

EXECUTIVE BULLETIN

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OpenMinds: The assisted living community in Dibbiyeh will include an integrated village that provides people with special needs with education, work and recreational activities



OpenMinds and the AUBMC Special Kids Clinic held their annual dinner Thursday Feb 22, at the Seaside Arena in Beirut, in the presence of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and a number of political and economic figures. The event was marked by a fashion show for Elie Saab and live singing by Nancy Ajram.

OpenMinds revealed during the dinner that its plans for the assisted living village for individuals with special needs in Dibbiyeh will be the first of its kind in Lebanon and the Middle East. It will include vocational education, touristic and cultural landmarks, exhibition and retail spaces, and a small hotel to cater to its needs. The village will aim to serve as a “safe haven for people with special needs, contribute to their integration and financial independence and provide them with sustainable medical and psychological care.”

The evening saw Tania Kassis perform the Lebanese national anthem “a capella”, with an additional performance by Nancy Ajram and Lebanese designer Elie Saab showcasing his summer 2018 fashion collection. During the gala, the choir of the Tania Kassis Academy performed a number of songs and dances that enthralled the audience.

Rabbat

The president of OpenMinds, Ghida Rabbat, welcomed Prime Minister Hariri and considered that his presence “shows that human rights in Lebanon are a priority for him.” She said that as a result of OpenMinds’ dedication to securing a future for young adults with special needs since over a year ago, the first steps were taken in regards to “the planning of the supported living community for people with special

needs in Lebanon and the Middle East”. It will be built in the village of Dibbiyeh on an area of 7,500 Sq.m. Noting that such communities are “rare, even in America and Europe,” she said that “achieving such a dream in Lebanon would be a great accomplishment for the country.” She clarified that the Dibbiyeh project will consist “of an open village providing opportunities in education, work and recreation and will include touristic sites, cultural aspects and exhibitions, a small hotel and a sports center”. She highlighted that it will create an environment that accommodates people with special needs, contributes to their integration and financial independence, provides them with continuous medical and psychological care and provides them with a dignified life. Rabbat explained further, stating that “instead of being sad and sorry for our children, we see them, on the contrary, as talented individuals treated equally with other citizens.”

OpenMinds will initiate the next stage with the aim “to develop a funding plan for this project,” stressing that “it aligns with the overall community goal of breaking the culture of shame for the parents of children with special needs.”

Commending the initiatives of Prime Minister Saad Hariri to “empower women and encourage the economy” and in his belief in Lebanon first, she said she had “the hope to support the cause of the special needs in Lebanon, who account for 10 percent of its population according to documented statistics.” “In the partnership between the private sector and the public sector in Lebanon, we can take care of a project that will re-categorize Lebanon as a leading country concerned with humanitarian issues,” she said. She concluded by stating that the case carried by the organization “started with a handful of mothers but has now been adopted by an entire society.”

Al Boustani

Dr. Boustani highlighted the fact that while there were some diseases that medicine can still not cure, “it is now possible to transform developmental disorders, such as autism, into capabilities through early intervention,” said Dr. Rose Mary Boustani, president of the AUBMC Special Kids Clinic. “Neurodegenerative hereditary disorders can be diagnosed with great precision and some deadly diseases can be cured,” she said.

Beyhum

Suha Beyhum, the vice president of OpenMinds clarified that this gala was not an opportunity for us to complain about the lack of services provided in Lebanon but rather a “cause that unites us all”. She thanked the sponsors for “helping us teach

and show our children how real and caring communities are built and nurtured and how they, in turn, must always reach out and help someone... is community building at its best... and in fact is nation building". Beyhum thanked all the donors, partners and sponsors who contributed to the success of the event.

Auction of Paintings

The lineup of the gala also included 2 documentary films about OpenMinds, a tombola and a public auction of paintings donated by noted artists Nabil Nahhas, Ayman Baalbaki and Marwan Sahmarani.

The organization paid tribute to these artists, "whose paintings have reached the greatest exhibitions of the world and its museums, and who, with commitment and generosity, presented to OpenMinds their most beautiful work."

"Lebanese fashion icon, Elie Saab, who has reached all corners of the world, is more than a fashion designer because he has embroidered Lebanon's beauty and raised the flag of Lebanon in dozens of fashion capitals around the world," and was thanked on behalf of the special needs community.

Presented by actor Wissam Hanna, the show included the screening of 2 documentaries about OpenMinds prepared by Rudy Hashash. Hanna commented that his "commitment to the annual event is based on the firm conviction that people who are said to have special needs are people with special talents, and there is nothing more painful than talent that is not given a chance to contribute to the community." He noted that for more than five years, OpenMinds has accomplished a great deal in terms of early diagnosis, treatment, research and integration within schools.

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