SOWING SEASON
SABANCI FOUNDATION
GRANT PROGRAM STORIES
2015 - 2016
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Sabancı Foundation Grant Program Stories

2015 - 2016

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SOWING SEASON 2015-2016 Sabancı Foundation Grant Program Stories

Foreword

Sabancı Foundation, the institutional body for Sabancı family’s philanthropy, has embraced the notion that equality has to be established in all walks of life to achieve social development. With this in mind, we have been supporting social development with our programs for 42 years.

We aim to overcome barriers to equality through increasing the social participation of the most discriminated groups, i.e. women, youth and persons with disabilities. To this end, we work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are well-informed on their issues, and work towards the solution and change in social perception.

We have been sowing seeds of hope with 54 projects in 72 provinces in Turkey. Our biggest source of joy is to have touched the lives of almost 400,000 people via these projects. It is immensely rewarding to see the transformation in people’s lives and the positive social repercussions such change leads to.

As Sabancı Foundation we are proud to see the outcome of 8 projects we have supported, that are designed to address social problems.

GÜLER SABANCI
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Sabancı Foundation

As Sabancı Foundation, we are convinced that when everybody is well aware of his/her responsibilities toward the society there will be worldwide abundance. There will be sprouts everywhere if only we dare to be the sun, or the rain, or the wind.

In the 2015-2016 Grant Period we have been involved in finding solutions to social problems through projects aimed at fighting discrimination against persons with disabilities, preventing early marriages, improving the participation of disabled youth in the workforce, and contributing to social peace. We aim to acquaint you with the proliferating work of NGOs we support in our book titled “Sowing Season Grant Program Stories”. We hope that this book inspires the society as a whole to further support these projects, in a figure of speech, to let the young shoots become fully grown trees, sincerely anticipating the significance of supporting such projects be registered.

Now is the time to reap what we’ve sown. Our work with NGOs has demonstrated that some issues need to be addressed more deeply. Therefore, we make grants to projects which we believe are intense on resolution of prioritized problems and need to be augmented. We aim for sustainability in social development and elimination of obstacles in the exercise of individual rights.

As Sabancı Foundation, we are convinced that when everybody is well aware of his/her responsibilities toward the society there will be worldwide abundance. There will be sprouts everywhere if only we dare to be the sun, or the rain, or the wind.

We hope to meet in a future in which courage, hard work and patience give way to abundance.
Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program (Grant Program) was launched in 2008 in order to support civil society organizations implementing projects for women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Why Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities?

Turkey is home to 38.7 million WOMEN, 12.8 million YOUTH and 8.5 million PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. Women, youth and persons with disabilities constitute a large portion of the population. However, a variety of indicators such as work, education and political participation show that these groups face problems when it comes to equal and active participation in public life. Groups, subjected to double discrimination as “Women with Disabilities”, “Young Women” or “Youth with Disabilities”, face even greater obstacles.

Why Civil Society Organizations?

With the goal of ensuring equal rights and active participation in public life for women, youth and persons with disabilities, Sabancı Foundation decided to support civil society organizations through its Social Development Grant Program.

There are mainly two reasons for this:

1 - Need and
2 - Potential for Change.

Due to the lack of local organizations or foundations that provide grants to civil society organizations, there is a constant need in the sector. On the other hand, civil society organizations, which are working closely with disadvantaged groups and analyzing their needs, have a high potential in solving some of the social problems.

It was at this point that the Sabancı Foundation, through the grant program, sprang into action to support the projects of civil society organizations promoting equal rights for women, youth and persons with disabilities, and their active participation in society.
How Does The Grant Program Work?

- The grant process begins with organizations deemed eligible after a comprehensive selection process, taking their places within the grantee network.
- The organizations become acquainted with other organizations working in similar areas within the grantee network, and become part of various information and experience sharing environments.
- The Sabancı Foundation keeps close track of projects implemented and works collaboratively with the organizations, through frequent meetings, field visits, and comprehensive evaluation of reports.
- Following this close monitoring, the foundation provides technical support in the area of need, from communications to monitoring and evaluation.
- In order to keep the public informed on projects being conducted, the foundation also creates vehicles for communication such as a bulletin service, special news and activities.

Through the grant program, the Sabancı Foundation provides not only material support, but also technical support where the need presents itself. Creating an environment of sharing between organizations and conducting joint projects with them are essential aspects of this process.

CHILDREN ON THE JUDICIARY’S AGENDA:
Magnify the Issue and Get Rid of Discrimination!

I woke up in an unfamiliar place today. My mother started crying when she saw me waking up. How was I supposed to know I’ve been asleep in this hospital room for months! Turns out that I fell 4 floors in the construction site I’m working at. Apparently as I was stepping forward the scaffolding came apart and I fell down. According to the doctor, I would quickly recover since I was only 13. Or else I could have been dead. My father sued the owner, but then withdrew the complaint, saying that they reached an agreement. He didn’t tell me why. Would he have asked me if I hadn’t been asleep? Would he have taken me by the hand to the court? If I had wished to pursue my rights, would the judge and the prosecutor have listened to me? Or would they have just dismissed it on the basis that I was a child? But really, am I still a child now that I’ve been a breadwinner for two years?
Discrimination is treating some people differently, on the basis of certain qualities, despite the fact that all are “born equal in terms of rights and dignity.” Children are subject to such discrimination the most, precisely because they are children, in other words, because of their age. With access to courts being difficult, they do not enjoy the same level of legal protection against violence compared to adults. In court cases involving girls and disabled children, decisions are reached without proper regard to the vulnerable position of and the damage suffered by these children as a result of the crime. In addition, there is a judicial lag of protective measures for children under physical, sexual or psychological threats. The “Report on the Judiciary” by Agenda: Child Association, analyzes 20 ongoing or closed cases in order to shed some light on these and other practices. Focusing on 3 cases in order to point out reasons for discrimination and changes required to stop their reoccurrence, the Association made a significant contribution.

One of the cases concerns Ö., a 14-year-old girl who has been sexually abused. After being sexually abused at 14, Ö. was married off to a man 15 years older when she was 16, with the consent of the family court. She was returned to her family of origin after 3 months.
As a child Ö. was a party in legal processes, first a marriage then a divorce. Actually, she should have been legally protected, supported and empowered as a harassment victim. The Association looked at the anonymous case of Ö. and using the authority granted by law to associations, filed a lawsuit for annulment of permission granted for child marriages. This marks a first in many respects in Turkey. For the first time a non-profit organization demanded the determination and prevention of abuse of human rights; abuse of rights related to child marriage was within judicial mercy and discussed widely and deeply. This led to the countrywide abatement of proceedings in cases regarding “permission for child marriage”. Last but not the least, it was a priceless tool in fighting discrimination for civil society organizations.

Nowadays the Association is busy keeping the issue of discrimination on the agenda. It calls on everyone, through short films it makes, to own up to children’s cases. It presents material proposals to decision-makers on necessary changes to legislation. And it prepares guides that civil society organizations and lawyers can use in fighting discrimination. All in all, it “magnifies the issue”, as stated in its motto and their success is in fact a win for anonymous children everywhere.

DID YOU KNOW?

Why Children?
As people in developmental stages, children are influenced and hurt much more than adults in case of a violation of rights. As individuals with equal status to all human beings, children are in need of protection to use their rights.

Why Discrimination in the Judiciary?
Children who can’t access courts do not enjoy the same level of protection of rights. As such they can only put up a legal fight against discrimination via the support of adults.

What Has the Agenda: Child Association Achieved?
With the “Magnifier: Effective Tools for Fighting Discrimination” project, 20 cases of rights abuse in areas of disability, age and gender, were analyzed and thus became visible. A practical and available source of information was created for children’s right movement, lawyers, civil society organizations and youngsters, in order to use in fight against discrimination.
I had an accident when I was young and lost my sense of sight. Ever since then I have dreamt of the same thing: a life where I could stand on my feet... I was hoping that university education would open the way for me. I was dreaming of a life where I would at least lean less on others. Alas, that is not the case. I always need someone’s help to find my way on the campus because tactile pavings are sure to halt somewhere suddenly. I can never read the required course materials at the library on time because I first have to convert them to Braille. Somebody is always with me in exams to read the questions. Socializing is a matter of my friends inviting me. I am not responsible for loss of my sight. So then why is it that I have to work harder for the same education?
Right to equal education for the persons with disabilities is covered by national and international legislation. That is, accessible campuses exist, but on paper only. Some reorganization at university level needs to take place in order for laws to be implemented. How many buildings are equipped with a ramp and have toilet facilities for persons with disabilities? How many elevators include audio alarm systems for the hearing-impaired? Do distance learning applications answer needs of the persons with disabilities? To what extent can students with disabilities participate in decisions concerning themselves? University students with disabilities are the best sources of information on such issues. They are the ones suffering when they can’t access the facilities they need... And they can mediate change when they fight for their rights. With this thought in mind, EGED brought together 25 students from various universities and with different disabilities in Istanbul and Ankara. They exchanged views on how they solved their problems and formed study groups to develop initiatives against commonly shared problems. Groups came up with a lot of data as a result of applications made to receive information and online surveys delivered to students with disabilities.

**HAİRİYE CAN**
Erciyes University, Faculty of Medicine

“I learned how to better demand my rights. I gained more confidence as I saw how self-confident my friends were.”

**OĞUZHAN AL**
Ankara University, Department of Social Services

“The library for the students with visual impairments at my school had old equipment and was inadequate. I helped change that through this project.”

**Berkay Ömer Ünal**
Trakya University, Department of Education for Persons with Mental Disabilities

“There are meager achievements but the will goes on. After we graduate our friends to whom we shall transfer all our experience, we will definitely do their best.”

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Data presenting a picture of the current state of accessibility practices at universities was first presented as a report, to be then submitted to relevant bodies at the Universities Without Barriers Workshop organized by the Council of Higher Education (YOK). Thereby, considerable contribution was made towards development of policies in such areas.

“I was aware that you had to fight to achieve anything but you should follow a certain method. The project was helpful in teaching me that.” As can be seen in the words of a participant, another of the most visible contributions of the project is the transformation in the mind of the students with disabilities. They were excited to finding out ways they had never known before, to do something about their rights. Some made applications to the school administration for ramps; others used the formal procedure to find out the number of representatives of persons with disabilities at their schools. Many were successful in setting in motion bodies of students with disabilities established by law at universities in 2006 but sitting idle since then. The students became more self-confident once they saw their achievements. Those wanting to share their experiences with others gradually multiplied.

As a result of EGED’s initiative more students with disabilities come together to take responsibility for independent living. They are heartened by the fact that issues are not simply being discussed but resolved. As they work for campuses without barriers they additionally accomplish something much harder: people with differing disabilities being able to imagine together...

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Why the Need to Organize?**
Students with disabilities, when working in an organized manner and in coordination, gain sensitivity for the different needs of each other. They feel more empowered when presenting their proposals to decision-making bodies and they apply more pressure in policy-making processes.

**Why Universities?**
Despite the fact that they have the right to education under equal conditions, a great majority of the persons with disabilities can’t attend universities due to lack of necessary arrangements.

**What Has EGED Achieved?**
With the “Initiative of University Students with Disabilities” project, approximately 100 students with disabilities from various parts of the country learned to own and act on their issues, and to fight discrimination together with different disability groups.

As a result of EGED’s initiative students with disabilities heartened by the fact that issues are not simply being discussed but resolved.
I have congenital Down syndrome. Ordinary human beings have 46 chromosomes; I have one more. This is neither a birth defect nor a sickness, it’s just coincidence. Down syndrome is one of many qualities that make me who I am. So it is sort of like having blue eyes or straight hair. Some people think that I can’t go to school or work. Have you ever come across a person who can’t do these because of the color of her eyes or the texture of her hair? I sure haven’t. I can just as well get education and earn money. Granted, it won’t be as easy, I will have to work really hard. Extra time and help will be necessary, but I can do it. But first of all I need to have equal opportunities as everyone else because I have the right to do so.
We are all born with different abilities, proclivities and hardships. Yet we are all equal in the right to live a dignified and independent life. No quality making us who we are can be considered a hindrance to the exercise of this right nor can they be put forward as reason for unequal treatment. It is the responsibility of the state to level the playing field if access to rights is made more difficult by circumstances we can’t control. For instance, if it is everyone’s right to work and equal pay for equal work, it should be a possibility.

Taking an important step, the Down Syndrome Association introduced persons with Down syndrome, unable to exercise their rights despite wanting to work, to the “Job Coach-Supported Employment Model”, a method never used in Turkey before. The most significant contribution of job coaches, who help persons with Down syndrome find employment in line with the principle of “Right Person for the Right Job”, is achieving sustainability of employment through regulation of communication between the individual, the employer and the family. The Job Coach-Supported Employment Program is aimed at persons with Down syndrome to lead independent lives. In operation for 3 years now, the program employs 3 job coaches with training received in Turkey, Italy and Ireland. These experts subject both the youngsters and their families, and the employers and employees, to a series of training sessions, and provide support to all parties throughout the process.

“After starting to work, Cengiz corrected his speaking and straightened his relations with his friends. He goes to work by himself, and he is elated. The other day he gave me the money he earned and asked me to give it to his sister’s school.” Cengiz is 30 years old. His mother was smiling incessantly while telling all this.

So does the store manager where Cengiz is responsible for helping tidy up the sections. He is also sure that Cengiz will be able to handle more difficult chores.

All parties are happy with the process because everyone has learned different things at training. Cengiz learned proper behavior at work and using means such as money and thus got to know himself better. His family, and other families as well, found out about many ways they could support their children. Some had joined the project reluctantly because admitting that their children were grownups who could take care of themselves was difficult.

Employment Program is aimed at persons with Down syndrome to lead independent lives. In operation for 3 years now, the program employs 3 job coaches with training received in Turkey, Italy and Ireland. These experts subject both the youngsters and their families, and the employers and employees, to a series of training sessions, and provide support to all parties throughout the process.

“My advice for everyone is that they should work because working is very soothing. I have a problem. Staying home because of it was very wearisome. Now my life has changed. At home I used to play games on the computer the whole day. Now it’s gone because I have job and it’s wonderful.”

“Ever since her first day of work, Özlem bonded miraculously with both the team and the brand. She showed us that we should have more faith in and give more support to the job coaching program.”

“She loves working and wants to learn more. She goes out with her friends and buys them stuff. She loves to go to work, she gets ready by herself. She’s careful to be on time and keeps prodding me not to be late. She says she’s not a kid anymore. She provides tuition to a university student.”
And now they smile on their kids’ going to work alone. In addition to his family, Cengiz’s directors and coworkers, as part of this transformation, also support him. They have learned how to communicate with Cengiz. They have also become aware of the significance of working for persons with Down syndrome, and provide role models for other organizations.

Exercised solely by and in the private sector as of now, the job coaching model inspires decision makers regarding improvement of policies on the persons with disabilities. The Down Syndrome Association is adamant in making the Job Coach-Supported Employment Program the official employment program for persons with mental disabilities. To this end, a book\(^1\) on the job coaching model was translated into Turkish. Another book\(^2\) determining the obstacles before persons with disabilities, underlined the importance of getting the support of families and employers. The next step involves training of 5 new job coaches and preparation of a fully integrated job coaching training program.

All this effort is for having more inspiring stories like Cengiz’s. As the number of persons with Down syndrome who lead socially rich, happy and independent lives increases, so does the number of workplaces wishing to employ them as well as families supporting their kids. And so it is possible for the society as a whole to leave prejudices behind and recognize the right of persons with Down syndrome to work.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

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**Why Persons with Down Syndrome?**

In Turkey there are approximately 126,000 persons with Down syndrome who are currently looking for work. There are no policies regarding employment of the persons with mental disabilities in the laws.

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**Why Job Coaching?**

In addition to empowering persons with Down syndrome through employment, the Job Coach-Supported Employment Program ensures sustainability of employment by consultancy and training services provided to the families and employers. The program also leads to increased awareness throughout the society as a whole.

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**What Has the Down Syndrome Association Achieved?**

Through the “I’m Independent Because I Work” project, 41 persons with Down syndrome in 8 cities have been employed and prejudice regarding with Down syndrome was toppled in thousands of people's minds.

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\(^{1}\)Persons With Special Needs in Employment: Methods and Means in Integration

\(^{2}\)Disability and Employment: Job Coach-Supported Employment Model on the Road to Integration

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We are all equal in the right to live a dignified and independent life. No quality making us who we are can be considered hindrance to the exercise of this right.
VAN COMES TO GRIPS WITH INEQUITY:
Early Marriage is No Fate!

It’s been 30 years since I came into this house. For 30 years I’ve been cooking bread on this hearth. For 30 years now I’ve been bringing up children in this very backyard. Frankly I brought myself up first. I was 15 when I first came here, but I believe now I’m older than every woman on earth. When I was young I wanted to meet many people and travel a lot. Now, I consider myself blessed if I’m lucky enough to see a few neighbors by the public fountain. Work at the field may be over but there is surely more work to be done at home. And there is swearing and beating and humiliation at home. In the morning the room fills up with chimes of bells, of schools I’ve never been able to attend. Every morning for 30 years I’ve woken up as if in a stranger’s bed. The man lying next to me is older than my father. He shows no interest in getting our daughters educated, he can’t wait for the day they’ll get married. I, on the other hand, have made no preparations, no dowry, nothing. I fear that their fate will be similar to mine.
Currently there are approximately 200,000 girls married underage in Turkey. This number is equivalent to the population of a big district. These girls, who quit school in order to be able to give birth and do house chores, become pregnant before reaching physical maturity and frequently have to deal with serious health problems. Many refrain from sharing their problems. They rather come up with methods of their own instead of going to a hospital. Some among them have been subjected to domestic violence throughout their lives, and some even commit suicide as a result of festering spiritual wounds.

As their numbers increase day by day, these girls grow up disenfranchised of their rights to education. And their daughters frequently can’t go to school, either. Some, unaware of what will happen, are even convinced that freeing themselves of familial pressures is possible through early marriage. And so goes, on and on, the vicious cycle, until someone realizes the unfairness and raises her voice.

One day female students in Erçek neighborhood of İpekyolu district, Van, informed their teacher that they were subjected to early marriage. This shocking news mobilized Life, Women, Environment, Culture and Management Cooperative (YAKA-KOOP), the first women’s organization in Van. At the beginning they were alone but knew that together the fight would be won. And they were right. The project “Fighting Early Marriages in Van”, headed by women in YAKA-KOOP, helped many people, women and girls first among them, as both beneficiaries and defenders.

Work begun in Erçek district spread to 6 villages in Van. The team first met with top brass of the village, including headmen, imams and teachers, informing them of why this issue mattered. These meetings were followed by house visits designed to meet village women. Visits were marked with tea and talk, surveys upon the consent of the women and determination of existence of early marriage and the extent of domestic violence. After the visits people were invited, to either a house in the village or the mosque or the school, for information seminars. In addition to the village headman and the village imam, a doctor from the regional office of Public Health Directorate, an officer from the regional office of Religious Affairs Directorate, a social worker from the Provincial Directorate of Social

BÜŞRA NUR ŞAHİN (18)
“T hey called back that night. Two days later I was enrolled.”

A FEMALE PARTICIPANT
“I came to this village as a child bride. Two months later I was already pregnant. I married early but in fact I had no idea about anything. If I knew then what I have known now I would have never got married.”

A FEMALE INTERVIEWEE
“Are you really here for us? Girl, nobody ever expressed interest in my life story.”

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2011 data
Polices or a volunteer lawyer attended these meetings, where women were informed about the Islamic approach to early marriage, health problems associated with these marriages as well as how to exercise their rights in case they were forced into marriage.

Participants, perhaps feeling for the first time that they were not alone, listened and told their stories. When they left the seminar venue they were well aware that early marriage was unfair on them and their daughters.

The whirlwind created by YAKA-KOOP did not just get to the women; it first reached the whole village community and then Van at large, transforming everyone. Men claiming, they had no such problems changed their minds upon seeing the results of surveys. As a result of such data early marriages became more visible on the media. The city-wide drawing competition on the subject of early marriage, led children to think more and do more research on the subject. Coiffeurs announced, following the workshop they attended, that they would not be involved in any bridal hairdos for children below the age of 18.

Young girls, aware of the injustice and thus able to break the vicious cycle, increased in number. Büşra Nur, who had quit school to take care of her disabled sibling, rejected the life of her friends who had married at the age of 14. With her dad’s support, she was finally able to enroll at the open education faculty.

There is a district-full of girls being married underage, whereas Van is populated by people willing and ready to reverse the situation. This news is good enough to raise our hopes.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Why Villages of Van?**
Van ranks among the top 10 cities where early marriages (15-19 years of age) happen the most. Due to traditional and patriarchal family structures, women and children in villages are subject to rights violations and feel more vulnerable than women and children in cities.

**Why Early Marriages?**
Marriages conducted at early ages result in more and more girls to quit school, face violence, health problems and even death.

**What Has YAKA-KOOP Achieved?**
“Fighting Early Marriages in Van” project was useful in informing approximately 500 women and girls residing in villages of Van on issues such as early marriage, violence toward women, and sexual health. Participants felt they were not alone by learning to exercise their rights. Thousands of village residents became aware of their responsibility in preventing early marriages.

**The whirlwind created by YAKA-KOOP reached the whole village community willing and ready to reverse the situation.**
I vaguely remember the times when I was just a kid. I used to spend my time playing and exploring. And now? I keep struggling with the same issues repeatedly: Will I be able to finish my homework for tomorrow? Will I get a good grade on that test? Can a person -at my age- have run out of things to explore? My teacher said it isn’t so. I should look at how others live and what they come up with in order to expand my horizon. Movies are good for this, and so is literature. And music and arts and theater... I heard that theater companies come to our city from time to time but I never went to a play. I’m very curious about how watching a play may change my life.
Why do people need movies, books, plays and music? Is life not possible without them? Art is valuable because it offers the opportunity to question life. It is as a result of arts we realize that there is more to life than just us and are able to break the routine and think outside the box. Sara, a 12th grade student living in Mardin, has similar opinions. Watching a play for the first time in her life, Sara says that she started “thinking about herself”: “It’s like I met myself, whom I’ve been trying to avoid, and started questioning her. You are an inspiration for me with your stance on stage and charisma.”

The actors of Bogazici Performance Arts Community (BGST), who are also the partner of Mardin Cultural Association in the project, are the ones who gave this inspiration. They turned the provinces of Artuklu, Kızıltepe and Midyat into living and breathing theater stages. They travel into the mindsets of many significant playwrights and interpret today’s actualities. They aim to become an intermediary for youth so that they gain awareness via contemplating on significant concepts such as social peace, class differences, and gender equality.

The journey of Mardin youth in theater is accompanied by Müşahipzade Celal, Shakespeare and Molière. It all begins with the BGST actors staging, in a documentary-like fashion, the lives of these playwrights. Then it is time for rehearsal and staging of historical plays by these playwrights. Although shy and withdrawn in the beginning, youngsters unwind with the euphoria of expressing themselves freely on stage. As stage fright and timidity disappear, century-old universal wisdom of the plays stands out. Youngsters interpret messages hidden behind the plain words through connections with their own lives.

11th grade student Aynur states that she finds her mom and dad in the play Romeo and Juliet, on social enmity leading to the death of two innocent youngsters: “My mom is of Arabic origin and my dad is Kurdish. My grandmother on my dad’s side didn’t allow my parents to get married simply because of the Arabic origins of my mom. My dad obviously rejected this and my parents got married.” Aynur now has a much clearer sense of social peace.

IREM D.
11th Grade
“I had a lot fun acting. Now whenever I do something I do it in a natural manner. Even if I’m criticized I say that that’s who I am. Thanks to Molière’s play I know very well how misers are seen.”

ZEHRA Y.
11th Grade
“We want to be able to breathe, free from exam pressure and school stress. Your putting us on stage increased our awareness on certain issues and helped us break away from prejudices. In my opinion artists are the best at providing direction for and educating a society.”

SARA D.
11th Grade
“This time I watched you with all my sincerity and revealed myself free from my fears. I am not used to show my feelings. You are an inspiration for me with your stance on stage and charisma in finding myself.”

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After working on plays with BGST members, youngsters hold discussions among themselves. And the stage now becomes an arena where everyone contributes with something of his/her own, where solutions as well as problems are out in the open. Hasene’s story of domestic violence, written by Musahipzade Celal 80 years ago, is the most discussed play due to resonating with current issues. At the end of the story named Kafes Arkasında (“Behind the Lattice”) Hasene is emancipated thanks to the support of her female neighbors. This provides an opportunity for both female and male students to contemplate together and discuss gender equality.

This is not the first time in Mardin that theater plays are staged, but for the first time they are part and parcel of such a learning experience. Local youth are happy to have gained stage experience. Some have started reading Molière and others have embarked on staging a Shakespearean play at school at year-end. They realize that current events are not specific to this era, this location or, for that matter, their culture. They find brand-new means to correctly assess themselves and the society they are members of. Isn’t art worth it, if for nothing but this?

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Why Mardin?**
Despite the fact that Mardin is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural town, urban youth do not have many social and cultural opportunities.

**Why Theater?**
Students unwilling to answer questions in a standard lecture format are quite participatory when art is involved in the learning process and put in more effort toward resolution of issues.

**What Has The Mardin Cultural Center Achieved?**
“Theater For All” project made it possible for approximately 2,000 youngsters at 3 provinces of Mardin to come into contact with theater. Approximately 50 students at 3 schools were able to develop their intellectual capacities via the theater.

**This is not the first time in Mardin that theater plays are staged, but for the first time they are part and parcel of such a learning experience.**
IN PURSUIT OF LOST CHILDHOOD:
Fighting Collectively Against Early Marriages

When I came home from school there were guests I hadn’t met before. My sister whispered to me, “they are here to ask for our sister’s hand.” How could that be? Even during playing with muslin curtains we had never made bridal veils. We didn’t even joke about getting married. My sister was very hard-working and determined; this time next year, she would definitely be enrolled into university she was admitted to. She would prove to me that dreams could come true. After the wedding our sister left us. Soon after she got pregnant. She used to say “if I am going to be a mother someday I should have learned all about this world. Otherwise what will I teach my child?” Indeed, what will she tell her child when she is still in need of hearing stories.
Volunteers of the Association believe that we should all participate in healing this wound, therefore they started by inviting women guidance counselors to take on responsibility. Women guidance counselors who were in a position to establish closer relations with girls, participated in a 16-week Education Program in Women’s Human Rights (KIHEP). Some had pre-conceived notions about the place of women in society, which were eliminated as the first step. In time they were all equipped with new skills to help them detect and address child abuse.

This issue, a bitter reality experienced by every third girl in Turkey, is not just a problem for a few households or a few villages, but a matter for the whole society. Removal of a girl from school for marriage purposes constitutes a liability not only on the part of the family but also on the teachers and school administrators who do not oppose such a decision, neighbors that attend the wedding and all those who fail to see the wrong side of this issue. Muş Women’s Roof Association has been talking about this for 2 years now, and undertakes projects to overcome child abuse.

Childhood does not unilaterally denote a golden age during which there are no worries and responsibilities. In many different parts of the world many young girls below the age of 18 are trapped into some sort of adulthood they cannot manage: Marriage. Children suffering from devastating practices such as bridal exchange, blood feud and bride price, are forced to become spouses and parents even though they obviously still need their own families.

Muş Women’s Roof Association was aware that as teachers became more empowered, girls would become ever stronger. And so it was. Thousands of kids between the ages of 11 and 17 met with guidance counselors in the Association’s workshops and formed brand-new and closer connections. In these workshops, girls learned why early and forced marriages were harmful and how to protect themselves if they are faced with this incident. As a result 57 girls returned to their schools and thus were reintroduced into education. Above all, these kids realized they had the power to make transformative changes in their own lives and the lives of their friends.
Volunteers knocked on doors and informed uncles, aunts and grandmothers in addition to mothers and fathers. Posters and billboards drawing attention to child marriages were placed in busy city quarters and short films were shown. The issue was always kept fresh on the agenda via social media and local media channels. In addition, a story book was issued, urging kids to complete the unfinished story using their imagination. The book titled Princesses Who Lost Their Fairy Tale, continues to inspire and provide courage to girls for writing their own life stories.

Muş Women’s Roof Association is now among the leading institutions to get information on girls in danger of early marriage. While trust was gained; much is changing in Muş. Guidance counselors with increased sensitivity make their students more conscious and aware. Women who have gone through early marriages themselves exhibit immense resistance against early marriage of their kids. More and more news of abuse of rights encountered by women appear on local media. And of course kids, the beautiful girls of Muş, have hope for the first time in their lives to make childhood their golden age.

**Why Muş?**
In central Muş, the rate of early marriage is 65% whereas it approaches 75% in the rural areas.

**Why Girls?**
Girls going through early marriage face a higher rate of absenteeism and domestic violence. In addition they are faced with a high risk of death during pregnancy and while giving birth.

**What Has The Muş Women’s Roof Association Achieved?**
With its “Say No To Child Abuse!” project, the Association reached out in 2 years to approximately 7,000 girls, more than 900 families and 81 guidance counselors.

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I was in high school when I started using a wheelchair. It was my first year in the school basketball team. I didn’t quit sports. Why should I have? I had lost only my legs, not my talent. I enrolled in the persons with disabilities team and went on playing. My wheelchair has never been an impediment to me, but I was obstructed by the car parked in front of the wheelchair ramp on the sidewalk. I have been obstructed due to being unable to roam bumpy roads, steep stairways and narrow doorways. Equally I had great difficulty getting on public transportation or when I had to turn back from a mall or a cinema because of lack of elevators. I couldn’t vote because I couldn’t go up to the floor where my ballot box was. I’m ready to fight for stardom in my team. But why I should have to fight for a life where I have equal rights as everyone else?
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been making the foregoing statement for 68 years. The Turkish Constitution stipulates that “measures to be taken about the persons with disabilities cannot violate the principle of equality.” As stated in laws, no different quality that a person has shall constitute an impediment to exercise of equal rights and freedoms. Is that the case in real life situations? Can the persons with visual impairments find what they are looking for in public libraries? Are streets suitable for wheelchair users to move around uninhibitedly? Can someone having impaired hearing finish her education and find a job?

Answers to such questions reveal the extent to which rights defined in laws have been realized. A map of where, how and to what extent persons with disabilities have come across impediments in real life, can be traced out by looking at these answers. The more realistically drawn the map is the clearer the picture becomes. Only then is it possible to speak of defending rights of the persons with disabilities in real terms and not just by rote. For a more powerful defense of disability rights, Social Rights and Research Association (TOHAD) conducts monitoring activities on institutions responsible for execution of laws, and paints a picture of the current state of affairs. TOHAD makes a significant contribution to improvement of policies regarding the persons with disabilities by reporting the violations as well as the attainments the persons with disabilities are subject to. The Association supports the notion that as more and more numbers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) embrace and exercise monitoring activities, the fight for disability rights will become stronger. This is the reason behind the Monitoring Group for Disability Rights.

Disability rights is a matter of human rights. Therefore a solution to fighting discrimination is possible only through enforcing the rights. Fifteen NGOs from all over the country took part in TOHAD training sessions on disability rights in order to learn, defend and keep track. Participants mapped access of the persons with disabilities to their rights in areas of education, health and work, as well as rates of harassment, maltreatment and torture they face. Data acquired has been reported to the United Nations (UN), European Union, Turkish Grand National Assembly and relevant ministries. Following first-hand experience of cooperation for a common goal, NGOs reinforced what they have learned through micro-monitoring activities in their relevant regions.

Some, like the Turkish Disability Association Antalya Office, conducted research on the suitability of public transportation vehicles in Antalya; others, like the Civil Society Association on Penal System, did research on to what extent inmates with disabilities had access to their rights. Methods they employed varied from applications to public institutions to gather information and media scans to examination of legislation and in-situ observation. Many benefited from correct and regular application of these methods.
For instance, as a result of monitoring carried out by Association for Employment of Persons with Paraplegia in Şanlıurfa, renovation activities took place in buildings of Harran University for access of the persons with disabilities.

Steps toward resolution of issues followed their statement out in the open. Public Audit Board referred to the data gathered in its detailed rulings. Ministry of Interior announced that the budget for renovation of its building for accessibility was doubled. A guidebook containing monitoring and defense experience was prepared in order to provide guidance to other NGOs for increasing such outcomes.

As work on the project continued TOHAD’s application to the UN for accreditation was accepted. The Association is now in a position of authority for provision of data and opinion to the UN. It now has power to influence international institutions with regard to executable recommendations regarding Turkey. Apparently laws may be improved as a result. Will there be changes in everyday life situations? Definitely. This project is an immense development in the fight for equal rights even though the number of ramps on sidewalks will not double up overnight.

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**Why Disability Rights?**

The source of problems the persons with disabilities facing is not their disabilities but rather their deprivation of their rights. Discrimination results when persons with disabilities are denied equal access to their rights.

**Why Public Monitoring?**

States protect disability rights through either laws or participating in international treaties. Public monitoring studies carried out to measure the extent to which such rights are brought to life, is an indicator for the relevant state to see the effectiveness of its policies, and provide intermediaries in activating correct institutions to address incomplete and problematic areas.

**What Has TOHAD Achieved?**

Within the “Monitoring Group for Disability Rights” project, more than 7,000 data applications were filed and 30 reports prepared in 81 cities by 15 NGOs in 3 years. Many ministries were consulted TOHAD in their work.
I’ve been aware for a long time now that I’m not a kid anymore. On the other hand, I’m not a grownup, either. I can’t say that adolescence is the most glorious time of my life. On the contrary, never before have I felt so vulnerable and weak. I remember how hard I tried to hide my breasts when they started growing. The shame of menstruation for the first time... It wasn’t only my body that went through change; the expectations of my family differed quite a lot. For example, my father remarked on the length of my skirt, and my mother wanted me to help with house chores. I didn’t feel the need for a comparison up until now but I can’t help but wonder now that I try to exist and carve a place for myself in society as a young woman: Certainly a lot of things change in the lives of boys who go through adolescence. So how come they don’t suffer as much as we do?
On a global scale, millions of girls reach the end of puberty before they have the chance to adapt the changes in their lives. These girls, oppressed in societies where talking about such experiences is considered shameful, a taboo or a sin, get weaker as they do not know how to fight back discrimination. It is even more difficult for young female inhabitants of Tarlabası. Spending most of their time home due to family pressure and doing house chores, these girls lack social opportunities to express themselves. Moreover the more they drop out of school the more they are susceptible to factors such as early marriage, eloping, smoking, drug use, and unprotected sex.

So, is it possible to reverse this situation? The answer is yes, on the condition that young girls are equipped to express themselves and exist in society. Safe environments need to be create for this. Girls with access to such opportunities have the courage to question their bodies and identities despite restrictions. Only then do they feel they are as adequate as their male counterparts.

They finally find their own voices and are not afraid to speak up. With the support of Tarlabası Community Center Association (TTM) 8 young girls with ages varying between 15 and 20 take inspiring steps. Training sessions on sexual health, reproductive health, women’s rights and gender offered by the Center constitute the first step of “Young Voices”. Girls living in Tarlabası get the opportunity to explore their bodies with no prejudices and taboos, and they become aware of roles assigned to men and women by the society. More importantly, they see that they are not confined to such roles and always have other choices. TTM volunteers frequently take the youngsters to cinemas and exhibitions; they create an environment for them to ruminate on and debate gender. This process opens the way for young girls to feel the desire to express their experiences.

Training sessions are followed by digital media workshops where they learn to make videos, and to tell stories with various equipment. Talented members become directors of their own films. Some, stating that some things can be realized only if they are seen together and sequentially, compile the gendered discourses of Yeşilçam (Turkish cinema) actors.

HİLAL TAKAK (19)
“Prior to the project I felt lonely, ordinary and clumsy... Now I feel much more self-confident, gutsy and resolved.”

GÜLSÜM DEMİR (20)
“For years we admired the lead actors in films, and maybe even hoped to have such boyfriends someday. But the leads are not innocent, there is a problem with their discourse. My film is on the gender discourse of Yeşilçam (Turkish cinema) lead actors.”

YASEMİN BUDAK (15)
“Soccer is always associated with men; it is said that women cannot play soccer. We aim to do away with this preconception. We learned about the Girls on the Field tournament; we met them, and they encouraged us to join. So we set up an 8-person team with our friends from the neighborhood... We want to represent Tarlabası and achieve good results.”

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Others dwell on the unacceptable nature of harassment, both of women and of men. All in all, they experience the joy of feeling more self-confident as a young woman. In order to provide inspiration to more youngsters they compile their stories in the blog “Jin Fikirler” (“Jin” means cunning in Turkish and woman in Kurdish. “Fikirler” means ideas).

Members of the Young Voices team have no reservations in self-expression when they are together because they know they will not be judged. For instance, they try to understand why people who do not find it odd to hear terms belittling women, consider it strange to see women drivers or boxers. They consider the reason behind feeling guilty for wondering about sexuality. They talk about why being out at late hours is more difficult and dangerous for women.

Young voices of Tarlabaşı have come a long way in exploring the half of the world unbeknown to them, all thanks to Tarlabaşı Community Center Association. Their questions to their families, friends and in fact, the society in general, have just begun. Now that they have found their voices, the world is their oyster.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Why Tarlabaşı?**
Inhabitants of Beyoğlu-Tarlabaşı region of Istanbul, home to people with different cultural backgrounds, and riddled with migration-related adaptation issues, poverty, and informal and illicit affairs, are in need of support for equal participation in society.

**Why Adolescent Women?**
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) defines young people between the ages 10 and 19 as adolescents. Adolescents need to be empowered in areas such as sexual health and reproductive health, where they are especially vulnerable, for a safe, healthy and successful future.

**What Has The Tarlabaşı Community Center Association Achieved?**
Twenty young women living in Tarlabaşı, between the ages 15 and 20, have been equipped for fighting against gender discrimination via the Young Voices project.