

WINTER STORY

By Gillian Southey, CWS communications coordinator.

THE WAR REFUSED TO LEAVE US

Like many of the Syrian women, Fatima has chosen not to have her photo taken for this story.

The journey to Jordan has been a story of transformation for Fatima. Six years ago, Fatima lived in a beautiful home in Syria with three rooms. She had hopes and dreams for her four children and her husband had work. Her days were busy looking after family.

At first, the fighting was far away and she could get on with normal life. But when the war came to her neighbourhood destroying her home, she turned into a survivor.

Her family is safe from the war, but stretching their tiny income is a challenge. Fatima is confident in the support she receives from CWS partner the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, to help her face the future.

One of more than 661,000 refugees in Jordan, she has learnt valuable new skills as a health trainer in their programme designed to meet the needs of other refugees. Importantly, Fatima has learned to organise the members to support each other and ask for help when someone needs it.

"Telling my story to you is a big change for me. Before I did not dare even to talk," Fatima says.

ESCAPE FROM THE WAR

"My suffering started from the moment I left my home," she says. She fled to her uncle's house in Homs in Syria. Days passed but she could not return. After seven months, she received a phone call from her father that made her weep. He was sick with cancer and wanted to see Fatima but she could not go.

Trish Murray visited students at the Dbayeh school run by DSPR Lebanon for Syrian refugees not ready for the local school. At first the school followed the Syrian curriculum as the parents thought they would go home soon. To get accreditation they now follow the Lebanese curriculum. DSPR runs a tutoring programme after school for those needing extra help and encouragement. Photo: Trish Murray



A young preschooler enjoys classes at the Sabra Centre in Lebanon. Many refugee children carry memories of the war. DSPR's programmes include psychosocial support for the traumatised children. Photo: ACT Alliance/P. Jeffrey.

The fighting came closer, destroying her uncle's house. The family moved to another uncle in Damascus. Ten people crowded into its one room with a kitchen and toilet. "The war refused to leave us," Fatima says. Eventually 50 family members slept inside and outside the house. Even with food, blankets and children's clothes from the Red Crescent, life was hard. When her husband was called up to serve in the Syrian army, they decided Fatima should take their four children and sick father to Jordan.

The family went to Za'atari camp, set up for refugees and now home to 80,000 Syrians. "Life at the camp was hell on earth. No one could sleep. It was a prison that nobody could leave," she says. After three months, she gained permission for her father to receive medical treatment outside the camp. Joined by her husband who had escaped from Syria, the family went to the Talbieh area where the United Nations Relief and Works Agency had set up a camp in 1968 for people displaced by the Arab-Israeli War.



DSPR Jordan organises free medical days for refugee families and trains women to start their own businesses. Photo: DSPR Jordan

In the Souf Camp, mothers meet to discuss ways to improve their daughter's education with DSPR Jordan, in preparation for a meeting with the teachers. Photo: DSPR Jordan

One day, a group of Syrian women appeared at their door. Curious, Fatima invited them inside. Volunteers for DSPR Jordan, they were conducting a door-to-door survey. Knowing her family needed more help to survive, she invited them in. The women asked her about her family, whether the children were in school, needed healthcare, extra food, rent assistance or other support.

Curious, Fatima asked more – at home women would not go into a stranger's home. "I then decided to volunteer so I could leave the house," she adds. At first her husband and children said no but she persisted. On the day she had planned to go to the DSPR Centre, her father passed away but this did not stop her from calling the supervisor to arrange another meeting.

"I OWN MYSELF NOW"

"My life started to change from the first day that I visited the centre. I met my new family who has supported me, stood with me, and I know will never leave me behind. I attended workshops learning skills that I had never experienced in my life. I became more open. In time I became a health trainer and discovered the courage to stand up in front of people.

"My children started to visit the centre, attending workshops on personal hygiene, open days and picnics. They even started to learn English for free. My six year old son Ahmed who would never go anywhere without me beside him, is now coming to the centre himself.

"What I have learnt from DSPR has given my family a new

start. We have received food and non-food items, medical treatment and a dignity kit with everything a woman needs."

"The most important thing that has happened to me is that I own myself now. I argue with people who do not agree with me. Before I had the idea that only a husband can support his family, but now I can be beside him and support him. Thanks to DSPR, I am not afraid of anything now. I can read books and use the internet to prepare workshops."

PARTICIPATORY MODEL FOR DSPR JORDAN

DSPR Jordan works alongside the refugee communities, through a network of women's committees. Beginning work with Palestinian refugees who first arrived in 1948, they integrate the different communities in order to minimize tensions over limited resources. The local committees are made up of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. With support from DSPR, they decide on a programme. DSPR trains the women who then run workshops for a smaller group.

OPERATION REFUGEE

In June, 140 New Zealanders lived on refugee rations and raised \$55,000 from friends, family and colleagues. Thanks to their dedication more Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have food, medical care, education and support. No one wants to live in fear.

Please support the Winter Appeal so we can make every refugee feel welcome.



YES, I WANT TO MAKE SURE REFUGEES HAVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED.

Name

Address

City

Postcode Donations of \$5 and over are tax deductible

Telephone ()

Email

I enclose: ☐ \$35 ☐ \$87 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$.....

Direct deposit to: 06 0817 0318646 00

Particulars: Your Name

Code: Winter Appeal

Reference: Your CWS Supporter ID no.

Email your postal details to cws@cws.org.nz for a tax receipt.

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Diners ☐ Amex

Name on credit card

Signature Expiry date /

Card number

Christian World Service

National Office

PO Box 22652, Christchurch 8140. Ph: 03 366 9274 0800 74 73 72
cws@cws.org.nz www.cws.org.nz

Auckland office: (09) 5719150

CWS is a registered charity. #CC22288



WINTER 2017