



Access to hearing care

“It’s all about children”

Sonova employee Julien Ricadat-Crosnier traveled to Lebanon as a volunteer with the Hear the World Foundation to provide audiological care for local children with hearing loss. Taking part in the aid project was a dream come true for him.

Julien Ricadat-Crosnier gives a thumbs-up, signaling “well done” to the little boy sitting opposite. He shows him the cast of his auditory canal he has just taken; the lad examines it concentratedly and beams, showing Julien that he has understood.

The young audiologist working for Sonova brand Audition Santé first volunteered for a Hear the World Foundation aid project in May 2018, traveling from his home in Mantes-la-Jolie, a medium-sized town northwest of Paris, to Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. The trip was a dream come true for Julien: “I’ve been interested in getting actively involved in humanitarian work ever since I can remember.”

Julien had long harbored a desire to take part in a Hear the World Foundation aid project, although he initially had to wait until he had qualified as an audiologist. When an opportunity arose at the beginning of 2018, he didn’t hesitate for a second. He recalls thinking to himself right away: “This couldn’t be more perfect. It’s all about children – I have just spent the last few years completing a supplementary audiological training course for under-sixes. And the Foundation is looking for someone from France because they also speak French in Lebanon.” Julien’s application was successful, and he found himself joining two Brits and a German on a trip to Beirut to provide audiological care for Syrian refugees aged between four and 14 as well as for local Lebanese children. “I had prepared very well for the trip and done lots of research. Beirut is being rebuilt and the military are patrolling the streets everywhere. You feel safe, although you do see a great deal of poverty outside the city.”



Julien Ricadat-Crosnier

The team worked in the IRAP (Institut de Rééducation Audio-Phonétique) school for the deaf and in a branch of Houry Hearing, Phonak’s local distribution partner. Many of the children had lost their hearing in bomb attacks and explosions, although some were born with profound hearing loss and had never received proper healthcare because of the precarious situation there. “I had been expecting traumatized children, but the little ones greeted us with a smile and were very glad to see us. They are curious and full of questions, asking us who we are and where we are from.” This friendliness and openness comes all the more as a surprise to Julien when he learns (via the interpreter) that some of the children live on the streets or have lost both parents in the upheavals of war.

Most of his little patients had already been fitted with hearing aids by other Sonova staff who visited Lebanon as voluntary aid workers for the Foundation in November 2017. Julien and the other staff on his mission have now been tasked with cleaning the devices and checking the settings. “We had to refit some of the hearing aids from scratch, as the children’s ability to hear had changed. Cleaning was sometimes also a lot of work.” They look after some 30 children as well as providing devices for new young patients, whom Julien fits with hearing aids made by Sonova brand Phonak for the first time. “We have noted excellent outcomes in children with 80% hearing loss; they speak properly and are able to communicate with one another. We were really pleasantly surprised.”

The young audiologist was also highly impressed by his visit to IRAP: “All the facilities there are old-fashioned, of course, the technology is not up-to-date, but there’s a real *joie-de-vivre*.” The Sonova volunteers adapt to local circumstances, working in a noisy environment and using just the simple means at their disposal. Julien supports the people working there with his professional expertise and compares notes with the team on new treatment methods.

The day of departure finally arrives, and Julien finds it hard to say goodbye: “I’ve developed a real bond with the children here. Just like everywhere else in the world, what they want to do more than anything else is play.” He is particularly fond of two little girls aged seven and eight. They live in the school for the deaf because their parents are too poor to look after them at home. “They showed me the whole school, including their classroom and their sleeping quarters. While we were waiting for the minibus that was to take us to the airport, we spent an hour playing, singing, and – most of all – laughing a lot together.”

“IT’S ALL ABOUT CHILDREN”

Having returned to Mantes-la-Jolie, Julien Ricadat-Crosnier has resumed his normal daily routine, but the trip to Lebanon has forged strong links between the participants, and he is still in close contact with his Sonova colleagues. “We write to one another and swap pictures of our stay.” Looking back, Julien sums up his experiences: “I learned a lot during my time there. Our Hear the World Foundation is doing genuinely sustainable work and we’re trying to provide long-term support for projects. In addition to fitting people with hearing aids, providing follow-up care and training opportunities for specialist audiologists on site is playing a critical role. I’m proud to work for a company that’s socially engaged in this way and I’m hoping I can be involved again.”