

T. Dichter

Learning Agenda Mini Case #5

Morocco

L’Avenir, Association des Parents et Amis des Enfants Atteints de Cancer, Rabat, “The Future; Association of Parents and Friends of Children with Cancer”

Begun in 1986 by Dr. Fouzia Alaoui, an oncologist, the Association became a formal organization in 1986 with lots of small contributions from friends and acquaintances. The money was initially used to buy medicines for families whose kids had cancer and could not afford the drugs, but Dr. Alaoui began to see that the challenges faced by children with cancer (and especially by their families) were much more complex than just affordable medicine. Kids with cancer need transport, and since many come from outside the cities families need housing, plus there are psychological adjustment issues, schooling issues; it is a much wider problem than they thought. In the late 1980s they launched the idea of a house where families could stay during their kids’ treatment. The government gave them a plot of land for 1 dirham. They rallied in-kind labor from trades-people, and got an architect to contribute the plans and supervise construction, and again appealed for many small contributions. The Kuwait Embassy then gave them enough funds to complete the building and it was opened in May 1995.

The house has 22 rooms and can handle about 40 families at a time. People pay 10 dh per day. They host about 250 families per year. Dr. Alaoui believes there are about 1000 child cancer cases a year in Morocco and since there are now 3 associations in the country doing similar work, she feels all cases are covered with such services. Nonetheless they are moving to create a few branches of their organization.

Presently, the association has one full time professional employee, who serves as the executive director, plus a secretary and people who work in the house kitchen. She and the chief fundraiser donate their time.

As they matured, they began to concentrate on the issue of schooling for the children and made contact with centers in Spain and France who were running schools inside hospitals. They decided to open a school inside the local hospital and sent people to Spain and France to learn from those experiences.

Then one day several years ago, a former Morocco Peace Corps Volunteer named Ruth Ann Skaff called from St Jude’s Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. Ms. Skaff had heard about Dr. Alaoui and offered to help make connections between the center and the hospital. They began a relationship which has given them both ideas and some money. They now have a regular conference call with the hospital.

Dr. Alaoui says that the big current challenge for the center is the training of hospital personnel to understand the needs of children with cancer (the association also supports 14 salaried persons in the hospital.) Their 2nd challenge is communication. They need to

develop better ways of getting things across to parents and the public. Third, they want to develop more systematic fundraising. Fundraising is now in the hands of Mde Chraibi, a retired woman who lived for many years in the U.S. and France, and who is well connected, but she is a volunteer and there is no real system. Finally there is the succession issue. They are concerned about that.

Dr Alaoui says they feel they are on the cusp of a changed situation. There are more and more NGOs, and more donors, but the donors seem to be spreading themselves more thinly. Some only fund x, but not y. So they are having a big strategy meeting next week. After which they will decide what to do. They realize there are new ideas out there that they could start trying (using their alumni, beginning the training of interns in hospitals by having them spend time in the house, etc.)