

## SUCCESS STORY

### 3D Printing to Shield Communities During the Pandemic: Tunisian Youth Lead COVID-19 Response (Vol. 4)

#### Ma3an youth in Sidi Bouzid volunteer to manufacture 3D printing masks.

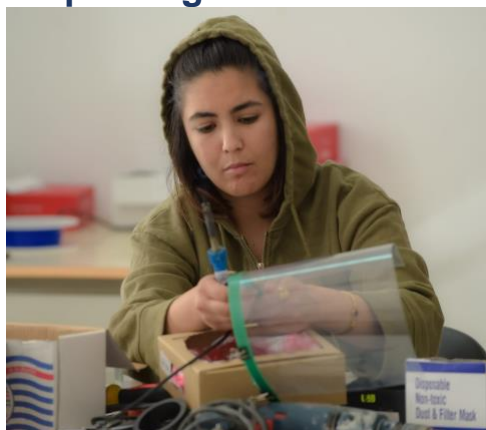


Photo credit: Oumaima Dhahri

Ma3an youth Oumaima Dhahri works with local college, ISET, to develop 3D masks that are given to hospitals in Sidi Bouzid.

*“I hope that we can all ‘shield-up’ against COVID-19. [...] Tunisian youth are capable of a lot!”*

*–Oumaima Dhahri, Ma3an youth*

“I’m one of those people who find it difficult to sit still and stay at home,” said Ma3an youth Oumaima Dhahri when being interviewed about her work during the COVID-19 pandemic. “I knew when the Tunisian quarantine happened, it was important for me to stay safe to keep others safe, but it was also important to put my abilities to work. I volunteered at ISET [a Tunisian college] and began manufacturing 3D printing masks to reduce the shortage of medical equipment across the country. I’ve been proud of the work we’ve been able to do.”

And Oumaima has reason to be proud. Since the start of the pandemic, her team at Institut Supérieur des Etudes Technologiques (ISET) has printed 1800 plastic masks, donating them to four hospitals across Sidi Bouzid. Oumaima has also helped ISET troubleshoot the problems the organization has encountered when attempting to finish mask production.

“We found out we were short of raw materials and equipment to manufacture the masks,” Oumaima recounted. “I decided to organize a fundraising event to raise the money that we needed for the materials. I also contacted some local officials who offered to spread the word about our efforts. This resulted in the organization of an online training session that taught others how to make masks at home. There’s been about 4,000 handmade masks that have been made through this work.”

Oumaima is grateful for the impact that Ma3an has had on her efforts to respond to COVID-19: “The work to make masks has been intense with conflicts arising among team members. Each time my team has faced conflict, though, I’ve been able to apply skills learned from Ma3an. [Ma3an] storytelling has helped me lighten the mood and calm people down. I also remember advice from the Ma3an team that has helped me manage team dynamics and communicate better. Ma3an was an enriching learning experience that’s paying off for me today.”

## SUCCESS STORY

### Housseem Dhahri, Community Standout from Souk Jedid: Tunisian Youth Lead COVID-19 Response (Vol. 2)

**Ma3an youth go above and beyond to respond in time of crisis.**



Photo credit: Housseem Dhahri

*Ma3an youth Housseem Dhahri and other local crisis unit members spread news of COVID-19 to residents residing outside of the Souk Jedid community center.*

*I'm optimistic that Tunisia will push through the [COVID-19] crisis and even be better for going through it. There is an emerging wave of young entrepreneurs who have innovative ways of solving the problems that the crisis is bringing. Hope resides in these Tunisian youth.*

*—Housseem Dhahri, Ma3an youth*

More than 10 miles outside of the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid lies the Souk Jedid community. In February and March 2020, when news of COVID-19 and associated Government-issued stay-at-home ordinances were first released, Souk Jedid was slow to hear. Many of the community's residents live far from the town center in remote areas where access to news and information is scarce.

Seeing the situation unfold, one resident, Ma3an youth representative Housseem Dhahri, knew just what to do. "When the Souk Jedid municipality announced they were creating a crisis unit," Housseem said, "I immediately volunteered. We used cars owned by the municipality and other volunteers to visit residents and announce COVID-19 news. We also told people how they could protect themselves based on Ministry of Health recommendations."

As the economic hardships of COVID-19 started to come to light, Housseem began working with a Government-sponsored initiative to provide 200 TND (approximately 68 USD) to Souk Jedid residents in need. "With the announcement of the funds, we had a huge flow of people coming to the city center to collect," recounted Housseem. "The problem, though, was that the travel defied social distancing rules and put people in danger. I suggested a ticket-based queueing method to avoid overcrowding at collection sites. I printed numbered tickets and gave them to people and provided estimated wait times that allowed residents to come at their own time and be safe."

Seeing the success of the two initiatives, Housseem was inspired to do more. "I decided to use the legal status of the NGO I had created to collect donations with other members of civil society" he said. "I dropped [the donations] at the front doors of people in need who were



Ma3an youth Housseem Dhahri coordinates with other Souk Jedid volunteers.



Housseem delivers supplies in the Souk Jedid community.

*I was born and raised in Souk Jedid and I want to give back to my community. [...] My hope is that other youth contribute, too. We are the solution. 'Impossible' is not a Tunisian word!"*

*–Housseem Dhahri, Ma3an youth*

too ashamed to ask for help.”

The initiative allowed Souk Jedid residents a greater sense of dignity during a challenging time and, thanks to Housseem, will continue forward in the coming months. “I wrote three proposals to different funders [talking about this work],” Housseem reported, “and on April 20<sup>th</sup>, I received an acceptance call from the Centre de Démocratie, Citoyenneté et Développement. I can now procure protection kits made up of masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer. We’ll give these kits to volunteers who haven’t been able to protect themselves properly in their work.”

Housseem has also put the skills he has gained on USAID’s Ma3an project into action. To educate community residents on false COVID-19 information, Housseem has made his Facebook page a resource: “Along with my other Ma3an peers, I’m posting daily on our Chebeb Ma3an Facebook group, and I’m using my profile to share tips to help people distinguish fact from fiction during this time.”

And Ma3an’s benefits to Housseem do not end there. Speaking of the connections and skills he has gained from the project, Housseem said, “From my time on Ma3an surveying officials and meeting with business owners, I now have a strong network that I can reach out to with these initiatives. It’s the network I’m using now. [...] Ma3an’s mentoring sessions helped me to feel confident approaching others and adjusting my message to different audiences, both youth and adults. I also learned to have a solutions-oriented mindset. And, my experience with Ma3an storytelling helped me get closer to youth in Souk Jedid. I learned how to listen without judging and I gained empathy for others different from me. [...] I’ve put all these lessons to work in my initiatives today.”



## SUCCESS STORY

### Protective Masks to the People: Tunisian Youth Lead COVID-19 Response (Vol. 1)

#### Ma3an youth lead their communities in responding to COVID-19.



Photo credit to Salwa Mahmoudi

Ma3an youth Salwa Mahmoudi models a mask she sewed to distribute to local residents.

*“I’m amazed by Tunisian youth’s initiatives during these times. The things my friends are doing have changed my perspective – everyone has potential and can contribute their expertise to their communities. My hope for Tunisia is that people continue these initiatives and this spirit even after coronavirus ends. Something good can come out of this.”*

*-Salwa Mahmoudi, Ma3an youth*

When COVID-19 came to Tunisia, Salwa Mahmoudi couldn’t sit back and do nothing. She knew she had to act: “When the media began talking about coronavirus,” Salwa recounted, “I saw that pharmacies were selling masks for an expensive price – 9 TND. People in Tunisia have to work a whole day to save that much money. It’s much too expensive.”

Undeterred, Salwa started thinking: “I had recently begun working as a dressmaker, designing and selling clothes online for babies. I had a lot of high-quality fabric scraps that were just going to be thrown away. I decided to recycle the fabric and make masks. At first, I made just a few, but then I saw there was high demand and I’ve now made more than 50 that I’ve distributed to people in my community.”

Salwa is one of many Ma3an youth who have chosen to see COVID-19 as both a challenge and an opportunity. Working as a Ma3an youth mentor, Salwa has developed this spirit of perseverance over time. “In the time I’ve known Salwa,” said Ma3an Youth Program Coordinator Chaima Amraoui, “she has completely come out of her shell. When I first met her, I encountered a shy, reserved young woman who was hesitant to speak, let alone act. Today, I’m not surprised that she’s leading the way in bringing masks to her community. It’s just something she would do.”

And Salwa has no intention of stopping – in fact, she is putting plans in place to expand her work to support those in her community who also want to be of service. “I launched a call on my Facebook page,” said Salwa, “asking people who have the know-how to make more masks. I also shared a video tutorial in case people don’t know how. I have plans to set up my garage and teach people who are interested. I’ll provide fabrics and a sewing machine to whoever wants to help, all for free and with only one condition – masks go to the people!”





## SUCCESS STORY

### The Energizer of El Kef: Tunisian Youth Lead COVID-19 Response (Vol. 3)

**Ma3an youth in El Kef engage peers in COVID-19 response efforts.**



Photo credit: Firas Boushaki

Ma3an youth Firas Boushaki leads quarantine center cleaning and food distribution activities in his hometown of El Kef.

*“Simply put, I want to paint the dark things that are happening in white. I love my community and I will work hard to bring hope to it during this time.”*

*–Firas Boushaki, Ma3an youth*

Ma3an youth Firas Boushaki is known for his energy. According to Youth Leadership Advisor Lilia Kamoun, who has known Firas since the early days of Ma3an activities in 2019, Firas is a source of enthusiasm. “Firas is like the Energizer Bunny among the youth Ma3an works with,” said Lilia. “He zooms around doing the work of ten different people – and he always does it with a smile.”

It was no surprise, then, that when COVID-19 began to spread across Tunisia in March 2020, Firas put his energy to work. “When I learned of the situation, I reached out to the governor of El Kef to gain authorization to collect donations,” Firas said. “So many people in El Kef are daily workers, and I knew I had to do something to supplement their lost earnings – for them, it was a matter of life or death. So far, I have worked with my friends to collect and distribute more than 350 baskets of full-week supplies.”

Seeing the success of his initiative, the Governor called Firas to ask him to work with the community’s crisis unit. “I have become the main person responsible for two quarantine centers,” Firas noted. “I manage the budget to provide food and supplies for the centers. [...] I work with others to distribute food in the centers, respecting the rules of the Ministry of Health, [...] and I disinfect the rooms and the dishes at the centers.”

Speaking of the influence of Ma3an on his work, Firas said, “Sometimes when I’m talking to people in the street or holding a meeting, I can hear the [Ma3an] mentoring principles I’ve learned in the back of my head. [...] Learning how to manage small budgets through Ma3an has helped me budget for the centers during quarantine and has given me the skills to make sure that we have enough supplies for all the people in need. [...] Ma3an has helped me strive for excellence and has helped me lead.”