

Capturing humanity with photos

Modelled after the photoblog 'Humans of New York', a recent exhibition conducted at the Academy featured street portraits and interviews collected from faculty, students, administrative and support staff.

With the intention of creating connections between the members of the Aga Khan Academy community, 22 students of class VIII were challenged to design and develop a project that represented human diversity and they chose to create a photojournalism exhibition.

This student-led project, guided by Teacher Preparation Programme intern Afeera Maryam and design faculty Michelle Massaro and inspired by Brandon Stanton's popular social media site, "Humans of New York", invited people to share a part of themselves, their ideas, challenges, a story or just a moment of their day with the goal of showing diversity and fostering empathy.

To develop their version, students needed to take on many roles including those of journalist, photographer,

translator, editor and event manager. They conducted interviews and recorded conversations with "humans" at the academy, including faculty, support staff, hospitality, maintenance, student athletes, artistes and academics. They transcribed an excerpt from each of the recordings to be displayed along with a candid photo they snapped of the person interviewed.

They captured over 100 different people, eventually selecting 70 to be part of the end product.

The connections that the students made and shared with the school community was extended to visiting Aga Khan Academy network leadership and parents on October 5-6th at their "Humans of the Aga Khan Academy Exhibition". The display visibly celebrated the diversity of some very vibrant people. The photographs, stories, project documentation and beautiful décor, arranged by the students under the guidance of their teachers received a positive response.

While this project by the students of class VIII has not yet gained the audience of 20 million of Stanton's orig-

inal, their exhibition was connected across the globe to a school in St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada.

In order to do this, the process was documented and the students invited a class of Canadian secondary school students to take part in their own version of the project and both groups will be sharing their experience through a Skype call in November 2017. This is seen as an opportunity to create connections between people, foster understanding and spark conversation.

Reflecting on the process, students found that this project helped them become more confident in conversing with new people and be more empathetic to others. When asked what skills they saw grow through the course of this project, the consensus was "patience, organisation and understanding".

The class VIII students have also submitted a video of their exhibition story to the 'Design for Change School challenge'.

**Michelle Massaro, faculty,
The Aga Khan Academy Hyderabad**

