

# When Sports Youth Become Agents of Hope

## Beirut Explosion: Greatest Tragedies Come With Greatest Acts of Kindness

*Youth from a Sports and Youth Association (Chabibeh Sporting Club) become volunteers and share stories of compassion and pain mixed together to shed light on the darkest hour of their country*



4th of August was just another hot summer day for many around the world, but definitely not for the Lebanese. The explosion that happened that afternoon in Beirut port changed peoples' lives forever. With the count of 203 deaths, 6,500 injured and around 300 000 left homeless, every Lebanese either lost someone that afternoon or knows someone who lost a dear person, or someone who got injured, or had their home or business destroyed. The unprecedented tragedy comes in times of the COVID19 pandemic and in the middle of a severe economic crisis in Lebanon: this is when you think that things could not possibly get worse and they do. But in these moments of extreme sadness, grief, rage, and despair, great kindness and compassion find its way in people's hearts. Only 30 minutes after the explosion, people took to the streets carrying bodies, helping the wounded, and cleaning up after the blast. Among those helpers were the young volunteers from the Chabibeh Sporting Club. Here are their heart-touching stories of compassion and pain mixed together that shed light in perhaps the darkest hour of their country and deserves recognition.

**Ahmed El Chidiac** joined the club in 2017, wanting to go beyond sports and leave a footprint in Lebanon. As traumatizing as it can be, the only thing that helped Ahmad gather his strength and go out helping people after the Beirut explosion was the pain he saw in people's eyes, among which also his friends heavily affected by this tragedy. "A lot of my friends live in Ashrafieh and Gemmayze and seeing their homes on the ground and their tears and wounds gave me the urge to do something and help as much as I can without asking whom my help will reach", explains Ahmad.





At only 17 years old, **Jad Bader** also rushed to lend a helping hand to the people affected by the explosion. Living in a village and far from the blast, Jad wasn't immune to the catastrophe that hit the capital. Having his mother and sister in Beirut when the blast happened, Jad, just like every Lebanese, was worried something happened to his loved ones. "I was very worried about my friends and family, but most of all, I was angry", explains Jad. Jad decided to volunteer to help those affected. Hence, he helped the Lebanese army by sorting out food and giving it to the families, cleaned the streets of the capital that was now unrecognizable, and also cleaned the club's school with his fellow Chabibeh volunteers. Afterwards, he went with Mr Fadi Tabet, president of Chabibeh Sporting Club, to help out in Karantina, which didn't receive as much help as other areas did. "Help is the most humane and selfless act", according to Jad.

**Carlos Younes**, a 20-year-old volunteer who started with Chabibeh Sporting Club in 2006 as a basketball player, became an active member of their youth department recently. In only a few seconds, Carlos experienced a trauma that all Lebanese people suffered from due to the war and bombings that this country had witnessed in the past. "After the explosion I felt a lot of pain for the 300 000 homeless people, especially in this really bad economy and how hard it is to bounce back. So we had to do whatever there is in our power to help those affected and hold our prayers up for those who unfortunately died in this horrific explosion", explains Carlos. "Chabibeh Sporting Club helped me go beyond sports and allowed us to give back to our community and grow as individuals. We had to transmit the message that people are here to help each other and what better way to do it than through volunteer work. My country is so damaged that sometimes I think it's beyond help but we keep trying in every possible way" he adds.



Being a member with Chabibeh for the last year, **Ibtissam Shukor** sees volunteering as duty: "a call has been made and a plan was set in order to address those affected". According to Ibtissam, Mr. Fadi Tabet, Chabibeh Sporting Club president, leading by example, was present during the whole period with the team from the planning phase and during all the on-site implementation. When the explosion first happened, Ibtissam was still at work which is located around a kilometer away from the site of the blast. To her, it felt like a terrible earthquake accompanied by a horrible explosion: "The first couple of minutes were terrible, no one knowing what's going on. My parents, friends and everyone are checking on each other. I couldn't leave work directly being under the shock of the horrific incident. People rushed to the streets, lost control while driving, destruction was everywhere, broken glass was all around on my way home", she describes.

After seeing all the destruction in the beautiful Beirut, **Joanna El Hachem** couldn't help but feel the urge to help. "Firstly, we merged with 'Rebuild Beirut' and we distributed water, food and clothes to the affected families and the people helping them in Gemmayze. Then, we cleaned the location of Chabibeh Sporting Club, which is placed in a public school. We gathered and got rid of all the broken glass and windows there. We also went to the highway next to the Port of Beirut and cleaned all the glass and debris. Later, we helped the army with the donation boxes for 5 days", explains the young woman. Other than all of that, Joanna still wishes to help more and more by providing medications for the elderly.



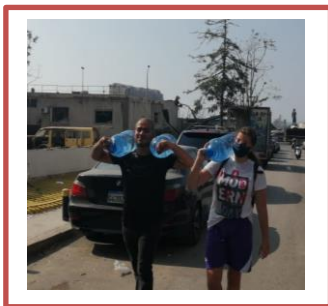
“The message that I wanted to transmit is that Lebanese people stand hand in hand next to each other no matter what, and that’s what really happened, more than 100,000 people including the Chabibeh team, went down to help” concludes Joanna.



**Maritta Abou Dagher**, a 16-year-old volunteer at Chabibeh Sporting Club, remembers: “When the explosion happened on the 4th of August I was playing basketball. I got so worried because my family was close to the site of the explosion but thankfully nothing happened to them” says Maritta. Having lost some of her friends in the blast, the young volunteer decided to take part in this in order to be useful and help in

these very difficult times: “I was devastated by the amount of people who got affected by the explosion, from victims injured to missing people. Even the families who lost their homes and businesses” she explains.

**Raymond Sahily** has been in the Chabibeh Sporting Club for over 7 years now. Raymond decided to help because he believes it’s his duty to help his co-patriots, “My humanity and personal beliefs guided me to help in this situation. My message is that to fight these circumstances we have to be one heart and hand in hand as citizens of our beautiful country”, he says. The young gentleman continues describing the current situation in Lebanon: “This has been the hardest year that I and everyone else had to go through in Lebanon. Starting with the economic crisis, the Corona virus and the 4th of August blast that made me lose friends and neighbors and people that I love and was close to. We stayed over 10 days in front of their houses waiting for them to come back, but they never did”.



“I was with 2 of my friends in Beit Merry. We were sitting on a big rock in a valley. We felt a small earthquake and a small blast which was so unclear. We began looking left and right and I saw all the birds leaving the trees, I was so confused with not a single idea in mind about what was about to happen. It was around a minute or so when the big blast happened. The sound was horrifying and loud because we were in the valley. The 3 of us stood up startled and started running toward our car panicking trying to call our parents but the service was off for almost 15 minutes. The first thing we had in mind is that our country was attacked”. This is how **Rawad Bondok**, who

has been participating in training and programs with Chabibeh Sporting Club for over a year as a youth member, experienced the tragic explosion on 4th of August in Port of Beirut. “My message is to never feel helpless or powerless to help, because you are going to achieve more than what you expect just in one act you do and its impact can be wonderful. And always looking forward to make a difference”, expresses the young gentleman whose mindset can lead by example the generations to come.

**Rita Mezher** hasn’t been a member of Chabibeh Sporting Club for long, she only started actively volunteering with them after the blast of Port of Beirut on August 4th. According to her, Chabibeh might look as simple as just a sports club on the outside, but when you step into it and see the spirit Chabibe holds, it becomes beyond clear that it has an incredible potential in terms of community service. “I felt helpless and I was in denial for quite some time.



The night of the explosion, I wanted to rush and donate blood to try and help, even though I couldn't because of a medical condition", shares Rita. This unfortunate event got her and many others bent out of shape whether they were directly affected by the blast or not. "I never actively decided to help, I needed to help so I could feel hope come back to me. I wanted the real victims to know they weren't alone and that we need to look out for each other as one united nation rather than groups", urges Rita.



"Everyone who survived the blast, me included, have felt guilty to even having survived", this is how **Reina Hazouri**, Chabibeh Sporting Club volunteer summarized what the people of Lebanon felt after the explosion that took place in Beirut on 4th of August. "It's not only safety and stability we're discussing right now: a global pandemic, economic inflation, and a huge uncertainty of whether we're going to survive this or not. I can't guarantee that what I'll do, and others like me, will make a major change.

But what I'm positive about is the fact that our young generation is the only one capable of investing in their resilience to make a better change in the longer run", shares Reina. Despite their young age, the Chabibeh volunteers found themselves capable of reviving hope amidst the despair.

Considering volunteering a duty of young generations to create a brilliant and better future and to help the homeland, **Tia Abbas** went beyond sports to contribute to her community through Chabibeh Sporting Club. The night after the explosion, Tia couldn't sleep thinking of all the people who were missing under the rubble. She felt hopeless, at loss, and in emotional distress. At the verge of losing hope, she refused to give up and decided to help: "Even though it's hard and maybe seems impossible, I had hope that we can do it all together hand in hand". She joined the volunteer group in Chabibeh Sporting Club with people she had never met before. They went to Gemmayze and reported the needs of people from food, shelter, clothes and others. Afterwards, they went to Karantina where they cleaned all the shattered glass and destruction. "This made me proud of myself and proud of being Lebanese", expresses Tia.



"If no one is willing to ensure me a bright future in my own country, I will build it myself", says **Sheren Feghaly**, a 15-year-old basketball player at Chabibeh Sporting Club. Feeling scared and unsafe after seeing all the destruction, victims, injured and all the blood, Sheren decided to help. "I realized that I am able to make a change by helping. Even people who aren't capable to help financially can still lend a helping hand, which costs absolutely nothing but time", expresses Sheren.

Even though it may be tough for Lebanon's young generation to keep their hopes high and continue believing in their country, this disaster proved to everyone that Lebanese people have great power when they come together, and these volunteers are a great example that illustrates what the future of Lebanon looks like.



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