received at Anta Akhi during these ten months, but I will try to share my testimony anyway.

My mission at Anta Akhi went beyond the simple administrative work in the offices. It is in the free relationship with the members of this large family, and in particular the “youth” that it took on its full meaning.

Anta Akhi is a bubble of tenderness in which it is not difficult to love. Love draws from source, otherwise it is empty. The source from which the “youth” draw their love is Christ. And me, I drew my love from the “youth”, because they are perfect reflections of Christ Himself. “My joy” is how Elie defines Jesus. My joy, this is how I define what “youth” have been for me. Faced with the demands of the mission, the difficult times and the misunderstandings, they allowed me to always redirect my gaze towards the Essential. Anta Akhi is also a “laboratory of holiness”, a place where we learn to be holy. Holy and not perfect.

The fragility of the “youth” brought to light my own fragility and the darkness of my heart. They are not perfect and neither am I and so much the better. In contact with them, I

learned not to be a “know-it-all” anymore, but to listen and let myself be taught. Holiness is simple and joyful, it makes no noise, that’s how we live in Anta Akhi. [...] With so many life companions, I learned it. Anta Akhi is a place of truth.

At the “Home of Tenderness” I saw that we could not pretend or appear. We are asked to be ourselves. I liked being a servant of joy, sharing my love of humor, making the “youth” and the members of this large family laugh. I also felt honored and powerless to share the suffering and distress of the Lebanese people and with whom I shared my daily life.

I deeply believe that friendship has no borders, and those that I created this year at Anta Akhi will remain engraved. Thank you wonderful family of Anta Akhi for everything I received, thank you dear “youth” for showing me the way to follow, thank you Lord for calling me to Anta Akhi. Pardon me for my lack of courage and love. “Be all blessed and be all holy! What is weak in the world, this is what God has chosen” 1 Co, 27”

Loyal was touched as she narrated the stay of Louis-Omer, Aurore, Timothée, and other volunteers. She would have liked to talk more about each of the 817 people who were sensitized by discovering Anta Akhi this year: members of groups, movements, friends, schoolchildren, academics, seminarians, priests...they all marked Anta Akhi by their generosity and their love, and they were touched in turn by the joy and the family spirit which reigns there.

Maria was also touched by the love she felt vibrating in Loyal’s heart...she wanted to tell her that she guessed the extent of this action, when Laura arrived to announce the 10 a.m coffee break.

The weather was fine, the youth and their life companions were seated in a circle under the newly rehabilitated tent. They were waiting for Maria to drink coffee together. Maria was delighted! There was no sign of fatigue on her face, on the contrary, she did not want to miss any moment of her visit to the “Home of Tenderness”, and especially wanted to hear the youth express themselves about their experiences

- **Samo** : You are very beautiful. I love Jesus and [Saint] Charbel. I love you too.

- **Aïda** : Here everything is very beautiful (ktiiaiiiiir helo).

- **Elie K.** : I come from Zahle and I really like Anta Akhi. **Mikael was making sounds:** he wanted to talk but no one understood. When Kamil, his life companion, asked him the question: “Are you happy here? He smiles and says “eh” (yes).

Then several youth talked about their life in Anta Akhi. Pierre and Elie even went back to the beginnings of the mission: they were proud to say that they were one of the first families to join the project...Ghassan patiently waited for his turn. In fact, he referred to the speech he had prepared on behalf of the youth at Anta Akhi’s 30th birthday on September 8:

“On the occasion of the birthday of our mother Mary, Set el Beit, and that of Anta Akhi, we want to thank Mary, because we are her children and a mother never abandons her children. She knows their needs and watches over them.

Mary, who stands under the cross, feels our pain. For this she put a flame in the heart of Yvonne and in the heart of each person who belongs to the family of Anta Akhi, and who had faith in us as human persons and did not look at our handicap.

Anta Akhi taught us a lot, especially to be witnesses for the living Jesus.

She taught us:

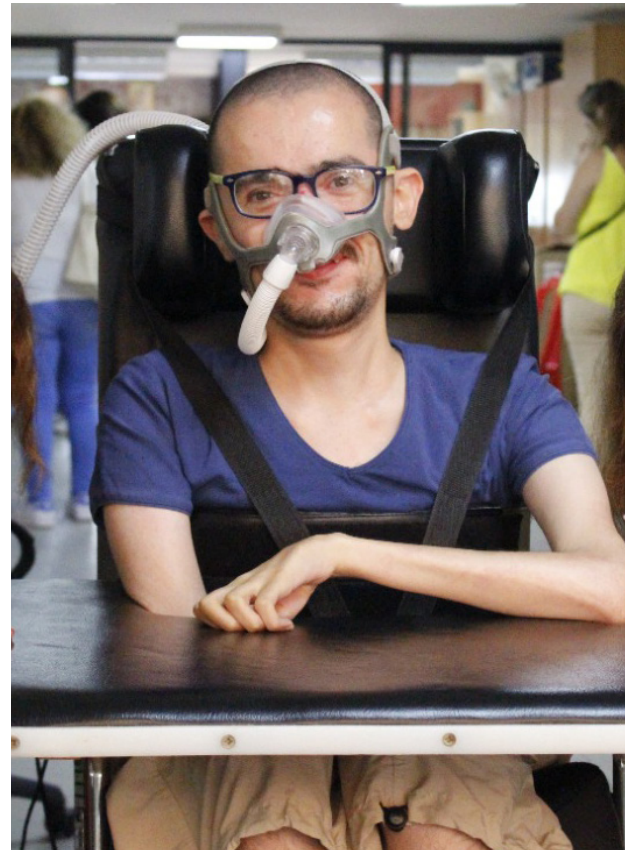
- Not to differentiate between people: we are all equal in value and dignity.

- To be grateful to all those who have helped and accompanied us, to overcome all the difficulties we face and not to give in

- Not to be afraid because we are not alone on this path, because an assiduous work is carried out to ensure us all the daily and medical needs.

- To live like children; it made us recognize our value and also our responsibility. She made us feel that we were loved, members of a real family.

Anta Akhi represents security and support for our families. It is also our security after the great departure of ours. It is true that we are sad when our loved ones pass away, but with Anta Akhi we can overcome sadness and overcome all difficulties in our life.



We thank Mary, who put Yvonne on our way, who helped to light up a spark inside of us, and helped us live our mission which is to:

- Be a sign of hope for the people we meet, or who live with us.

- Be a support for each other.

- Live together the joy, the pain, the sadness and the hope as sons and as brothers.

In conclusion, we want to say thank you to Yvonne and thank you to Roula who agreed to carry this “torch”. Thank you to the whole team who watches over our family.

Help us Mary to remain witnesses of love in this family. Happy anniversary.”

Maria saw that Ghassan and all the youth were grateful. At the end of her break with them, she noticed that many of them had accepted their disability, and were talking about it openly. She thought that if this was possible, it was because they knew they were loved. She shared her thoughts with Norma, who accompanied her upstairs to visit the dormitories and the medical corner

In Lebanon, the most important thing is said at the end of a visit or between two floors! Norma took her time to explain to Maria how the youth were accompanied so that today they are able to accept their disability.

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT AND EXISTENTIAL TRAINING

Norma explains:

- If our youth are fulfilled, if they manage to experience joy despite all the difficulties, it is because they have been accompanied since childhood. Yes, they know that they are loved: this certainty comes from the fact that they have recognized their value and their identity as children of God. And what father does not love his children?

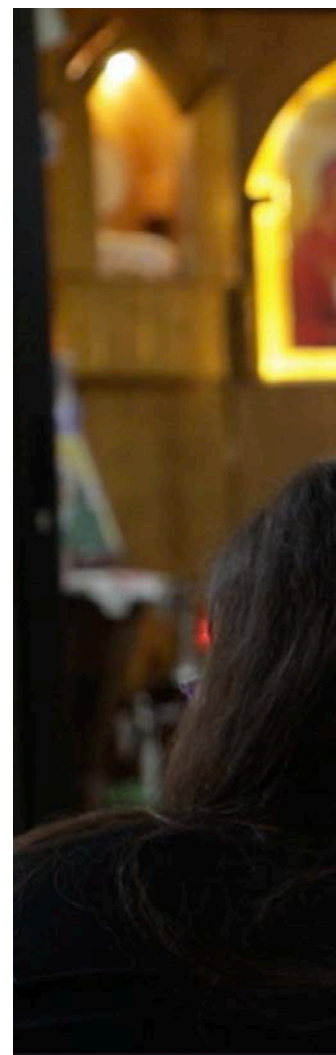
But to get there, it takes a whole journey: we begin spiritual accompaniment and existential training from a young age in our sister association: Sesobel. This accompaniment is still continued in Anta Akhi. Three main components constitute the pillars of our action:

- Catechesis
- First Communion
- Existential training



If the purpose of a life is to let the Holy Spirit live in us, it is important to know him, and to know the Trinity, and to create a relationship with God. Who is God the Father? Who is his Son Jesus? Who is the Holy Spirit? And who are they to me? This is the goal of catechesis. For this we start from the Word of God expressed in the Holy Gospel and we adapt this word to the children divided into groups, according to the type of disability. It is very important for us not to give information, but to promote an encounter. The people who benefited from catechesis this year are:

	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF GROUPS	NUMBER OF SESSIONS
CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF SESOBEL	80	18	369
YOUTH OF ANTA AKHI	27	3	56



Maria was listening carefully. She wanted to know more:

- People say that persons with multiple disabilities cannot understand God, and that they should have all their reason to do so...

- Our experience proves just the opposite, replied Norma. God gives Himself to all his children and it is up to each one to welcome Him, or not, into his heart. Let me tell you two small testimonies:

Often, Fadi, suffering from autism, refuses to go to class before praying: he runs to the chapel, sits in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament, holds the Gospel, (no matter if it is upside down !?), and smiles. He comes out of it half an hour later totally calm.

During mass, at the time of the consecration, Joe, with multiple disabilities, who cannot see and who can say just a few words, lowers his head to the side, smiles, and says: "Habibi Yasouh" Dear Jesus. And he sends Him two kisses in the air.

Maria remained speechless but her face expressed a lot of tenderness. Norma resumed with her smile: "They are touching, aren't they? They are even more touching during the First Communion. And she explains how happy she was that, this year, 14 children made their First Communion in their parishes!

- It's a real achievement! She says.

- Can you explain a bit more? Asked Maria, very interested.

- The First Communion is the entry point for children in the parish. If the parents overcome this "test", they will be able to return more easily to the parish with their child and possibly include him in parish movements like all other children of their age.

But parents want to avoid, as much as possible, the look of pity from society, and that is completely normal. And they wonder why they should face that look on a day that is supposed to bring joy to them and their child.



Out of 18 children of First Communion age, only 4 families could not pass the gaze of others. But for the 14 who agreed to enter into this logic, a team from Anta Akhi provided support according to the following approach:

- **We encourage parents to contact their parish.**
- **We accompany the children and their parents during the 1st meeting in the parish.**
- **We ensure a presence in the meetings to raise awareness, and guide those responsible as to how to deal with the child and the role he could have, given his abilities**
- **We support parents as needed, through individual meetings.**

If most parents needed motivation, they also needed listening and support. After a journey of 9 months together, all those who had agreed to make First Communion in the parish were happy with the result! They were proud of their children! And it was a beautiful thing to see!

Maria dropped a tear. She knew that disability is not easy for the child, nor for his family. The daily experience is not lacking in difficulties, nor the concern of parents for the future of their child. And then, she thought that fortunately a “family” like Anta Akhi was present to support these families in their difficulties. She saw people of good will there. And that was enough to give credibility to this mission.

- And the existential training, she asked? What is it exactly?

- Basically, it is training given to children with physical disabilities, because they begin to ask themselves very early, around the age of 7, questions about the meaning of their life: “Why was I born with a disability? Why me and not someone else? If God loves me, how can He accept that I could be born with a disability?” And they risk sinking into their negative thoughts: “I am a burden on my family, isn’t it better for me that I die?” Impressive, isn’t it?

And this is how Yvonne, our founder, began this training which answers these questions, and which aims to make these children aware of the importance of their life, its value, its dignity and its greatness :

“it is not little to discover that we are the children of the Creator of the universe! We are sons of a king! The sons of The King!”

What a relief!

What abandonment, does not generate this truth!? With this faith, we will all be able to manage our own lives, despite the difficulties of the journey,parcours.

And then this training was extended to able-bodied people, who also ask themselves the same questions a little later, generally, at a turning point in their lives. Thus, we adapt the existential training to our visitors, friends, volunteers, seminarians, in short, all those who are eager to give its meaning to their life. In particular, this year:

	NUMBER OF PEOPLE	NUMBER OF GROUPS	SUPPORT METHODS
CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES	32	4	2 to 3 days per month in group and individually
ABLE-BODIED GENERAL PUBLIC	38	4	2 sessions per month in face-to-face and/or virtual groups
SEMINARIANS	11	1	3 days at the seminary and not at Anta Akhi because of the confinement

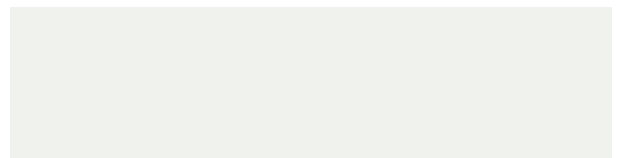
To explain all this, Maria and Norma had taken the time to sit down and concentrate. Norma expanded further on the subject, especially as she sensed Maria’s growing interest. And she told her:

- And so Anta Akhi would be more than a home for people with disabilities! It’s a school of life!

- Exactly, said Norma. We want to testify about our art of living in joy despite all the difficulties. And it is not only the youth with physical disabilities who are the witnesses: with the “chouchou” persons with multiple disabilities, we also question ourselves and we discover that a gesture of love, a smile, are often sufficient to fill us with joy and love. Yes, life is beautiful and worth living as a celebration. And if our youth with disabilities have succeeded in doing this, how much more, able-bodied people are also called to have an important role in the lives of others, and to give meaning to their actions, and to find the true meaning of their life!

- Could there be several meanings of life?

- There are different ways to reach a single goal: to love and to know that you are loved!



Maria was thrilled! Those answers filled her! Yet she was sure that it required a lot of work and that you had to hang on to not let go. She looked at Norma and, with her outspokenness, asked her:

- What gives you strength? What motivates you?

- We have adopted the life values of Jesus, expressed in his Gospel. And the fact of being close to His Word on a daily basis gives us the strength needed to move forward in joy.

- And you manage to live this every day?

- It depends on everyone's "yes"! It's a personal choice. We invite our youth, and the people who are present for them, to believe in what makes the essence of this Home.

- And what do you believe in?

WE BELIEVE THAT :

1. MAN "IS", FAR BEYOND WHAT APPEARS OF HIM. IT IS A MYSTERY THAT CAN ONLY BE APPROACHED BY AN ACT OF FAITH AND TRUST.

2. EVERYONE WITH A DISABILITY IS A HUMAN BEING, A CHILD OF GOD.

3. EVERYONE NEEDS TO LIVE WITH DIGNITY AND LOVE.

4. ALL THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED AS GIFTS, IS TO PUT AT THE SERVICE OF ONE ANOTHER.

5. DIFFICULTIES ARE PART OF LIFE. IT IS UP TO US TO COME OUT OF IT VICTORIOUS.

6. LIFE REMAINS; EVERYONE IS CALLED TO GROW AND ACHIEVE.

7. WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE AS ONE BIG FAMILY, WHERE THE SMALLEST IS AT THE HEART OF THE FAMILY.

8. EACH OF US IS DEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD: FROM NOW ON, WE ARE HIS FAMILY.

9. GOD LOOKS AT US AND SAYS TO US: "YOU ARE MY BELOVED CHILD, YOU ARE MY JOY. »

10. THIS IS WHY WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE'S LIFE, HOWEVER SEVERE THE DISABILITY WAS, IS WORTH LIVING AS A CELEBRATION, BECAUSE LOVE IS STRONGER THAN ANYTHING AND YOU ARE MY BROTHER.

CREED ANTA AKHI



A PRESENCE OF LOVE

Maria appreciated the time devoted to her. She knew that welcoming visitors was one of Anta Akhi's priorities, but she did not want to abuse it. She took leave of Norma, and Mirna joined her to continue the tour with her; In fact, Loyal had left to welcome a group of schoolchildren who had come to learn about the world of disabilities. We like to say: to be rehabilitated to the world of disability. Yes, we assist people with disabilities to live as best as possible with their handicap, but we educate able-bodied people so that they change their look.



Indeed, what bothers our youth the most is this look of pity or condescension, which is addressed to them, often out of ignorance. And this gaze needs to be rehabilitated so that it sees, above all, a human person, with equal value and dignity!

Mirna and Maria toured the two floors where there are, among other things, dormitories, living space, kitchenettes and toilets. On this last subject, Mirna said:

- In taking care of the needs of daily life, it is necessary to be careful and present to our youth. What am I holding in my hand? A damaged machine or a human person? No, we do not repair a damaged machine, but we ensure that our youth are comfortable in their bodies, but also in their home. Diligent, daily work is carried out at this level.

- Indeed, said Maria, the Home is very clean and it's obvious! There are no unpleasant odors. On the contrary, the space is well ventilated and very welcoming. I feel at home here. I am at home here!

- The life companions' team and the logistic team work hard, every day of the week, so that whoever passes through our "Home of Tenderness" feels at home. You can hardly imagine all the load of the logistical tasks. Just to give you a few numbers:

	NUMBER	NOTES
CLEANING	80	Ladies take care of the daily cleaning of the entire « Home of Tenderness » and the laundry room.
WASHING – LAUNDRY	3,113	And nearly 46.000 kilos of laundry: clothes, sheets, tablecloths...
DECORATION OF SPACE	4	Change of decoration of the « Home of Tenderness » with the seasons.
DÉCORATION DE L'ESPACE	106	Decorations for special events, times of prayer, masses
MAINTENANCE OF THE « HOME OF TENDERNESS »		By our own means, by external labor, by annual maintenance contracts.
TRANSPORT	1,791	Transport for youth to their homes, to the doctor, on outings, for a administrative work of the team, for visitors
WATER	53	Water tanks, nearly 1.060.000 liters were transported to compensate for water cuts.
MEALS	4	Meals per day throughout the year for 50 to 70 person.

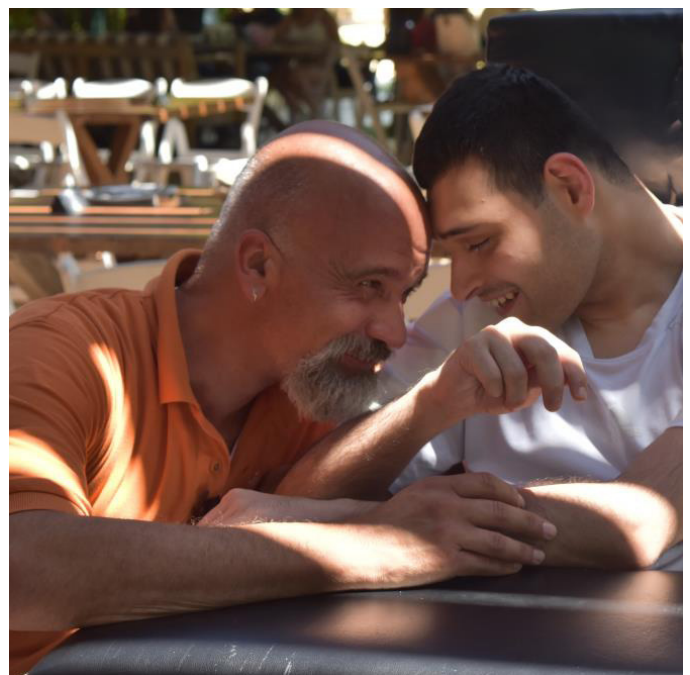


Mirna elaborated on the question of the meal, and the difficulty of Maha's task, and Laura, her assistant :

- It is not easy at all to prepare the 4 daily meals for our youth who have many particularities, and who require great collaboration with the medical team: for some, it is necessary to prepare ground meals, for others without salt, or dishes without meat, or without spices, or without vermicelli... It's hard, but there is no risk Maha can forget the requirements or even the preferences of the youth, the team and the volunteers: she does her best to please everyone. With the donations received, since we do not buy food products, she invents dishes and always decorates them in such an attractive way that we only want to enjoy them !

Maha, like any other person in Anta Akhi, does not count the hours of work. They are present in this Home because they love the youth, who love them so much! All it takes is a hug from Joey, a smile from Pierre, a small word from Elie, a thank you from Joanna to overcome the fatigue and continue to give oneself joyfully.

Maria saw smiles on the faces. She especially noticed the beautiful relationship that bound the youth to each other, and the one that existed between the youth and the members of the team. She thought that work was necessarily done with the members of the team so that an atmosphere of brothers reigns. She withheld her question because she knew she was going to meet Roula, the director of Anta Akhi.



TOGETHER FOR A SINGLE MISSION



Maybe people have a model director in mind. But Maria had none, especially since she was in contact since the morning with a world so different from the outside...

In any case, Roula's simplicity put her directly at ease. She felt that she was in the presence of a mother; the current quickly passed between the two women.

Roula guessed Maria's emotion after those small hours spent at the "Home of Tenderness". Overcoming her emotion, Maria said with a beautiful smile :

- I am very happy to have come to see you today. You have given me so much joy !

- I'm glad you touched the heart of Anta Akhi's mission, which goes beyond disability to reach everyone. Indeed, all the people who visit us, or rather, who form our big family, are called to live joy, and to believe that life is beautiful, with You my brother, regardless of our differences.

- I totally agree, answered Maria. I saw the joy in the hearts of the youth and the members of the work team. How many people make up the team? And what do you do with them to make them feel good here ?

- This year, 46 people worked permanently, while 18 others were present as needed, particularly to support the youth. Indeed, our Home is always open, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and our youth require a continuous presence. To give you an idea: on weekends,



a team made up of life companions, cleaning ladies, a cook and a referent person, ensures the requirements of the reception of the youth. But on weekdays, it's a whole different matter. The 46 members of the permanent team are distributed as follows:

UNIT	NUMBER OF PERSONS
DIRECTOR GENERAL	1
HUMAN RESOURCES	2
COMMUNICATION AND PROJECTS	1
TRAINING (BALLOUNEH AND ANTELIAS)	8
HUMAN ENVIRONMENT	1
SELF-FINANCING ACTIVITIES AND DONATIONS	7
GENERAL SERVICES	11
ACCOMPANIMENT	13
FINANCE	2
TOTAL	46

Maria, you spoke with a few members of the team, but there are others. They are "unknown soldiers", as we say in Lebanon, who put their hearts into ensuring that this mission develops and is consistent with what is expressed in our values. But to come back to your question, **we accompany the team and train it :**

At the technical level to understand the world of disability and ensure effective action with the youth.

At the level of personal development: annual outings are carried out in the units. And for the first year, music therapy sessions were offered to members of the support team.



At the spiritual and existential level :
 No one can stay in our Home if he has not adopted our mission: there is mandatory work on oneself. It is beautiful to say that we would like to live in joy, but it is difficult to achieve it: there is a continual questioning of the members of the team towards themselves and towards the others. For this, prayers in community, and prayers in the different units, and days of monthly spiritual meetings are carried out, with or without the youth. As our mission is to live together different and complementary, in joy, as brothers, we want to fully adhere to it under the gaze of Jesus, and to be witnesses of this living together.

Maria was thankful for what she heard; she was amazed that this Home was so “rich”. She expressed her thoughts to Roula:

- It is almost unthinkable that there is such a big action behind these walls! Is the society aware of what you are doing ?
- We try by various means to explain our action, resumed Roula. Alongside awareness-raising visits to parishes or schools, and alongside outings in society, a media action is carried out each year, through :

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

EVENT

SOCIAL NETWORKS	Facebook, Instagram	119 reels and posts 116 posts 4 interviews 1 “live”
LOCAL SOCIAL NETWORKS	Keserwan online	September 8, Anta Akhi’s birthday
PROGRAMS ON THE RADIO	Voix Liban libre	Giving Tuesday : world day of generosity
TELEVISION PROGRAMS	Charity TV, MTV and OTV	Christmas, diocesan day of preparation for the Synod and Giving Tuesday
LEBANESE AND FRENCH DAILIES OR MONTHLIES	L’Orient – Le jour et Le journal de la DCC and that of d’Œuvre d’Orient.	Christmas

Whether our media action is developed, or not, continued Roula, we can say that throughout our 30 years of experience, a visit, or a stay among our youth, makes it possible to understand the scope of our action. I think you understood, Maria, that Anta Akhi is not a “rest home”, a place where “to place these poor handicapped people”. Not at all!

Anta Akhi is a Home, part of a broader mission, which lives, and which testifies that it is possible to live happily despite all the difficulties of the journey.



WITH ALL OUR FRIENDS, WE TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE OF CONTINUITY



Yes Maria understood! Anta Akhi is not a nursing home! It was a living community. There was one more question that was bothering her. It was the survival of this mission :

- Roula, how do you meet all the needs of your mission ?
- Our survival is based on the gracious presence of Jesus and His Mother, Mary, continued Roula with great confidence, letting her unshakable faith speak for itself.
- Do you really believe it? Asked Maria with a hint of a smile.
- But of course! Our 30 years of experience have confirmed this. Without Mary, Set el Beit, Mother of our Home, it would have been impossible for our action to last, with so many difficulties, and in such a problematic but so beautiful country, could not help saying Roula, who loves Lebanon so much.
- And practically, how does this take place?
- So Mary does her part, and we do ours, which is practically based on our donors: lay people, priests, and members of associations, companies, banks, and others, who have remained faithful for 30 years, or have recently joined our mission. I do not forget to thank them every time I have the opportunity. They are no longer donors but members of our family who look at us with the eyes of brothers, fathers, mothers, and who carry this responsibility with us with great love. Those are :

IN LEBANON	19 ladies of the support committee	Usually they organize an annual dinner and brunch, but this year, due to the Covid and the economic situation of the country, they helped us through a tombola, a sale of Christmas products and various donation
	2700 sponsors	They participate by a monthly, quarterly or annual contribution to our action. While some are retiring for financial or other difficulties, 86 new members have joined our family this year.
	167 donors of in-kind products	We try to keep our expenses as low as possible. As a result, we do not buy food or hygiene products. And this year, we bought very few medicines.
	7 members of the unit Self-financing activities and donations	Alongside the management of sponsorship, and small activities, the team organizes a telemarketing action at Christmas, a raffle, and manages donation boxes in various small businesses. This year too, the usual family dinner has been cancelled...
	The Apostolic Nunciature	The Nuncio and his team are always present to support us in difficult times.
IN FRANCE	our 10 friends from Anta Akhi	They never let us down! After a forced stop of 2 consecutive years, they once again organized a gala dinner to help us cover our costs and carry out our projects.
	Our friends from the Franciscan Fraternity of Eastern France and our 64 sponsors	They have been faithful since our beginnings. If through their gifts they contribute greatly to our action, it is through their prayers that we feel supported.
	Our 68 volunteers, including 16 present this year	They responded to our calls for Giving Tuesday, and the summer holidays of the year.
IN FRANCE AND SWITZERLAND	Friend associations	

With these explanations, Maria is happy to get a general idea of Anta Akhi's action. It is not one person, or 50, or 100, who make up Anta Akhi's big family, but all those who have chosen to take the step, to give, support, meet, laugh, pray, but above all, to love. She shared her thoughts with Roula, who said:

- We are happy when we perceive behind the presence of our friends by our side, initiatives of love. Young and old are numerous to do great actions in favor of our youth.

Matthieu, a young man of 18, with a disability, is good at drawing. After a visit to Anta Akhi with a prayer group in his parish, made an exhibition for the benefit of our youth.

Every Christmas, Verlaine, a young friend, tries hard to come up with ideas to make her friends aware of being present for a cause. This year, a wellness day was organized for the benefit of Anta Akhi.

Father Sami, a friend in Anta Akhi, secured most of the medicine for us through his friends living abroad.

It is not the value of the gift itself that is most important. An elderly widow still wants to support us up to 10,000 LL per month, or nearly 27 cents of a dollar. Shall we deny her this joy? No! In the gift, regardless of its form, a part of oneself is entrusted to the other. And for us, that is very valuable.

At the same time, fortunately we are supported by our friends who live outside Lebanon. Without their substantial support, how would have we covered the heating and electricity needs which amounted to 65 tons of fuel oil last year? Or the salaries of the team members? Or youth transportation? The amount collected from Lebanon used to cover 70% of expenses, whereas today it covers just 20%.

Alongside all the actions reported above, we are supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which obtained "Public Utility" for us and which supports our operating budget at the rate of 1.5%, while the parents of our youth help us up to 1%.

- It's not much, Maria thought aloud. But in fact, since the "youth" are no longer very young, how do parents who are advancing in age survive? Are they still working? Do they need help? What relationship do they have with their children?

"You touched a sensitive point," answered Roula. For us, it is crucial that the families maintain ties with their own child, or brother and sister. Otherwise their presence at Anta Akhi would have been impossible! Money has never been the obstacle: it is above all the presence, the return to the parental home at least once a month, the visit to Anta Akhi. And if the parents are old and can no longer accommodate their child without our help, an accompanying person, whose costs are covered by Anta Akhi, is present with him throughout his stay at home.

On the other hand, we help families in need with the cost of medicines, and through in-kind donations: what we receive, we share with great joy.

- Parents should be grateful!

- Yes, they are!

Maria thought she had come to the end of her visit. She took Roula in her arms, thanking her for all the love she shows by her presence in Anta Akhi.

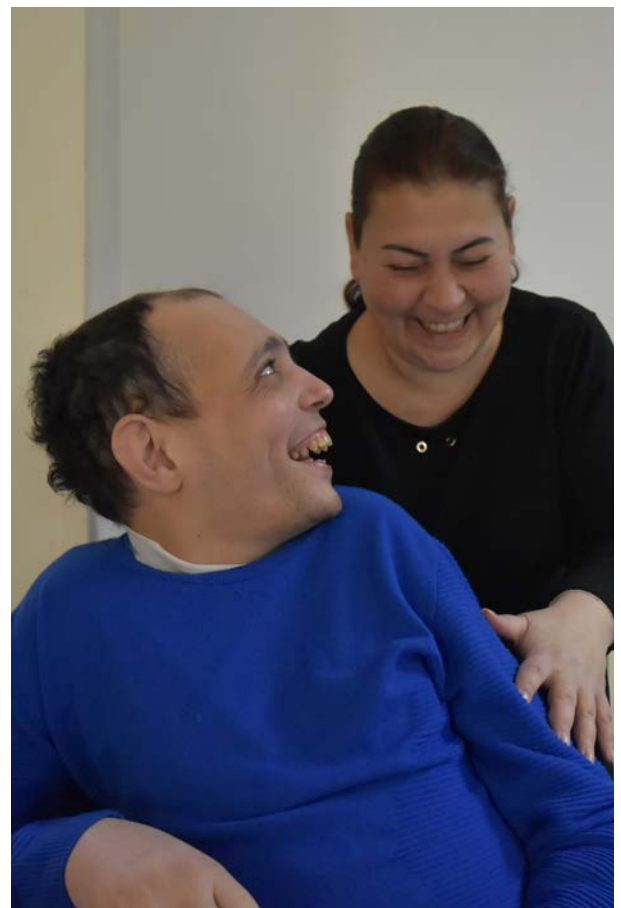
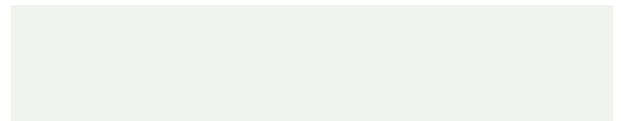
- It must not be easy for you, she told her.

- No, it's not easy. But I'm happy to be here. It is in contact with Mary and the Holy Spirit that we draw the strength to continue in joy.

I say "we", because it is not about me, but about each person who constitutes this beautiful family. I like to think that we are all holding hands and moving together, supporting each other, towards the point of arrival.

- What is this point of arrival?

Roula smiled and kissed Maria wholeheartedly, without giving her an answer. She knew she had it all figured out.



*Inti maana w ma men khaf,
Enti Set el Beit... You are with us,
we are not afraid
You are the Mother of the Home*

It was lunch time. The whole family of Anta Akhi gathered to share the meal. Maria accepted the invitation with joy and she sat among the youth: she ate and helped Pierre to eat too.

At the end, she got up and took her leave of the little family. She left the Home of Tenderness, her heart overwhelmed with feelings. She felt like crying: crying with joy, crying with gratitude, but also crying for the world that is moving away from all these values, crying for so many things that only she knew...

Yes, she saw the limits, she suspected them, but she didn't judge anyone. She knew that these weaknesses are saved and that it depended on each one to bring them to light so that they could be delivered from them...

In short, everything was mixed up in her head, but there was one thing that touched her more than anything else: it was the love that was hovering in the air. This love which gives itself and receives itself freely. This love that uplifts and liberates.

She thought she had done well to visit this "Home of Tenderness" which bears her name well, when a voice called her :

- Maria! Will you come back ?

She turned around, and with a radiant, affectionate smile said :

- But, how can you ask me that? I'm still there! You invoke me all day... and even if you don't see me, I'm here! In bad times, in good times, your voice reaches me; it will always reach out to me...

I'm not leaving you! Do not be afraid.

She walked away humming the song she heard when she arrived...

- Enta khayyé, w ana bhibbak... You are my brother and I love you.

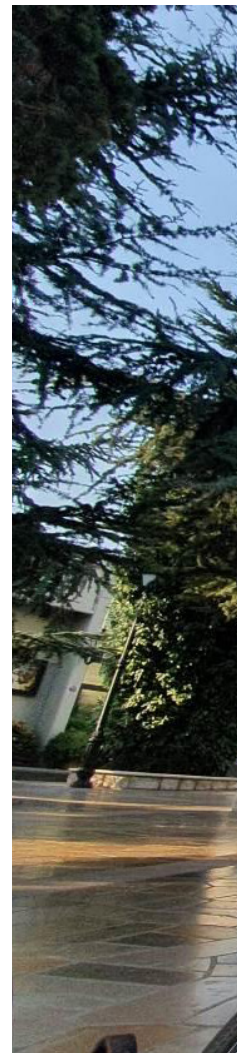
The youth and the team stood motionless... A little late, they realized that they had received a visit from Mary, their Heavenly Mother. They would have liked to say so many words, to explain how these 30 years have passed, to express what graces they were overwhelmed by during their presence in this "Home of Tenderness", but... there was only one word that came out of the heart and which resounded:

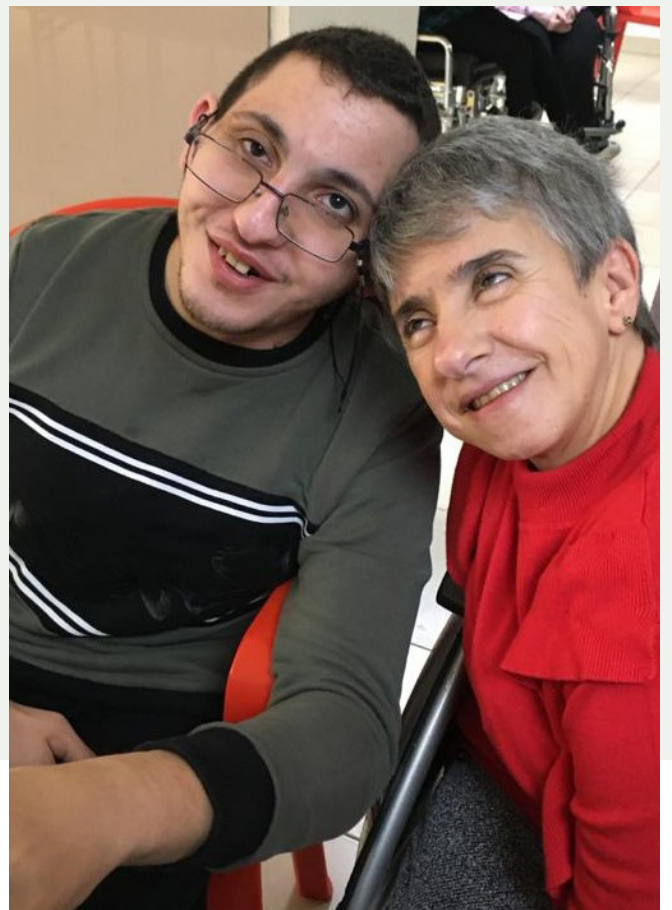
**Thank you... Thank you...
Thank you...**

And then joy broke out! With one and same heart, at the rhythm of the guitar and the darbouka, youth and members of the team started to sing the Marian song that they always pray:

**Ya Aadra ma elna ghayrik
Ma badna ghayrik
Inti maana w ma men khaf
Enti Set el Beit**

**O Virgin we have only you
We want only you
You are with us, we are not
afraid
You are the Mother of the
Home**







For your donations in Lebanon or elsewhere

Online payment : www.antaakhi.org

Emirates Lebanon Bank SAL – Ashrafieh, Beirut

Code Swift N°ELBKLBBXXX

IBAN (\$) - abroad: LB84 0092 0000 0000 2301 1772 4200

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