

Left to right: Lina Nahhas, Flora Hegler and Johnny Kamnitsky



## DUBAI-BASED SOCIAL INITIATIVE THE SAMENESS PROJECT ON BRINGING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY TO THE CITY

**S**elfless, socially conscious and certainly determined, Lina Nahhas is inspirational in so many ways. Having packed in her impressive job as chief operations officer of the research company she founded after a life-changing trip to her native Palestine, Lina made immediate plans to start giving back to her community. Founding social initiative The Sameness Project in 2011 with only two members of staff, her dreams are now finally being realised with a larger team and scale of projects based in Dubai that help give back to the local community. The most successful of these has been 'Water For Workers', a project that sees volunteers travel across the UAE to give water and thanks to the many labourers who helped build Dubai. Other initiatives such as the 'Conversation Chair' and 'Soles & Stories' soon followed, each leaving their mark on the local landscape. Humbly chatting to HELLO! at their offices on Jumeirah Beach Road, the group and their founder Lina are keen to give us the 411 on the foundation.

**Lina, can you take us through your journey. What made you want to start the Sameness Project?**

"In 2008 I made my first visit to

Palestine and saw the real struggles people go through with my own eyes. Being a new mum at that time, I felt a profound sense of empathy towards all humans that are faced with any amount of fear or suffering, and viewed each one of them as once a child, just like my little girl, who has a mother always praying for their safety and their wellbeing. Arriving back in Dubai I had absolutely no idea how to go about developing an idea to contribute to a shared humanity, but knew that the mix needed to take on a funky, creative rhetoric and engage people in a way that wouldn't be seen as another standard charitable group. It had to generate an ongoing profound experience on many dimensions. Those were the thoughts that stirred themselves up to become the beginning of The Sameness Project."

**You were previously a successful chief operations officer. Do you ever miss corporate life?**

"No I don't miss corporate life at all; but that doesn't mean that I'm not full of gratitude for that time in my life, because it had its place and benefits. In my life stage today though, I feel that my work and energy need to be channeled into a bigger dream, of a more direct service

to my surrounding community and to the world."

**What are you working on for the upcoming Ramadan season?**

"We're working on an initiative called 'We've Got Your Back', which is about engaging with taxi drivers and providing them with a booklet of detailed stretches and exercises that they can perform to combat the physical stresses of sitting stationary for long periods of time, while encouraging long-term physical health and emotional well-being. Another project, called 'For God's Sake' which will bring together fasting Muslims and various other religions over an iftar dinner, will also be running through Ramadan; and of course, our online initiatives never stop!"

**A lot of your projects highlight the struggles of people working and living in Dubai. Would you like to take your message further?**

"Our main purpose, although it's happening by default, is not necessarily to highlight the struggles of those working in the UAE, nor is it focused on the 'underprivileged'. We all have our degrees of struggles and pains. These projects are simply aimed at erasing the lines that separate humans from themselves, from

others and from the world around, whatever those lines may look like. The idea of Sameness is something that is applicable to every single human being and that gives it a global scope. The initiative is based out of Dubai and, in the short space of time we have been running, the projects have been run organically in this city, but every project is transferable to other cities and other sites. 'The Conversation Chair' has had a lot of interest from people around the world and towards the end of the year the concept will be transplanted to Auckland, New Zealand, and Berlin, Germany, which is very exciting."

**What can people do to help?**

"Get involved in our projects by checking under 'action stations' on our website where we list all our projects with ways people can engage in them. Most importantly, spreading the word on how corporates can be involved in our collective, which is a limited number of no more than 20 companies, of all different sizes, who can contribute a very nominal amount every year to breathe life into this social initiative." **H**

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