

# REPORT ON ACTIVITIES 2017

## A ROLLING ROCK

### Bringing the Mountain to the Valley



#### CONTENT OVERVIEW

- ★ Project Context
- ★ Report on Activities 2017
- ★ Outlook 2018
- ★ Financials
- ★ Donors & Sponsors
- ★ Climbing for Development
- ★ Media Coverage
- ★ Contact

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

Lebanon is a Middle Eastern country made up of 4m Lebanese, estimated 1.5m Syrian and 0.5m Palestinian refugees. These figures make it the country with the highest concentration of refugees per capita worldwide: 1 of 3 is a refugee.

The Beqaa Governorate – our main area of operation – has a total population of more than 0.5m, of which 50% are Syrian and Palestinian refugees. In many villages, like Ghazze, Qab Elias and El Marj, the ratio of refugees to locals is two or three to one. Poverty – defined by \$3.84 per day and capita – among Lebanese (>30%) and Syrian refugees (>80%) is widespread, amounting to 260'000 people in need. 78% of Syrian children and teens are not enlisted at school (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP 2016 and various others by UNHCR).

An economic crisis, the doubling of the population, and the entanglements of national politics are weighing down on the region. Although there seems to be a satisfactory sense of security and conflicts remain latent so far, there are significant sources of tension, primarily linked to job competition over low-skilled jobs, scarce resources and public services. Regular perception surveys on social tensions (ARK Group 2017) finds that relationships between Lebanese and Syrians worsened significantly between March and May 2017.

Given the fragility of the current situation, UNDP's Conflict Analysis Report for the Beqaa from March 2017 recommends to "(...) expand social cohesion projects for Lebanese youth from mixed political and sectarian backgrounds, as well as between Syrian and Lebanese youth and women through school education and make sure such projects are designed rather long term and involve frequent activities."

---

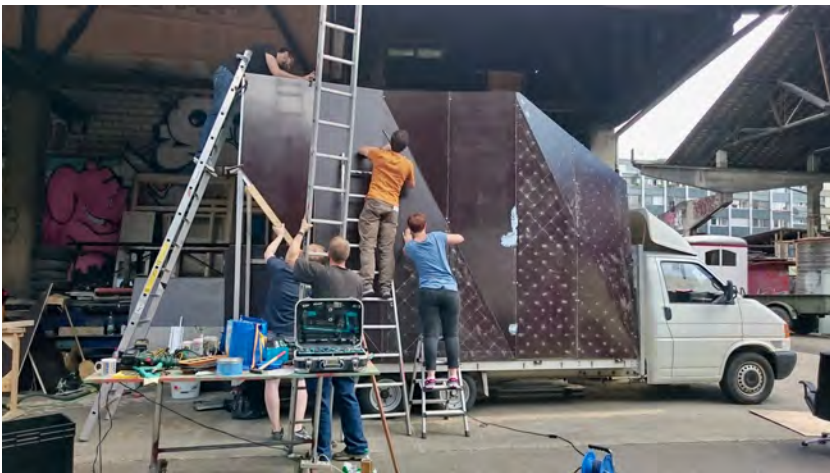
## REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

In 2017, the once rather vague if not naïve idea of a mobile climbing wall rockin' refugee camps in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon became rock-solid.

---

### A ROLLING ROCK – MADE IN ZURICH

After – to all our surprise – raising the entire budget all at once already in December 2016, we quickly moved to executing our plans, only to learn that Lebanese laws made it impossible for us and our partner organisation to register our truck. This first of many bureaucratic and organisational obstacles to come eventually led to the decision to build A ROLLING ROCK in Switzerland and later on, ship it to Lebanon.



It's also thanks to this change in plans, that we were able to count on more than 30 highly motivated and skilled volunteers in Zurich who helped executing what our ROCK Science team meanwhile had designed.

---

### PRECIOUS TIME AND TOUGH DECISIONS

Besides money, time quickly became the most critical factor. Since we knew that we would have to leave the Beqaa due to heavy rain and snow already in November, every setback to our plans would cost us valuable time and experience in the field.

In order to build a 3.60 meters high climbing structure within the legally permitted total vehicle weight of 3.5 tons, we chose to use aluminium for the frame instead of wood – a tough decision that cost us almost a month. Another 2 weeks got lost when the transport to Beirut was postponed and a strike at the port of Beirut stalled the release of our equipment.

---

## THE UNKNOWN BECOMES THE KNOWN

Overcoming each one of these obstacles led to sometimes unlikely and surprising solutions. Every encounter with the unknown contributed to create a network of friend and partnerships that is today's fundament for ClimbaID's endeavour in Lebanon.

We feel grateful, that besides our numerous friends, our local partner organisation Salam LADC and their volunteers, arcenciel, cirquenciel, AL caravan, SAWA for Aid and Development and CatalyticAction became integral parts of our operations during the last year.



ClimbaID also became a member of the Social Stability and Livelihood Workgroup headed by UNDP Lebanon as well as the Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group led by UNICEF and UNHCR Lebanon.



---

## BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS

On August 30th, 2017, it finally happened in a mid-sized informal tented settlement in Tanail. Halfway between Beirut and Damascus, about 15 km away from the Syrian border, we hold our first A ROLLING ROCK climbing session.



Click [here](#) to see a short, but awesome video clip about our first session.

Over the following 3 months, we rocked 18 settlements, parks, back- and schoolyards in Tanaïl, Bar Elias and Qab Elias. Regardless of nationality, religion or gender: More than 400 kids, teens and adults climbed THE ROCK.

---

### NEVER GIVE UP!

A group of 7 Syrians and Lebanese youth even became our volunteers, started to set routes and helped us giving sessions for younger participants. For them, climbing has become a new passion that gives them balance, stability and resilience. When asked what they had learned in our climbing sessions in the Beqaa, they told us: "Having an objective and never give up".



What started as a psycho-social project to fight boredom and depression in Syrian refugee settlements, also quickly became a magnet that brought together Lebanese, Syrian and Palestine refugees, volunteers and humanitarian aid workers from all over the globe.

Then while climbing, we all can forget our sorrows and hardship for a few hours. It doesn't matter where we are coming from or where we go. We feel joy when we succeed, often frustration when we don't. What we learn, is to never give up and try again.

---

### CLIMB AND PLAY

Upon the invitation of CatalyticAction, ClimbAID contributed a small climbing wall to their amazing playground project in Ghazze for underprivileged Lebanese and Syrian children. It amazes us again and again how natural climbing comes to kids. They see, come and climb!



---

### THE DREAM TEAM

At the core of the success of our climbing sessions stands a team of passionate, strong-minded and big-hearted climbing instructors and facilitators.



- ★ Gianina Costa (Switzerland) who brought good vibes and her expertise as a humanitarian aid worker into the project
- ★ Marie-Raphaëlle LeBlond (Canada), a remarkable, courageous young woman with a big heart and treasure trove of climbing games
- ★ Marwan Maayta (Jordan), an incredible rock climber, whose soft-spoken and placid personality often stood out in the mere chaos
- ★ Beat Baggenstos (Switzerland), the founder of ClimbAID is incredibly lucky to have found this amazing group of people to run THE ROCK.

Among the many visitors, Sven Létourneau (Canadian) volunteered with us for one month, connecting fast with the rest of the team and setting some of the meanest boulder problems to date.

---

### YALLAH NINA!

Without any doubt, one of the highlights was the visit of our ambassador and pro-climber Nina Caprez, who supports our projects since the very beginning.



From reliable sources, we know that Nina made a lasting impression on the young women in Bar Elias. Everyone is looking forward to her next visit in Lebanon. More about her visit can be read in her blog entry [“Something to Offer”](#).

---

#### THE ROCK@CIRQUENCIEL

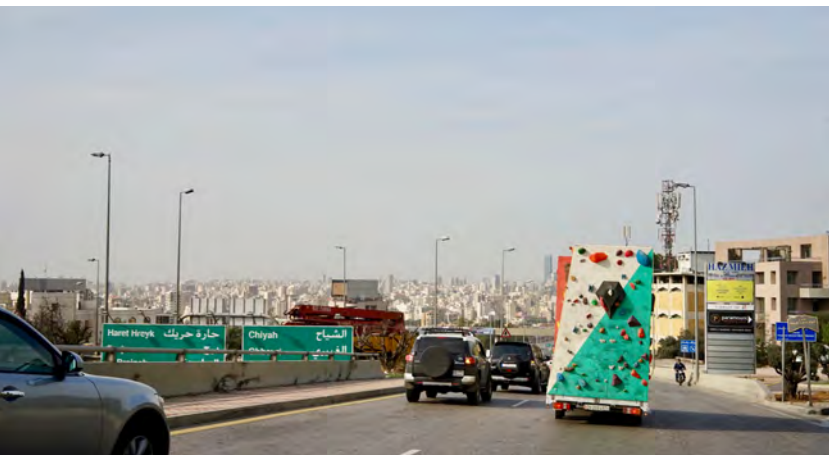
As expected, mid of November, we had to pull out of the Beqaa due to bad weather conditions. Unfortunately, we couldn't continue our outdoor sessions and we didn't have enough time and funds to establish THE ROCK in an indoor space in the Beqaa.

Instead, after a proper training, handed over THE ROCK to the organisation cirquenciel in Beirut where they – together with our friends from the local climbing community – now give weekly sessions to local at-risk youth until we can return to the Beqaa in April.

---

#### KLETTERN STATT KRIEG (CLIMBING NOT WAR)

We were happy to end the year with three project presentations by our founder Beat Baggenstos at Minimum Bouldering Gym (Zurich), Griffig (Uster) and Crux Bouldering (Biel). There are many more to come in 2018!



---

## OUTLOOK 2018

In 2018, we will continue our project in the Beqaa aiming to expand our reach (>1000 participants) and reinforce our impact.

---

#### SITUATION REMAINS FRAGILE

Amid reports that the situation in Syria is calming down, it doesn't look like the fighting is likely to end any time soon. Besides the still precarious security situation and destroyed livelihoods, especially young Syrian men who return home need to fear prison, torture and forced army recruitment. Furthermore, a sharp decrease in funding for humanitarian aid in Lebanon is posed to worsen the living conditions of poor Syrian and Lebanese and might even aggravate the current crisis.

Therefore, we expect that a majority of the Syrian refugee population will stay in Lebanon, keeping on to put pressure on its economy, infrastructure and environment for the coming months. As a consequence, the overall situation will remain fragile and volatile.



---

#### NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT

While the international community and public interest slowly seem to turn their back on the Syrian refugee, we stay committed to our cause.

Projects like ours that bring together youth from mixed political and sectarian backgrounds and contribute to their cognitive, social and physical development are more necessary than ever. Although, our ROCK is only a drop in the ocean, we believe in the relevance of every second in which we succeed to push back desperation and depression with joy, movement and colour.

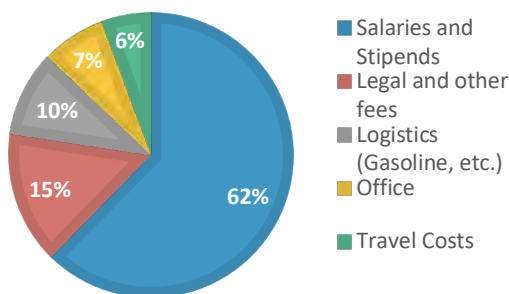
## MID & LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Highly motivated, and provided that we can attract sufficient funds, we will continue our activities in the Beqaa in spring and work on permanently establish our project in the region. We aspire on expanding our reach (>1000 participants), further develop our programs and continue to train hard with everyone who shares the passion of climbing.

As part of our long-term strategy, we intend to train local staff to take over the day-to-day management of our project from 2019.

## REQUIRED BUDGET

To run THE ROCK in 2018 and to establish it in Lebanon on sustainable grounds, we need an estimated 100'000 to 120'000 Swiss Francs.



The doubling of the budget compared to last year is the result of 1) a longer operation period in Lebanon, 2) higher salaries for well-trained professionals and 3) an inclusion of a salary for a project manager. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further details.

**WANTED: PARTNERS FOR 2018**

## EXIT STRATEGY

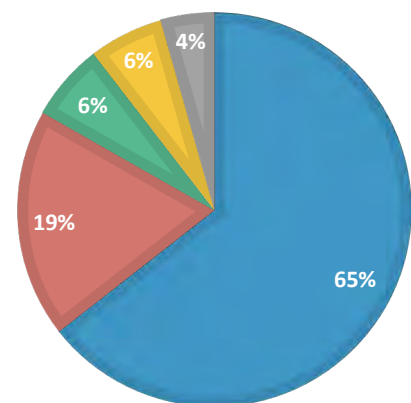
In the unfortunate event of insufficient funding, we might be forced to bring A ROLLING ROCK back to Switzerland.

However, under all circumstances, we aspire to build a permanent climbing structure in the Beqaa that will allow local youth to continue climbing. Furthermore – making the best out of such a situation – we would visit many refugee camps along the way and give climbing sessions.

## FINANCIALS

Our budget was spent as follows (in Swiss Francs):

<b>THE ROCK</b>	<b>33'791.63</b>
Construction Material	13'717.35
Equipment	6'330.88
Food Construction Team	119.75
Liability Insurance	802.35
Registration Fee	808.30
Vehicle VW T4	12'013.00
<b>Third Party Services</b>	<b>9'850.74</b>
ATA Carnet	123.00
Clearing Agent	1'125.62
Salam LADC	5'129.47
Shipment	3'472.65
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>3'326.79</b>
Transportation Lebanon	3'198.05
Transportation Switzerland	128.74
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>3'180.16</b>
Team Accommodation in Lebanon	3'180.16
<b>Travel Expenses</b>	<b>2'283.78</b>
Travel Costs (Flights)	2'218.58
Travel Costs (Train)	65.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>52'433.10</b>



## DONORS

The start of this project in 2017 has been made possible through the generous support of many private individuals, small and bigger businesses – THANK YOU!

Special thanks go to the following corporate donors:

- ★ Z Zurich Foundation – for matching all donations made to ClimbAID up to almost \$27'000
- ★ Scarpa – for donating 40 pairs of climbing shoes
- ★ peka-metall AG – for a donation of \$2'500
- ★ Fischer Reinach AG – for a donation of \$2'500
- ★ belop gmbh – for a donation of \$1'500
- ★ Minimum Bouldering – for being our host for the fundraiser in December 2016, shoe and climbing hold donations
- ★ Citywall + Climb1 + Illusion – for your valuable expertise and high-quality holds and volumes
- ★ Flathold – for a big donation of super nice climbing holds
- ★ Slacktivity – for donating a bunch of your awesome slacklines to the project

### WANTED: PARTNERS FOR 2018

ClimbAID is looking for financial support to continue the project in 2018.



---

## 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 ethnic 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

Competition for jobs, scarce resources, the troublesome history between Syria and Lebanon as well as political campaigning are contributing towards increased tensions between host, refugee, religious and political communities (UNDP 2017).

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 “unharmful” proportions of their personality.

---

### EDUCATION & COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Many children and teenagers do not have access to formal education, let alone recreational and sports or other stimulating activities. In the Beqaa, only 9% of Syrian refugee adolescents aged 15-17 have been enlisted in secondary school (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP 2016).

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

Youth in Lebanon often face challenges and a lack of life skills when they enter the job market. Amongst others, employers identify a lack of communication skills, self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence, respect for authorities, ability to work in teams, ownership and leadership skills (Global Partnership for Youth Employment 2013).

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, Fatic Climbing, Swiss National Radio and many more. You can find an overview of these on [www.climbaid.org/media-coverage](http://www.climbaid.org/media-coverage).

Furthermore, a short video clip and many more photos can be found on [www.climbaid.org/ROCK](http://www.climbaid.org/ROCK).

---

### CONTACT

Please do not hesitate to contact Beat Baggenstos, the founder of ClimbAID.

E-Mail: [Beat@ClimbAID.org](mailto:Beat@ClimbAID.org)

Phone: +41 79 794 75 53

+961 707 809 10

WhatsApp: +41 79 794 75 53





---

## SOURCES

- ★ ARK Group on behalf of UNDP: Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon: Wave I, July 2017
- ★ Global Partnership for Youth Employment: Preparing Youth for Success – An Analysis of Life Skills Training in the MENA Region, April 2013
- ★ Kowald & Zajetz: Therapeutisches Klettern: Anwendungsfelder in Psychotherapie und Pädagogik (Therapeutic Climbing: Application in Psychotherapy and Pedagogics), 2014
- ★ Luttenberger, Katharina & colleagues: Indoor rock climbing (bouldering) as a new treatment for depression: study design of a waitlist-controlled randomized group pilot study and the first results, BMC Psychiatry 2015
- ★ Schöffl VR & colleagues: Acute injury risk and severity in indoor climbing-a prospective analysis of 515,337 indoor climbing wall visits in 5 years, Wilderness & Environmental Medicine, 2013
- ★ Sport for Development: The Potential Value and Next Steps, 2013
- ★ UNDP Lebanon: The Burden of Scarce Opportunities: The Social Stability Context in Central and West Bekaa Conflict Analysis Report, April 2017
- ★ UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2016

---

## PHOTOS

All rights reserved by ClimbAID

- ★ Photos 1-4, 7, 10-11 by Beat Baggenstos
- ★ Photos 5-6, 12 by Lusse Cloutier
- ★ Photo 8 by Giulia Adagazza
- ★ Photo 9 by Marie-Raphaëlle LeBlond