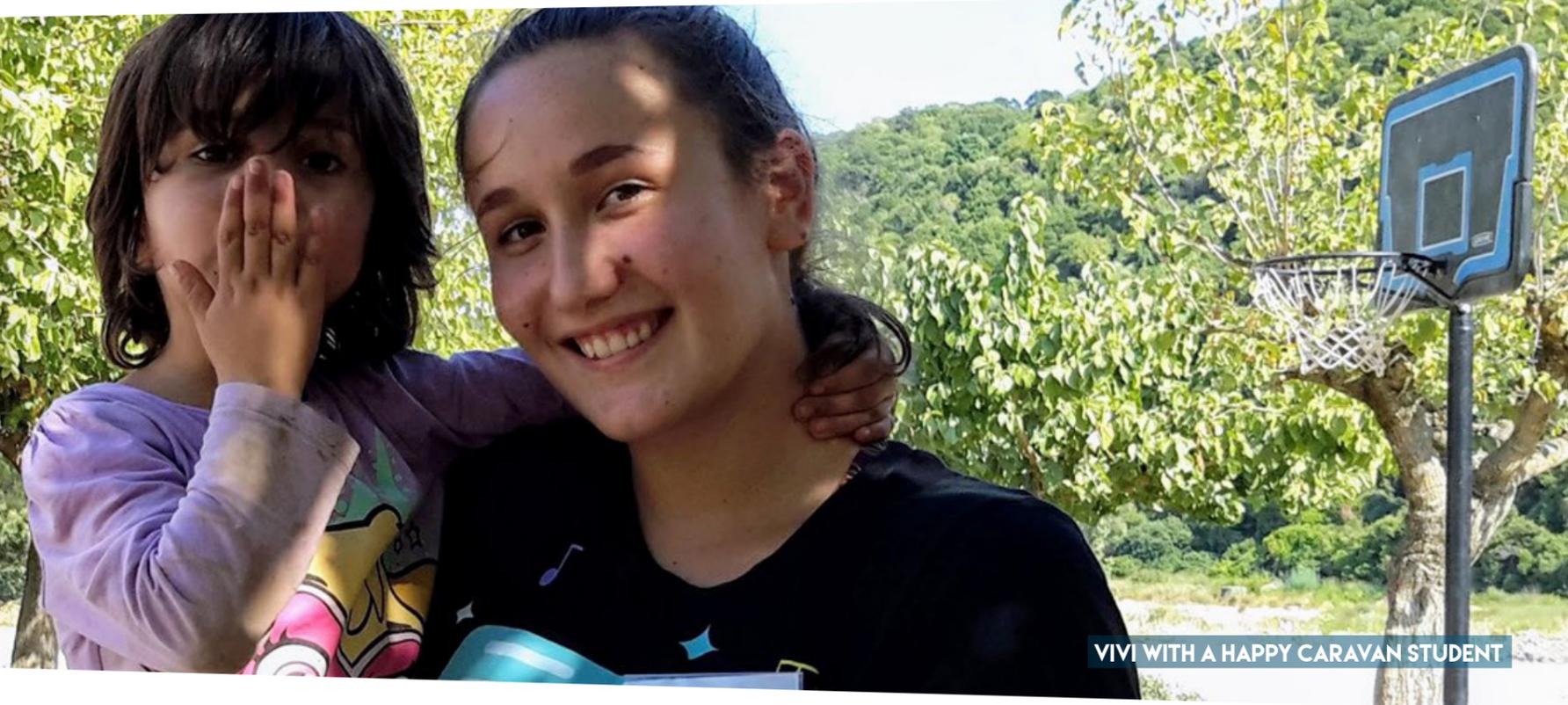




LEARNERS CREATING CHANGE



VIVI WITH A HAPPY CARAVAN STUDENT

BY ARNIE BIEBER

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF PRAGUE WON THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT AWARD AT THIS YEAR'S INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL AWARDS. HERE, DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL, ARNIE BIEBER EXPLAINS THE INITIATIVE.

Alaeddin Janid grew up in Aleppo, Syria. During his formative years, he journeyed from a world of privilege to the relentless persecution, oppression, and brutality of the Assad regime. "I was born in Aleppo, the oldest city in the world," he told students, teachers and parents of ISP (International School of Prague) during a visit to the school for our ISP Refugee Awareness Week. "I was in a bubble. My father was rich. I grew up going to school and working in my father's polyester factory in Aleppo."

As an activist, Alaeddin joined forces with other young people in Aleppo to fight for democracy

and human rights. "In 2011 [in Syria], there was the revolution. You start having all those amazing conversations with people, speaking about revolution and freedom, about democracy, about respect and human rights," he told us.

The brutal treatment he and his comrades received at the hands of the Syrian regime forced Alaeddin to reluctantly leave Syria. He became one of millions who fled their homeland to seek refuge abroad. His harrowing journey took him through Turkey and other countries until he finally gained refugee status and citizenship in the Netherlands.

During his travels, Alaeddin helped others in any way he could, ultimately channelling his compassion and activism into the establishment of two schools for refugee children called Happy Caravan, in Thermopylae and Malakasa, Greece. The Happy Caravan mission is simple and powerful: to make a tangible difference in the lives of refugee children by preparing them for a better future through nurturing their resilience, education, and creativity.

DEVELOPING AN INTERNATIONAL IMPACT INITIATIVE

The International School of Prague's connection to Happy Caravan began in 2017 when one of our teachers, Nina Horakova, who had been working with Alaeddin, proposed a long-term partnership with Happy Caravan to the ISP Leadership Team. Since then, Upper School students and teachers have spent a week volunteering with refugee children in the two schools in Greece as part of our 'Week Without Walls' programme. Teachers and support staff have also dedicated time during school breaks supporting Happy Caravan children and their volunteer teachers on-site. The Happy Caravan partnership with ISP has now become a school-wide endeavour and a source of great pride in the ISP community.

Not only do ISP students and teachers provide these deserving children help in the refugee schools, but they have also found that the entire ISP community has, in turn, greatly benefited from the relationship. Our students have found the

experience enlightening and transformative, as Lily, one of our Upper School students who worked with the Happy Caravan students, describes:

"When we were busy with the kids, trying to teach them things, you're really in the zone and didn't think about what was happening. I stood back and throughout the day I found myself tearing up because of the difference between us. It's not as people, but the opportunities given to us. No one deserves being in a life like this. When they were in Syria and there was no war they were just like us." Another of our students, Vivi, added: "I went on this trip to become a volunteer and help teach the refugee children English and Maths. But turns out, they did most of the teaching and I did most of the learning. Not only did we learn the skills needed to work with children of a traumatic past before departing, but every moment I spent at the camp with the kids I learnt something." And Alana explained: "I always thought they'd be different, traumatised kids. But they're completely normal kids. They all have fun, they all laugh, they all scream, they all misbehave, they do all these things just like any other normal child."



ALAEDDIN SHARING HIS STORY WITH STUDENTS AT ISP



ALAEDDIN JANID, FOUNDER OF HAPPY CARAVAN

CREATING CHANGE BIGGER THAN WE ARE

In line with ISP's strategy to 'Create change that is bigger than we are', ISP has provided not only financial and material support to this important endeavour, but has also worked to become an integral part of the Happy Caravan educational programme by sharing our professional expertise in curriculum and pedagogy.

Sponsoring Happy Caravan visits to ISP helps the organisers to observe and learn from our approaches to teaching and learning. At the same time our entire community learns more about the refugee situation and is inspired to figure out ways to make a difference to the lives of others from around the world.

In 2019, Alaeddin and his Happy Caravan colleagues came to ISP to participate in the ISP Refugee Awareness Week, speaking with students, teachers and parents. He also spoke about his harrowing journey from Syrian refugee to social action leader in his TEDxYouth@ISP Prague talk delivered at ISP called The butterfly effect: helping refugee children create a future.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of Happy Caravan schools during this time, it

has been impossible for us to visit. Nonetheless, our commitment to the long-term partnership is stronger than ever. For the time being there remains a strong online relationship between the two schools and, most recently, Alaeddin joined our staff virtually during a workshop.

For our students to take on true leadership roles, we adults, we educators, have a duty to support them in finding their purpose, and becoming positive change-makers in small and large ways. Programmes such as the Happy Caravan-ISP partnership demonstrate that given the space and pathways to explore, 'problem find' and seek guidance, young people can achieve remarkable things.

We are particularly proud and grateful that ISP's partnership with Happy Caravan received the International Impact Award at this year's International School Awards.

GIVEN THE SPACE AND PATHWAYS TO EXPLORE, PROBLEM FIND, AND SEEK GUIDANCE, YOUNG PEOPLE CAN ACHIEVE REMARKABLE THINGS.

TIPS FOR NURTURING LEARNERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

- > Recognise the passion of teachers, staff and students as the prime drivers of a sustainable initiative
- > Difference-making is core, not incidental, to student learning
- > Develop a culture where students and teachers have the space to lead, take risks and follow their passions
- > Commit school funding to signal the project's importance and ensure sustainability
- > Foster and invest in human connections and hands-on initiatives, as they are the most impactful
- > Highlight and share your learning stories associated with the initiative
- > Give the programme sufficient time to grow, allowing it to find its place and take root firmly across the community



THE AUTHOR

Arnie Bieber is completing his 13th and final year as the longest-serving Director of the [International School of Prague](#). You can read more about the partnership in Arnie's blog post [Happy Caravan and ISP: Creating Change That's Bigger Than We Are!](#) Connect directly with Arnie on [LinkedIn](#) or Twitter [@arniebieber](#)