CLIMBAID is a non-profit organisation founded in September 2016 in Zurich, Switzerland which focuses on humanitarian projects with an emphasis on climbing and other alpine sports activities. In particular, ClimbAID focuses on the holistic development of youth into autonomous, social, self- and environmentally aware actors. We have projects in Switzerland and Lebanon:

MAXI FAMILY is a growing network of volunteers and climbing gyms that offers climbing sessions to asylum-seekers in Switzerland.

A ROLLING ROCK addresses problems in Lebanon arising as a consequence of the civil war in Syria and the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990. With a mobile climbing wall built on a truck, we aim to bring colour, movement and joy to underprivileged youth in the Beqaa Valley.

PROJECT CONTEXT
By the end of 2016, 65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations (UNHCR 2017).

A majority of these people (40.3m) were displaced inside their home country. Of the 22.5m who had to leave their home country, a majority found refuge in neighbouring countries. In absolute numbers, Turkey received the highest number (2.9m) of refugees. Lebanon continues to host the largest number of refugees relative to its national population (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP 2017).

ASYLUM IN SWITZERLAND
In 2016, according to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), 1.3m refugees sought asylum in Europe, thereof 2% in Switzerland (27,207 applications). This trend was declining in 2017: 18,088 applications for asylum were filed, one third less than in the year before.
As per the end of 2017, SEM counts a total of 121'402 persons in the area of asylum. Thereof 43% have been granted refugee status (Permit B & C), another 34% have been granted the right to stay on a temporary basis (Permit F).

**REPORT ON ACTIVITIES**

During 2017, the maxiMiNimum Project became the MAXI Family: a growing network of volunteers and climbing gyms in Switzerland that offers climbing sessions to asylum-seekers.

ClimbAID’s volunteers climbed an impressive 935 hours – or 22 working weeks of 42 hours each – with asylum seekers in Zurich, Kriens (Lucerne) and Winterthur. In average every 37 hours a climbing session in Switzerland or Lebanon took place.

**MAXIMIMUM IN ZURICH**

The maxiMiNimum project – launched in October 2016 at Minimum Bouldering Gym – is ClimbAID’s first active project. Since its start, volunteers from Zurich’s climbing community dedicate their time and expertise 3 to 4 times a week to supervise climbing sessions with mostly minor, but also adult asylum-seekers.

ClimbAID closely coordinates the maxiMiNimum sessions with Zurich’s asylum organisation AOZ. In particular, we work together with AOZ’s dedicated centres for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers MNA-Zentrum Lilienberg and MNA-Zentrum Zollikon that each host up to 90 adolescents as well as with AOZ Juch, a national test centre for the accelerated asylum procedure.

Beat Baggenstos, who established the maxiMiNimum sessions, left Switzerland in July 2017 in order to manage ClimbAID’s A ROLLING ROCK project in Lebanon. Since then, Dave Kennel – passionate ClimbAID member from the very beginning – continues to organise the maxiMiNimum sessions with loads of dedication and diligence.
At this occasion once more: thank you Mini-mum for being our host for almost 1 ½ years now! You are family.

MAXICITY IN LUCERNE

In spring 2017, Anita Kolettu heard about the climbing sessions in Zurich, participated in one and quickly decided to start another MAXI climbing group – now called MaxiCity – at CityBoulder in Kriens. With a lot of verve and love, she built a close-knit and hard climbing group of dedicated volunteers and participants.

MaxiCity is closely coordinated with Lucerne’s asylum centre for minor refugees Grosshof that hosts up to 120 adolescents.

Anita, who will work for a development project in Senegal in 2018, handed over operations to Kathrin Aeberhard who will run the show for the next months to come.

Thank you CityBoulder for your hospitality! We are looking forward to many more fun sessions in your awesome new gym!

MAXIPLUS IN WINTERTHUR

Kim Bodmer and Laura Lurati, two of our most passionate volunteers, decided to bring the MAXI Project to Winterthur. Last autumn, they finally succeeded and their hard work paid off:

ClimbAID is very happy to welcome the climbing gym 6a plus and a super fun group of new volunteers in the MAXI Family!

MaxiPlus is closely coordinated with the asylum centres for minor refugees in Wiesendangen and the asylum centre Deutweg, Winterthur.

Thank you for supporting our cause 6a plus. We are just getting started!

THE CLIMBHEADS

ClimbAID and its projects are shaped by a team of passionate climbers. Without these people the MAXI Family would not exist and we’re extremely proud to have them on board.

Thank you to everyone who has helped in any way shaping ClimbAID and its projects.

Especially, ClimbAID would like to thank Katharina Hornschuch for always caring and representing our organisation as its vice-president. – You are awesome!

CLIMBING THERAPY

ClimbAID closely follows the scientific research about the benefits of climbing for mind and body and aims to build a broad knowledge base in the field. In 2017, a first workshop with Alexis Zajetz, the founder of the Institute for Climbing Therapy (Austria) and 12 ClimbAID volunteers took place. Another one is planned in 2018.

Institut für Therapeutisches Klettern
OUTLOOK 2018

In 2018, we will continue the MAXI Family project aiming to expand our reach (10 climbing gyms) and reinforce our impact.

MAXIGLARUS

We are very happy about MAXI Family’s arrival in the canton of Glarus: the sessions are kicked off on February 15th in connection with a presentation by ClimbAID.

We are looking forward to many fun MAXI sessions in the GLKB Bouldering Gym in Näfels! Thank Jasmin Schläpfer, Joane Steiner and Patrick Hess for making this possible.

MAXICRUX

Crux Bouldering in Biel also joined the MAXI Family and from February plans to offer weekly climbing sessions to local asylum-seekers.

Thank you for taking this on Christian Auer. We are looking forward to many fun session!

MAXIFRANCE, MAXIGERMANY, MAXIUK

We work on expanding our network to France, Germany and UK.

MAXIMAL IMPACT

In order to maximize our impact, we continue to learn and optimize our program and methodology. To ensure consistent quality of all our activities, the transfer of this knowledge is one of our top priorities in 2018.

REAL ROCK

Another priority of this year’s activities is to let our regular participants feel real rock. Stay tuned for rock climbing action.
CLIMBING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Climbing increasingly gains attention from academic research as a treatment for a variety of mental health issues and as a method of experiential education. Self-esteem and body-awareness are fostered through concrete challenges, fears are overcome, team building capacities and responsible social interactions across cultural and ethnical backgrounds are taught.

Through climbing activities, we aspire to achieve impact on individual and social level, specifically in the following areas:

- Conflict Prevention
- Mental Health & Psychological Well-Being
- Education & Cognitive Development
- Social Competencies & Life Skills
- Physical Health

CONFLICT PREVENTION

Sport activities - and according to our belief, especially climbing being a non-competitive, social and peaceful sport - can increase the conflict prevention capacities among youth through building a sense of community, sharing common goals, the passion for climbing as well as friend and companionship (on the impact of sports activities in general: Sport for Development 2013). On a personal level, by exercising self-control – crucial for climbing – participants learn to moderate violent behaviour and anger.

MENTAL HEALTH & PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Although refugees find relative safety in host countries, they need support to deal with distressing experiences of violence, abuse, exploitation, family separation and more.

New research finds a positive impact of climbing (specifically: bouldering) on depression (e.g. Luthenberger 2015 or Kowald & Zajetz 2014) and is increasingly used as means in psychotherapy and experiential pedagogics. The sense of accomplishment when successfully solving a “boulder problem” helps to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Through experiencing oneself as “functioning” (self-efficacy) participants ultimately regain the feeling of being in control of life and daily routines (Kowald & Zajetz 2014). Furthermore, through the required high demand of attention and a very coherent experience of reality, traumatized participants might be able to reconnect to “unharmed” proportions of their personality.

EDUCATION & COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Through climbing, executive functions of the brain are trained which are central aspects of conscious guidance of our mind, feelings and thoughts. They help us to focus, to stick to a plan, set priorities, moderate emotions and calm stress (Kowald & Zajetz 2016). Paired with a social environment supportive of learning, we aim to stimulate the receptiveness for further education.

Through workshops for local volunteers (possibly in cooperation with other non-profits specialised in relevant areas), we want to teach basic knowledge in business and project management, accounting, leadership, climbing therapy and psycho-social support.
SOCIAL COMPETENCIES & LIFE SKILLS

Climbing in the group improves the individual’s social perception and personal skills. Discussing problems, sharing tips, motivating and taking care of each other are all integral parts of climbing (Kowald & Zajetz 2016). How climbing also strengthens self-control and self-esteem is described above.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Sport and physical activity lead to improved health. Empirical evidence exists on the beneficial outcomes of sport on individual, community as well as society level. Besides improved health or better fitness in general, physical activity has been proven to reduce non-communicable diseases and lowers the risk of heart disease, chronic respiratory disease, early death, stroke and high blood pressure. People who play sports have a lower Body Mass Index (BMI), thus sport helps to prevent obesity and certain types of diabetes (Sport for Development 2013).

MEDIA COVERAGE

Since its foundation in September 2016, ClimbAID has been featured in 13 news outlets and blogs in over 5 different countries including Climbing Magazine, UK Climbing, Fanatic Climbing, Swiss National Radio and many more. You can find an overview of these on www.climbaid.org/media-coverage.

Furthermore, a short video clip and many more photos can be found on www.climbaid.org/ROCK.

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PHOTOS

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★ Photos 1, 2, 4-6 by Beat Baggenstos
★ Photo 6 by Jan Bakker
★ Photo 3 by Anita Kolettu
★ Photo 8 by Lusse Cloutier