

Basim Albeladi: Advocating for Mental Health in Saudi Arabia

RAMA CHAKAKI: Our guest today is global innovator Basim Albeladi. Basim is an entrepreneur and tech enthusiast who is trying to destigmatize mental health in a society that deems it taboo. Years ago, he himself was struggling to find mental health support, and so came his solution, Labyah - a mobile app that anonymously connects individuals looking for treatment with licensed therapists.

BASIM ALBELADI: We are here to support you, to guide you, to be with you in the journey of hope.

RAMA CHAKAKI: Three years into his journey, Basim received a \$100,000 innovation grant from Expo Live.

Today on the show we'll hear from Basim about the story of Labyah and what this fund means for the future of his company.

I'm Rama Chakaki, and you're listening to Innovate with Purpose, the official podcast of Expo Live, an innovation programme by Expo 2020 Dubai.

INTRO STING

BASIM ALBELADI: My name is Basim Albeladi, founder and CEO of Labyah app. I have an MBA in entrepreneurship. My background is engineering, but right now I'm an advocate of mental health and I'm working day and night to share awareness about mental support and why it is really important for everyone in this life.

MUSIC

BASIM ALBELADI: Labyah is a mobile app that connect you with a qualified therapist immediately and in private. We provide a one-to-one session, we provide a group therapy, we also provide webinars, workshops about wellbeing and mental health, we also create content about mental health and how you can deal with it.

RAMA CHAKAKI: The seeds of Labyah were planted when Basim was pursuing his MBA at Babson College in Massachusetts.

BASIM ALBELADI: In 2015, 2016, I was there in the States, in the United States. I was studying my master's degree over there. Unfortunately, I have a tough and a big accident. I went to the hospital. I was in the ICU for almost a month. I was away from my family. I was sick, alone in the hospital. That accident was a dramatic change in my life, to be honest. I was really stuck. I didn't know what to do. What should I work on? What's next? And then I decided to go back to my home to Saudi Arabia, to my family, and the challenge was still there and I was not in a good wellbeing.

I am from Medina and here in Medina, there was not much mental health support.

However, I was in contact with my doctor who was with me there in the hospital. And because of my doctor support, my family support as well, I can say, came back to life and I decided, I think here is a problem and we can do something for that.

How could we find a good therapist for everyone who needs help? Is it only me? Or there is other people who are suffering the same time? Uh, Are they alone? Are they, uh, have the willing to talk about their challenges? Are they willing to go to the hospital or to the

clinic? How could I know if there is, uh, a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist in my city or in my area? How do I know if he is a good doctor or not?

RAMA CHAKAKI: So 2016 was the start, but then in 2018 you launched a beta version and a year later you went live. How do you measure impact, and can you tell us about some of the milestones of these stages?

BASIM ALBELADI: Labyah is a social startup. So impact is one of our main things since we started.

Our main KPI is number of sessions. How many sessions we provide monthly and yearly. Also, number of users, uh, signed up with us. And also how many doctors do we have and number of minutes that we provided.

By the end of September, we have over 300,000 of signed up users in Labyah. We have provided more than 75,000 of sessions. We have over 250 therapists and doctors on our app. Also the amazing number that we have achieved this year is number of minutes, number of counseling minutes. Last year in 2020, we have provided over 1 million minutes of counseling. But this year in only nine months, we have provided over 3 million minutes of counseling.

We can help everyone online. Telemedicine is applicable to solve this issue. Mental health support online is the same like the physical clinic or better for some cases. Yes, we can reach everyone in his room anytime and anywhere.

RAMA CHAKAKI: You're working in an environment that is still reluctant to discuss mental health issues openly. I'm curious, how have these challenges played out?

BASIM ALBELADI: The journey in Labyah or any startup is not that easy, to be honest, you are here to prove for yourself, for everyone that our solution is applicable.

We have limited resources in funding, time, human resource, these are some of the challenges, but the main one is obtaining the telemedicine licenses was one of the biggest challenges, you know, before COVID, telemedicine was not that normal practice. It was not that easy. Also, hiring the doctors, the therapists, it was not easy. Their practice was not online practice. They have been practice and study to be offline in the clinic. So to convince them to go online also, uh, a big challenge.

The other thing is the funding, convince also investors for the mental health, uh, application is not that easy. You have to convince them about the problem itself, the market size is big, and, uh, to convince them about your self and your team that you can make it and become a successful start up.

And the last thing is the awareness about the mental health problem. The society itself is still not aware about the problem itself, how it is huge and how it really affected our daily life here in Saudi Arabia.

RAMA CHAKAKI: And just to put that into context, the Department of Mental Health at King Saud Medical City reports that 34% of people in Saudi Arabia suffer from mental health issues. That's more than 11 million people.

RAMA CHAKAKI: With the grant from Expo Live, Labyah can continue to service those who are seeking help.

BASIM ALBELADI: I think gathering 120 startups have an impacted solutions for their society for the globe is really important. Right now. I have a friend for example, is working in a social startup in Japan, the other one in New Zealand, the third one in Senegal in Africa

or South Africa. And the fourth one in the United States. So all of them have similar goals to impact their society, to make the change. This network is really unique.

And the second thing that I have benefited from Expo Live was, the mentors they have. They have a lot of mentors from everywhere to help us. So the support that we get what's really amazing.

And the last, but not the least is the fund itself. We have got a hundred thousand dollar grant fund without any equity. That fund helped us to accelerate our work and to make the change as well.

MUSIC

BASIM ALBELADI: Thank you, Expo Live, I'm really glad to be part of this journey in Expo. And we hope that together, we can make it and help not only thousands of people, but millions of them. I believe they need us.

RAMA CHAKAKI: And thanks to you Bassim.

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