

Program Script for Naside Buluttekın (Aired on 29 November 2009)

Category: Civic Participation

Location: Diyarbakır

Big cities are famous for their endless streets. However Diyarbakır, a large city in South Eastern Turkey, is famous for its narrow streets. This city finds its identity in its 1-metre wide streets.

Diyarbakır’s narrow streets and their cobblestone pavements keep thousands of secrets. They are witnesses of young people’s dreams, sad stories of unemployed fathers and the excitement of a young girl who got admitted to university. Streets are storytellers and keepers of secrets at the same time.

Sometimes everything seems to disappear when you are walking in the streets. However, children never seem to disappear from the streets of Diyarbakır.

Children that cannot be properly raised by their undereducated parents...these are the children who frequent the streets of Diyarbakır.

Many rural families who settled to Diyarbakır during the 1990s are still struggling to adapt to the city.

In districts where each family has 4 to 6 children on average, children spend almost the entire day out in the streets. They are pretty much raised in the streets as their mothers do not have the means to receive proper education about child rearing.

A group of women developed a project in order to solve this complex problem. These women who do not expect everything from the government, go knocking on every door to educate families about children’s and mother’s health.

And there is a true Changemaker behind this brave initiative.

Naside Buluttekın worked as a teacher at public education centers for many years in Southeastern Turkey. During this time, she realized how difficult it was to educate and change the habits of adults. As she was unable to change much in the present, she decided to change the future in order to improve the living standards of the population.

Interview with Naside Buluttekın:

Naside Buluttekın: “I worked with adults for many years. It is so difficult to initiate behavioural change with adults...

I worked very hard on it for a very long time but it is very difficult to change their behaviours. I’m not saying that it’s impossible, you can make them question some things. But I could not witness an immediate change most of the time. With kids however, you can see that they implement what they learned from you immediately.”

After taking part in many NGOs as an activist, Naside Buluttekın quit her teaching position in order to carry out a project devoted to children in Diyarbakır.

Along with her volunteers, she started visiting each and every district in Diyarbakır. Her goal was to identify women’s problems in these districts and to offer potential solutions to these problems.

Interview with Naside Buluttekın:

Naside Buluttekın: “We identified many problems with women. We asked them to define their problems themselves. They were mainly troubled by not being able to leave their homes, to express themselves freely and to socialize. There were many obstacles on their way such as traditional and feudal settings and pressures from their husbands. They did not have any place to leave their 0-6 year old children in case they wanted to receive education, work or to leave their homes to socialize. Considering this, we established two education centers for women and children.”

First, Buluttekın and her friends set up a childcare center with the support of various NGOs. While trying to get children to attend the childcare centre instead of playing in the streets, her main goal was to educate the children and allow their mothers to participate in social life.

Along with the Ray of Hope Women’s Cooperative that she founded in 2004, they opened their first childcare centers in densely populated districts.

Interview with a child:

Interviewer: How do you spend your days here?

Child: Very well. I

Interviewer: What do you do here?

Child: We sing, we study, we play the arbane (a traditional percussion instrument) and then we play games.

Interview with another child:

Child: My family wanted me to come here. I have a great time here, we read books...

Interview with another child:

Child: We play the arbane, we play chess. There are also other games we play here. We have a great time.

Naside Bulutekin and her friends started inviting mothers to the childcare center. However, as soon as they realized that most mothers cannot come to the center due to their family structures, they decided to go see mothers themselves.

Today, 15 volunteering women from the Ray of Hope Women’s Cooperative visit women in their homes and distribute educative booklets. Their goal is to inform women about children’s and mother’s health.

A volunteer educator is giving instructions to a mother:

Educator: Growing hormones are most active between 9 and 11 at night. Therefore your children should definitely go to bed before 9.

Woman: My child goes to bed a little late.

Educator: Growing hormones are also very active between noon and 1 P.M. Your child should sleep during that time also.

Eğitim alan kadın ile röportaj:

Interviewer: Did you receive such an instruction before?

Woman: No, I did not. I did things by myself.

Interviewer: What did you learn?

Woman: I learned a lot of things. I would be happy if my children would learn how to behave properly. I will apply what I learned today from now on.

During these visits, mothers are informed about simple but important child rearing and women’s health issues.

If the father is at home during the visit, he also takes part the training.

Interview with a father of 10 children:

Interviewer: How many children do you have? **Father:** I have 10 children. **Interviewer:** Isn’t that too much?

Father: Yes it is. But this is very common in this region. Most pregnancies are unintentional. We can link this to the lack of education in the region.

Interviewer: Can you look after your children?

Father: No we cannot, we have a very hard time trying. We cannot feed them or educate them as we want to.

Interviewer: What do you do for living?

Father: I am currently unemployed.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from this training? For instance, mothers were taught how to raise a child properly. What do you recall from today?

Father: Parents have an even a more important role than school teachers in educating children.

Another goal of the Ray of Light Women’s Cooperative is to get women they visited to volunteer as a “neighbourhood mother”.

Fatma Altunç was visited by the Ray of Light Women’s Cooperative many years ago. The training she received changed the way she looked at life and she decided to join the group of volunteer educators. And since last year, she has been informing women about health issues and trying to be their guides on all aspects of life.

Fatma Altunc is talking to women:

Fatma Altunc: “Especially girls who do not use toilet paper suffer from diseases such as urinary tract infection and bronchitis.”

Interview with Fatma Altunc:

Interviewer: What kind of change do you witness in the behaviours of families after the instruction?

Fatma Altunc: They become more sensitive about health issues and behavior disorders of their children. Mothers start approaching their children in a different way. They take better care of them, spend more time with them.

I tell all mothers to spend at least 1 hour talking and paying attention to their children. I tell them to accept them as individuals. I notice that many mothers change their behaviours towards children after the instruction.

The main subject of the instruction offered by the Ray of Hope Women’s Cooperative is reproductive health and child rearing.

This is because most mothers with more than one child are not educated on these areas. With the help of real-life illustrations, women are advised to give birth only if they can take care of that child.

Interview with a woman who received the instruction

Woman: “We feed our children more healthily; we offer them the care they need. They thought us how to answer calmly, politely and in an informing way to questions our children ask us.

Before we used to get angry with them when they asked us questions, thinking they were being naughty and noisy. But we were wrong. Every question they ask influences their personal development, intelligence and decision-making abilities. We were not aware of this before.

We learned about these thanks to the training sessions. We also see many other benefits from the training; our children are raised in a better way. Our children learned how to say “Thank You” and “Have a nice meal”, they learned table manners, how to use their belongings properly, how to share with their friends. We are witnessing many changes in their behaviours.

What matters is not giving birth; what’s important is to take care of that child properly. We should not give birth if we are unable to take care of them.”

While the Ray of Hope Women’s Cooperative keeps visiting families, children also receive complimentary education in childcare centers.

From music to drama; from chess to cinema, they receive education on a wide range of topics. They spend their days in a safe environment with the permission of their parents, instead of playing in the streets.

Interview with a young educator working at the childcare center:

Interviewer: What are the children most interested in?

Educator: Most of them are very interested in music and drama. We encourage them to come and play here instead of the streets. At the same time, we ask them what kind of activities they want to do as we want them to have fun. We organize our activities according to their needs and requests. They are very interested in rhythm, drama, folk dance and chess. But they are especially interested in chess, as they cannot play enough of chess at their schools. They also love the computer class.

Naside Buluttekın and her friends have visited 1600 households. They tried to inform women about child rearing and teaching children how to look at life in an optimistic way.

Although maybe they were unable to change much in the present, they still provided the parents of tomorrow with a vision.

Interview with Naside Buluttekin:

Naside Buluttekin: “We also widely offer training on reproductive health. We have been active for the last 10 years and I believe that these women express themselves by giving birth as they are unable to participate in any other type of productive activity.

We have been working with children for 8-9 years. We try to track how children who come to our center do at school. Among children who started to attend our center between the ages of 0 to 2, none of them were involved in any type of crime. This is without exception. We try to track them as much as we can. We see great improvements in their grades at school also. We follow their successes and make comparisons.”

Naside Buluttekin did not wait for the government to deal with each and every problem. She recognized the importance of education and started a project with the help of her friends.

She did not make recommendations, she offered solutions. Over the years, she tried to inform thousands of women about their rights and thousands of children about their future.

Instead of complaining, she lit a candle in the dark. In the narrow streets of Diyarbakir, she made a difference that will influence many generations to come.