As we come to the end of 2020, it is only natural for us to reflect on the year that has passed and the lessons we have learned as an organization and as a global community. 2020 has been a year of adaptation. This year, we coped with the realities of first the coronavirus pandemic, then economic crashes in both Lebanon and Syria, and finally the August 4 Beirut port explosion. Each of these crises called for us to adapt, to change our plans and be willing to change them again. Needless to say, our 2020 program year did not unfold as planned.

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This year, we launched new programs in response to unexpected challenges. For example, we created a field program to rebuild homes and business in Beirut and distributed hygiene kits and coronavirus prevention information in Syria. But we also found that our well-established programs remained just as relevant as ever. Food security, community cohesion, leadership development, and safe spaces for children are still very needed in our communities. This year, much of our work was to collaborate with community partners to find innovative ways to continue to provide services and supports safely and in ways that responded to our current political, economic, and social context.

In December, FDCD held three face-to-face workshops “across the borders,” bringing together Syrian volunteers from our Child-Friendly Spaces, Syrian Leaders Program, and IDPD (Interfaith Peace and Development Dialogue). To participate in these workshops, Syrian volunteers traveled to Beirut, while others gathered in Syria with Lebanese trainers who made the journey to spend the weekend with them. Planning these workshops was challenging. We had to balance our desire to be present with one another and the practical realities of what was necessary to limit the spread of coronavirus. Even hours before the workshops we weren’t sure that everyone would be able to attend in person.

This year has fundamentally changed the way we work and come together. What was once the easiest way to share information and fellowship (holding an in-person meeting) is now a huge achievement! But we have also come to understand that in this new reality, the choice is ours: we either choose to cross the fire or to stand still and wait for it to burn itself out. At FDCD we chose to move on, to think outside the box, to be quick in finding alternatives, even when moving on meant stepping into the unknown.

For me, the workshops we held this month were some of our most important events of 2020 – the outcome and reflection of our faith and courage. Faith in our cause and mission, and courage to push our capacities to new heights. At the same time, these retreats reminded all of us – volunteers, staff, and trainers – of the importance of taking time to rest; “retreating” is not a sign of weakness but rather a necessary way of sustaining our spirits and renewing our energies.

As we finish this difficult year and look forward to a year of yet more unknown challenges, I hope that all of you will be able to find this hidden strength within you, as well. The Christmas season is a time to rest, to care for yourself and your loved ones. We look forward to this time of rest and renewal, so that we can continue innovating and building stronger communities together in the new year.

Peace and blessings,
Mireille
FDCD has completed the first phase of its rebuilding program, helping families to rebuild over 200 homes and businesses around Beirut. Construction is still underway at some sites but will be wrapping up in early 2021.

Beginning this month, FDCD will distribute food parcels to hundreds of families in Beirut who are still struggling under the immense cost of rebuilding or relocating, providing for their families, and weathering Lebanon’s ongoing economic crisis.

The first meeting of “Shebab Act,” a new initiative by FDCD with generous support from the British Council, took place this month. Over five days, 18 youth from Beirut and the Bekaa valley participated in trainings on active citizenship, diversity, and community service. Following the training, FDCD will be supporting initiatives written and implemented by the trainees in their own communities. So far, 3 local initiatives have been planned, the topics of which include peacebuilding, conflict resolution, social cohesion with Syrian refugees, sports, countering stereotypes, and agriculture.

Volunteers in Beirut prepare food parcels for distribution

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