

Happinest – A Local Nonprofit Organization Profile

1. Background

What started as a revolution in the streets of Beirut in October 2018 quickly fell into a downward spiral. Lebanon witnessed a steep freefall of its currency as it devalued exponentially, sending the country into its worst economic collapse to date. Fast-forward to the end of 2019, and along with the entire world, Lebanon was battling a rampant pandemic with little to no resources and a virtually non-existent government. 2020 saw light, adding oil to the fire, as Beirut, along with most of its suburbs, was decimated by the third biggest blast in history of humankind. The explosion killed more than 200 people, injured 6,500, and left scores more missing to this day. The structural damage was colossal and devastating, leaving more than 300,000 people homeless. The backdrop against which this series of unfortunate events unfolded was already dark and deteriorating. A government constituted of incapable, underqualified, and corrupt politicians had been slowly but surely guaranteeing the demise of the country. The most basic rights, such as electricity and clean water, were already considered a luxury by the majority of the population, especially the vulnerable. Unable to achieve financial independence and autonomy in such conditions, Lebanese young talents were forced to leave their country and families behind to search for opportunities abroad. It is needless to describe the detrimental effect this amalgam of calamities imposed upon the country. The result was a collective sense of depression, anxiety, and despair, present up to this moment - 3 years after the blast. Currently, it is needless to mention the effects of the war in Gaza on Lebanon, as our South is under heavy bombardment since October 7, 2023, putting the country and its residents through yet another heavy blow.

2. Introduction

We built Happinest as we realized the vitality of an oasis that celebrates creativity in the midst of havoc and ruination. We are offering our nest as a safe haven to any individual residing in Lebanon, seeking to explore art as a vocational pursuit, a healing instrument, and/or a recreational pastime.

- + **Our mission:**
Happinest is a non-profit creative home committed to promoting storytelling as a catalyst for individual development and social cohesion. We offer programs in visual and performance arts to help individuals build creative skills and attain economic independence.
- + **Our vision:**
Healthy communities founded on creativity, authenticity, and autonomy of expression.
- + **Happinest - بيت السعادة**
The house, located in the town of Wadi Chahrour - a 20 min drive from Beirut, was originally built circa 1980. After being inhabited for almost 25 years by the Saadeh family, its doors were permanently closed as the family members gradually moved out. Five floors, multiple spacious terraces, and a 1000 m² lively garden with its own gazebo add up to 2200 m². The amplitude of the space allows for the occurrence of several activities, simultaneously and comfortably. The renovation process began in April 2021 and was fully completed in September 2021.

3. The programs

+ Happinest programs

The art programs offered by Happinest are divided into two main categories: visual arts and performance arts.

- Visual Arts Programs:

1. Art programs (trainings and workshops in painting, illustration, sculpting, mixed media, etc.)
2. Ceramics & pottery

- Performance Arts Programs:

1. Comedy program
2. Music programs (singing, songwriting, and composition)
3. Musical theater program

+ Partner programs

The nest is happy to open its doors to any potential partnership and/or collaboration with entities and organizations that promote or conduct artistic programs or activities aligned with our mission. In May 2023, we had the pleasure of offering a residency to 5 artists as part of Goethe's ArtEvolution Program.

4. Activities

+ Regular

- Training modules:

Regular classes will be offered as per a set weekly or monthly schedule, to be assigned in the implementation process. Participants will have the option to choose one or more disciplines to explore.

- Art therapy:

In parallel to the art classes, an art therapy program will be in process. This program accompanies participants on a long-term basis, following the progress of their journey. Certified therapists and psychologists will be consulted in the design and will monitor in detail the implementation of the program.

- Guesthouse/Residency:

The upper two floors, containing a living room and five bedrooms, will be open to accommodate creatives for residencies, guest speakers/teachers, or any individuals looking to retreat into a wholesome and transformative artistic experience.

- Co-working space & library café

Originally a kitchen, a dining room, and two living rooms, these functions will jointly operate as a co-working space and library café. The facility will be open for individuals seeking a workspace to focus on their academic, cultural, or artistic projects.

+ **Sporadic**

- **Workshops**

Complementary to the classes, workshops covering a variety of artistic disciplines will be carried out frequently. Through these intensive short-term workshops, participants will have the opportunity to learn extensively from local and international artists and professionals.

- **Exhibitions**

Happinest will be organizing occasional art exhibitions (across numerous disciplines) that will allow participants as well as professional artists to display, and eventually sell, their artwork.

- **Events & live performances**

Our capacious indoor and outdoor spaces enable us to organize and host a broad and eclectic assortment of communal and live events that range from musical performances to standup comedy, slam poetry and spoken word, etc.

5. Sustainability

A vital component to the durability of our mission and programs is the self-sustenance of the nest. This will be feasible through activities such as:

1. **Guest organizations:** The nest is available for rent to any organization or entity seeking a space for its activities, on condition that these activities are in congruence with our values, mission, and vision.
2. **Co-working space:** The plan is to transform the ground floor, consisting of a large kitchen, a dining space, and two adjacent halls, into a spacious workspace and library café offering a suitable work environment for creative professionals. The generated revenues from the services provided by this facility will be transferred to the maintenance and continuity of the nest.
3. **Guesthouse/Residency:** The two upper floors containing 5 bedrooms with the ability to host between 10 and 15 individuals currently function as a guesthouse and an artist residency space.
4. **Events & live performances:** Similarly, the revenues generated from concerts, indoor & outdoor events and performances would serve as another financial resource.
5. **Art therapy practice:** In tandem with the potential gratuitous art therapy programs, we plan to launch an art therapy practice, offering fee-based sessions for individuals, couples, and families. Sessions will be personalized according to the clients' needs and objectives.

6. Target participants

We aim to reach a wide range of participants - tailoring our programs to specific groups such as children, elderly, domestic workers, victims of domestic abuse, and individuals with learning or physical challenges, etc. Our programs are not exclusive to one nationality, however, individuals residing in Lebanon will be prioritized.

7. The value of our mission

At the heart of Happinest lies a profound belief in the transformative power of storytelling and creative expression. We believe in art as a universal language that transcends cultural, linguistic, and social barriers, allowing space for empathy, understanding, and connection. Our mission encompasses a multitude of enriching values. Participants who are pursuing their chosen artform as a vocational endeavor will get the chance to hone their craft, hence enhancing their probability of securing job opportunities and boosting their potential careers. By the same token, participants seeking art as a healing catalyst will be greeted in a safe and stimulating environment that will lead to the improvement of their overall wellbeing while encouraging them to share their personal stories and express themselves freely. Ultimately, we aim through our mission to bring our vision into fruition. We aspire to build healthy communities founded on creativity, authenticity, and autonomy of expression.