

Paper Airplanes

Supporting the Right to Education: Using online education to empower students who have been victims of political violence

The Problem

Over 2.5 million Syrian children remain out of school, and over 200,000 Syrian college students are not attending higher universities.

As the Syrian civil war enters its sixth year, the vitality of providing education to the next generation remains a top concern for humanitarian workers, politicians, and residents of host countries. However, due to the large influx of refugees throughout the region and the globe, educational resources remain scarce for Syrian students. Inside of Syria, violent outbreaks from the civil war prevent many students from attending schools, and in many instances, targeting schools has been a weapon of war. Language remains an extra barrier preventing many students from accessing universities abroad, and TOEFL preparation courses or British Council English courses are often too expensive. Further, as refugees and displaced persons search for additional job opportunities in foreign countries, language and technical skills remain significant barriers. Victims of political violence remained trapped by circumstance, unable to access formal or informal education.

The Market

We are the only organization providing mass tutoring over Skype for free.

Because our digital model - relying on Skype to provide one-on-one language tutoring - is unique, we have filled a niche otherwise unmet in the response to the educational crisis. Only one other organization in Canada followed suit, and their effort is limited to one university. However, there are several organizations working on education for refugees through digital means: Kiron, which is providing accredited college courses to successful refugee applicants; NaTakallam, which is employing refugees to tutor Arabic learners, and MercyCorps, which is working to provide iPads with preloaded educational apps to women and children.

Budget

Paper Airplanes, Inc. received its non-profit status confirmation from the IRS in December, 2016. The first official fundraiser is scheduled to begin in February, 2017, with a goal of raising \$10,000. The majority of the money raised will be allocated toward funding our first paid staff positions and helping students access the TOEFL and IELTS exams. The remaining funds (approximately 10-15%) will be used to pay for administrative overhead costs, including taxes, fees, email accounts, publicity, and our website subscription.

Our Timeline

Over the next six months, we hope to grow the diversity and breadth of our programs and the financial support they receive.

February 6, 2017

Launch a digital fundraising campaign to raise an initial \$10,000 to cover administrative costs, website upkeep, and three part-time staff positions.

February 2017

Launch four major pilot programs: the high school matching program, computer coding for women, Meet and Teach in Ann Arbor, and webinars for students.

March 2017

Develop a financial, data, and marketing portfolio to improve our branding, financial tracking, and internal data management. Apply for two more grants to increase funding and improve sustainability.

April 2017

Form connections with smaller partner institutions on the ground, working with local schools in Jordan, Turkey and Syria to provide additional support for classroom needs. These include organizations like Syria Relief and Development, the Karam Foundation, and the 'Ataa School. Launch second fundraiser through college campuses and digital marketing to raise money for a Paper Airplanes integrative educational platform.

May 2017

Launch a pilot program in partnership with Northeastern University's School of Journalism. Provide instruction on journalism and opportunities for students to publish original work. Apply for two more grants.

June 2017

Identify a computer programmer to begin planning out a Paper Airplanes integrative educational platform including chat messaging, video, homework uploads, surveys, and a mobile friendly app. Begin building website.

July 2017

Hire a full time Fundraising Director and PR Director. Launch formal study measuring the effects of digital programs on tolerance levels between host and refugee communities. Apply to three grants to sustain funding.

Your Solution

Paper Airplanes is a 501(c)3 registered nonprofit providing informal educational courses through Skype.

Paper Airplanes has helped over 1,000 students learn English, supported students through university application processes and connected them to scholarship opportunities. The organization has grown to support over 400 student-tutor pairs in its English program per semester. It has diversified to launch a Turkish language program, a coding course for women, an in-person ESL tutoring program in Ann Arbor, an IELTS prep course in partnership with Talent Without Boundaries, and a high school matching program in Long Island, NY. We believe in the power of digital technology to reach those otherwise unreachable, and continue harnessing its potential in a variety of informal educational courses for those displaced by political violence. Ultimately, we think education is the foundation for stable, flourishing societies, and believe everyone has a right to learn.

Metrics

As a nonprofit providing digital education, our goal is to reach a higher number of students more effectively and facilitate meaningful relationships between students and tutors. This means better language and skill acquisition, higher retention rates for students, and improved cross-cultural tolerance.

Currently, we use pre and post surveys to collect our data. We rely on a mixture of satisfaction variables, retention rates, growth rates and English improvement to determine the success of our English program. We are working with a PhD candidate from the University of Minnesota to develop measures of cross-cultural tolerance, and developing a study with Andrew Lebner, a Harvard PhD candidate, to measure the long term effects on tolerance of digital programs. Our growth plan includes establishing more partnerships with individual schools in the region to facilitate multi-layered educational support of students. In the long term, we want to implement a better strategy of tracking students after they finish Paper Airplanes, so we can get a sense of how it served them in the long-term.

Team Members

Bailey Ulbricht

Email: Bailey@paper-airplanes.org

Major: Political Science/International Relations

Class: Carleton College, 2015

After spending six months on the Syrian border, I became dedicated to the cause of Syrian students.

In response, I founded Paper Airplanes, offering free online opportunities to learn and bridging borders between communities through one-on-one tutoring.

Trained in political science with a focus on the Syrian crisis, I have run Paper Airplanes for three years with the hopes of providing educational opportunities to victims of war through digital means. I am a 2015-2016 Fulbright Teaching Assistant and am a 2017 Marshall Scholar.

Muriel Carpenter

Email: muriel@paper-airplanes.org

Major: French and Francophone Studies / Minors: Arabic Studies, Islamic Studies

Class: Swarthmore College, 2016

I have worked with refugees and immigrants in the United States and abroad for over three years, and

Since the beginning of Paper Airplanes' work, I have been providing language access for Arabic speakers and facilitating communication between English and Arabic-speaking volunteers. I now primarily focus on information management, coordination between staff, and financial and legal work for Paper Airplanes.

Cheryl Hagan

Email: ahagan@wesleyan.edu

Major: Religion, Middle Eastern Studies, International Relations

Class: 2017

I strongly believe in the rights of education for all and especially as a refugee, this program is very personally important..

As a refugee from Sierra Leone, my parents ingrained in me the importance of education. They pushed me to work hard and also presented me with opportunities to do so. I want to enable others, especially other refugees, the fortuity to receive quality tutoring. I tutored in high school, continued with Paper Airplanes, and manage others to allow them to do the same. I am currently the Fundraising Director for this semester.