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Summer Story

Nour enjoys fresh water with a new friend. Credit: DSPR Lebanon

MY DREAM IS TO TEACH

BY GILLIAN SOUTHEY | CWS COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR.

The Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees Lebanon has run the Sabra Centre across the road from the Shatila Refugee Camp since 1950, one year after the camp was founded. The Centre has proved an oasis for generations of Palestinians who have found community support, emergency help and educational opportunities through its programmes. Pushed from their homes during the Nakba or Catastrophe, the Palestinian residents have been able to uphold their dignity and culture for fifty years.

Apartment blocks tower over the narrow streets of the Sabra-Shatila neighbourhood. Unable to expand outwards, the residents must build upward. Twisted power lines fill the air while the ground is covered in litter. There is nowhere for children to play and the adults who may be third or fourth generation refugees have few opportunities for work. Always hospitable, they have made room for Syrians who fled the war that has crippled their homeland for nearly nine years. Nour and her mother are two of those refugees.

SYLVIA HADDAD, DIRECTOR OF DSPR LEBANON TELLS HER STORY:

Aida Taha, the director of the Sabra Centre, was the first to notice the silent 13-year-old's deep sad eyes. Nour wouldn't look or talk to anyone. She soon found out why. The young refugee girl from Idlib in northern Syria had seen her beloved father killed in front of her eyes, a scene she will never forget.

Nour and her mother had fled to Lebanon with very little. Someone told them about the Centre. Desperate for food,



"Music is the language of love and peace," says Osama who fled Syria without his instruments. Credit: DSPR Lebanon

they showed up on its doorstep. They were welcomed and immediately given basic food and sanitary items. Nour's mother began attending the programmes for women run by other refugees.

Nour started the "Children on the Go", a special class for refugee children struggling in the new school environment. Like many Syrian children she had missed out on primary schooling in Syria because of the conflict.

"I couldn't go to school," she explained. "It was too dangerous in my village. Armed men were everywhere. People were being killed all the time. So I just stayed home with my mother."

Unfortunately, her mother was illiterate and couldn't homeschool her daughter. Despite the battles outside their home, the family somehow managed to survive. That is, until Nour's father was killed.

Nour and her mother joined the Centre's literacy programmes. In the class Nour learned to read, write and do maths and science. She participated in traditional



Nour enjoys the artistic programme for traumatised children.
Credit: DSPR Lebanon



Osama was overjoyed when DSPR gave him musical instruments and the opportunity to teach young refugees. Credit: DSPR Lebanon

dancing, psychosocial activities, and life skills training. She enrolled in a special dance and 'free artistic expression' programme for traumatised children.

At first, Nour's drawings expressed the misery of war and death and she would only use black and white crayons. But a few weeks later, colour began to creep into her drawings and soon she stopped sketching images of horrors.

Slowly but surely, Nour began to smile. Her deep sad eyes began to twinkle. "I love to draw," she said shyly. "And I love to dance. But mostly, I love to read."

The staff were thrilled with her progress only to find that her mother was working on giving her away in marriage. Her mother, like all Syrian refugees in Lebanon, believed

that marriage is better for girls at an early age for both economic and social reasons. Nour was only fourteen!

As soon as they heard this news, staff set to work. They began weekly sessions for all the women focusing on the negative effects of early marriage on a girl's physical, mental and social health, and allowing for the sharing of perspectives.

Fortunately staff were able to convince her mother that Nour had the right to be a child and that education would give her a better future. Nour is an ever smiling girl. She is good in her lessons and is a good Dabkeh dancer. She has shown talent in art and likes to help others and teach when she can.

"My dream," said Nour, now 15 and smiling widely, "is to become a teacher. And if I can't get a certificate to become a certified teacher, then I will become a tutor."

Her eyes sparkled. Life for her had just begun."

Going to school helps children like Nour learn vital skills and restores their confidence. Like children everywhere, they want to belong and be part of their community.

Your support will give refugee children the education that is their right. It will save girls from early marriage and provide refugee families options in an uncertain world. Please support the Summer Appeal.

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