# Help That Respected Her Wishes



مدارج



In the last hour of the volunteer session, sixteen-year-old Sarah stayed beside the table in the school activity room. The girls on the volunteer team were checking a poster they had made to raise support for their neighbour Amal. Sarah tilted the sheet toward the light. Part of an electricity bill was visible at the bottom. The street and house number were at the top. The poster had not gone out, but a photo of it was ready on a teammate's phone. Sarah imagined the bill on a noticeboard in the neighbourhood. People could recognise the house before Amal even knew what the team had made.

Layla, Sarah's eighteen-year-old sister, came in with their forty-two-year-old mother. Sarah slid the sheet toward them on the side of the table away from the door. "Remember when Amal said the bill was worrying her? She didn't say she wanted anyone to see it." Layla looked at the phone and asked their teammate to hold off sending the image. "She told

me she wanted to look into the bill," their mother said. "I don't know whether she wants help with money at all." Sarah folded the sheet over the address.

"What shall we tell the team waiting for the poster?" their teammate asked. "That there's a question we haven't asked," Sarah replied. She asked her mother to call Amal at a convenient time and first see whether she would welcome a short visit. The girls left the amount and the collection plan undecided. Layla packed her design supplies. Before leaving the room, Sarah wrote a question in her notebook. "What kind of help would you like, Amal?"

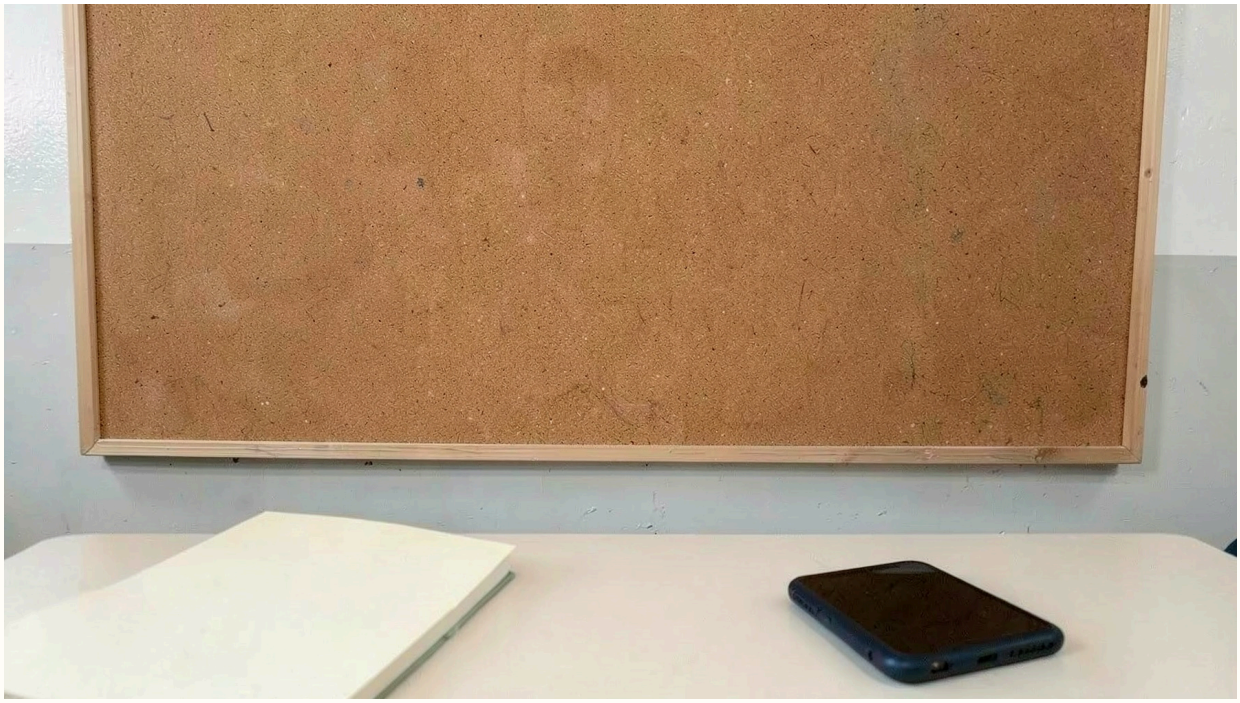


That evening Sarah walked to their neighbour Amal's house with her mother and Layla. Amal was forty-seven and had chosen the time herself. The folded poster was still in Sarah's bag. When Amal opened

the door, Sarah rested her hand on the zip for a moment, then let it go. She had rehearsed a long explanation, but Amal handed her a glass of water and simply asked what had brought her over.

Sarah told her that the volunteer team had thought about making a poster to ask for help and that the draft included details from the bill. She took it out, handed it to Amal and explained that the team hadn't shared it. Amal read the first line, then turned the sheet over on the table. She wanted no poster, no picture and no story about her going around the neighbourhood, even if they left out her name. Sarah took a moment to answer. At the volunteer table, leaving out the name had seemed like a solution.

Then Amal said there were two items on the bill she wanted to ask about. She had tried to get both questions straight, but when she reached the counter she always remembered one and forgot the other. Could they help her write them down and check which office she should visit? Sarah's mother asked whether she would rather keep the bill with her. Amal drew it closer and said yes. Layla wrote down the one thing Amal had asked her to check, where to take the questions, and closed her notebook. Before they left, Sarah asked what she could tell the team. Amal thought for a moment. They only needed to know that the poster wouldn't go up.



The next day Sarah's teammate was back at the volunteer table, switching between the poster on her phone and the message she had prepared to send with it. Sarah sat opposite her and said the poster wouldn't go up. Another girl asked if they could still use the work they'd spent the last hour of the session doing. She pointed to the top of the sheet and suggested blurring the name. Sarah turned it face down and asked whether she would recognise her own house in a picture without her name on it. The girl looked at the little map she'd added and took her hand off the paper.

Her teammate asked how the visit had gone. Sarah said she had permission to tell them only about the decision on the poster. She waited for another question, but her teammate opened the unsent message and removed the attachment. Together they checked the shared copy and the print draft. One still showed the street name. In the other,

the corner of the bill was visible even after cropping. The team removed the two drafts from their shared workspace, and Sarah took the folded sheet so she could dispose of it privately.

The space on the noticeboard stayed empty. The teammate suggested writing down a question for whoever joined them next time. In the team notebook, Sarah's friend wrote a question that could fit any request for help. What would the person asking like us to do? Sarah liked how the question made sense on its own. After they gathered their pens, she told Layla she'd check where to take the questions with their mother before the next visit. Amal could write the questions herself.



On their next visit Sarah put a blank sheet and a pen on the table. Amal kept the bill in her hands. She'd folded it so she could see the two items she wanted to ask about. She pointed to the first without handing anyone the bill. She began a long question, then stopped halfway across

the line. Sarah's mother asked what she hoped to know by the time she left the office. Amal thought for a moment, crossed out the first sentence and wrote, "How can I check the reading this charge is based on?"

Amal read the second line under her breath. She wanted to understand why one item was different from the one on her previous bill. She put it in her own words and numbered both questions so she could find them easily at the counter. Sarah took a note out of her bag that her mother had helped her prepare. It had the enquiries number and an office address from the utility's website. Sarah showed Amal both and asked which she preferred. Amal wanted to start with a call. Sarah slid the phone towards her and read out the number when she asked.

Amal made the call herself. Sarah and her mother waited while she asked when she could bring her questions to the office. The clerk on the phone offered a time the next morning. Amal asked if she could come in the afternoon instead. She wrote down the time they agreed on and read it back. Then she slipped the bill into its envelope and tucked her questions in beside it. Both charges still needed an explanation. She had the two questions in the words she wanted to use.



When Sarah saw Amal the next evening, she had her notebook with her as usual. She almost opened it to ask how things had gone at the office, but Amal spoke first. She'd read both questions from her sheet. The clerk had explained the second charge and put in a request to check the reading behind the first. She still had to wait for an answer. Amal said nothing about the amount or what she might do if the bill stayed the same. Sarah put her notebook away and they spent a few minutes talking about other things.

Before she left, Sarah asked whether Amal wanted anything while she waited. Amal knew where to ask about the request and could follow up if the time the clerk had mentioned passed. She asked Sarah to come by when they usually saw each other. By then, she could decide whether she

needed any more help. Sarah said she'd drop in and asked if Amal would like Layla to come too. Amal smiled. There was room for both of them, and she'd make tea.

At the volunteer meeting Sarah saw that her teammate had left an empty space next to the poster on their list. Could they cross it off? Sarah agreed. Together they checked that the message had no attachment and that the design was out of the shared folder. Her teammate kept the question she'd written in the team notebook and added a line for the next volunteers. First, find out what the person wants help with and what they're comfortable letting you do. Sarah read the line again and passed the book to the girl beside her. She understood it without asking whose story it was.



Before they left to see Amal, Sarah reached for her notebook, then left it on the shelf beside the keys. She and Layla walked to their neighbour's house as agreed. In the kitchen Sarah asked whether Amal wanted to go over her remaining questions or leave them for another day. Amal was still waiting for a reply. She'd marked the day to follow up on her calendar and would tell them next time if she needed help with another question. She asked Sarah to bring the cups to the table.

Sarah handed her a cup. Layla asked about the small plant Amal had put by the window. Amal showed them a new leaf. Sarah leaned in to see and noticed the envelope with the bill on a shelf nearby. She left it where it was and moved the plate of biscuits closer when Amal sat down again. Before the sisters went home, Amal offered Layla a cutting once the stem was stronger. Layla said she'd ask about it on their next visit.

The following week, a different request came to the volunteer table. A student wanted to borrow supplies to fix the cover of a book. Sarah set aside the roll of paper she’d started to unroll and pulled up a chair for her. She asked which supplies the student needed, then waited for an answer before opening the box.

**Reader activity** A classmate asks for help sorting papers and wants them to stay in their bag. Write three lines explaining what they need, what they’ve given you permission to do and one step you could take within that permission.