

Hanzade Germiyanoglu – Support to Life



Hanzade Germiyanoglu, Field Coordinator of Support To Life, clutching a feather, a symbol of the fragility yet a deftness of ability.

A straight talker from the get go, Hanzade Germiyanoglu responds to my initial set-up question with frank humility. “Communications... the team mentioned that it was going to be like a personal affiliation to the project, a personal profile; I’m fine with that... though, I don’t know if I’m eligible or it’ll inspire...”

Germiyanoglu has spent the last 2 years as Field Coordinator of Support to Life, and actually inspires wherever she treads. Talking of her reasons for getting into the Humanitarian Aid work:

my motivations are very personal; the reason [is] to grow the mass... the need to grow the mass... and what’s happening in these projects... and support them with mechanisms for their own sustainability.

Born to a well resourced, upper middle class Turkish non-minority family, she was surrounded by very little defect, feeling very secure “as like in a bubble”, she says...

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“I was so bored!” she laments, remembering back to an adolescent self, weathering an existential crisis of ideas; and that’s the push that lead her along a path towards doing humanitarian work at the age of just 15 year olds. While adults around her were saying ‘oh, she’s a teenager, it’s ok, she’s depressed’, the words of a mentor, a very close friend’s father kind of reset her compass point.

Satiating her yearning to figure out the world, he spoke in pragmatic terms, telling her ‘you know what, I have an idea for you... you can explore different ways of existing... which might include getting involved in other people’s lives.’

In many ways, that’s where the journey began, by way of introduction to an education volunteers association. “And I was literally spending my Saturdays an Sundays with children between the ages of 9-12, and I was 15 or 16 teaching them English”; and she realizes now that those ghetto children were actually victims of internal displacement.

Germiyanoglu gives a brilliantly simple answer to the media’s clichéd treatment of the people who suffer consequences of displacement, specifically in terms of the Syrian context:

it is what it is... as a society, to reach out and make a decision on who we want to be... do we want to be a good neighbor?... do we want to be more human?... who on this earth is placed?... do I know what I feel when I’m in my own home life?... what does home mean?

Despite everything, Germiyanoglu is an optimist, even recognizing that the crisis is so massive, huge. She knows that in all of the communities there are people that are doing small, small stuff, that lead the way to change.

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Hanzade Germiyanoglu, Field Coordinator of Support To Life, taking part as a 'facilitant' during a canyoning trip with other 'facilitants' (facilitator/participants) in a community building gathering which we call Anatolia and Middle East Jam (see Yesworld Jams) which is part of external support system for Hanzade Germiyanoglu.

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Hanzade Germiyanoglu, Field Coordinator of Support To Life, abseiling in Turkey during one of the canyoning trips, a manner in which she takes stock and recharges

But in 2013 a despondent Germiyanoglu almost turned her back on her ambition to work in the social change sector; a decision not taken lightly, but in response to heavy disappointment at seeing Turkey's Gezi Resistance loose in its challenge of the government's restrictions on people's rights.

"That's it", she thought, "nothing changes, nobody's life is changing," and set-off to follow a career in fashion management in New York. Yet, literally found herself perusing also a masters degree in International Human Rights Law at the same time.

Though, nine months into the job, she admits "I missed being part of the work... like... giving back, I started to challenge my concept of change, and my role in delivering change;" time enough for her to re-imagine a healthier relationship with the change-sector business, and take up her current role in the combat against the daily injustice people face because they are displaced.

I realize that my personality is not allowing me to be happy when I'm not working towards that [goal].