

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Children in a Time of War



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Of the more than 10.4 million refugees almost half are children, according to the U.N. Refugee Agency. Whether they are classified as refugees, internally displaced, asylum-seekers or stateless, children have rights to an education, safety, healthy conditions and non-discrimination.



LINDA DAVIDSON

Post reporters cover many countries where turmoil and wars are taking place. They provide the current situation and perspective in words and images. In addition, *The Post's* international correspondents supply eyewitness stories of the people they meet. In "Refuge: 18 Stories of the Syrian Exodus," *Post* photographer Linda Davidson and foreign correspondent Kevin Sullivan visited Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to report on the Syrian refugee crisis, one of the largest forced migrations of people since World War II.

The highest number of people to have fled their homes recently come from Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Somalia. But adults and children have fled from many other countries. Students are encouraged to read and research the situations, problems and conflicts; locate the countries and refugee camps on maps and get acquainted through the organizations that are seeking to provide the rights of children in a time of war.

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Lebanon ill-equipped to handle mental-health issues of Syrian refugee children

BY KAREEM SHAHEEN

• Originally Published Sept. 27, 2014

BEIRUT — After Amira’s two uncles were killed in the siege of the Syrian city of Qusayr, she lost the ability to walk.

The 5-year-old had watched an uncle bleed to death, seen her home shattered by shells, had her arm struck by burning shrapnel. The psychological toll was too much and she stopped eating. Her muscles atrophied and her legs no longer were able to bear her meager weight.

“She saw a lot,” said Amira’s mother, who asked that her name and that of their family be withheld to freely discuss her daughter’s psychological condition.

After they fled to Lebanon, Amira’s mother would carry her daughter to schools where she met the staff members of a local non-governmental organization, Beyond Association, who arranged for Amira to get psychological care and treatment for her malnourishment. A month and a half after receiving medication and starting school, she began to walk again.

Amira’s case offers a glimpse into a devastating mental-health crisis that is taking hold among Syria’s refugee children, many of



HASAN SHAABAN

Syrian children and their mothers form a circle during a group therapy session in Beirut, Lebanon on September 18, 2014.

whom fled destruction at home into neighboring Lebanon, only to suffer the trauma of displacement — as well as exploitation, communal tensions and domestic violence.

The stress has left many with mental illnesses that include anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and developmental problems. Over half a million children have fled to Lebanon and four out of five of them are out of school. More than a million Syrian children in total have become refugees in Lebanon and in other countries.

The crisis is exacerbated by a lack of funding, awareness and

infrastructure for mental-health care in Lebanon and growing tensions with local communities as the Syrian war continues to bleed across the border, aid workers say.

“You are destroying a people beyond the destruction caused by chemical weapons,” said Bassem al-Faris, a Syrian doctor who fled to Lebanon late last year and now lives and works in Aرسال, a border town that has endured a massive refugee influx and briefly was taken over in August by militants loyal to the Islamic State and the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra.

There are more than 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees —

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children and adults — in Lebanon, a country of 4 million. Nearly half of them are younger than 17.

Lebanon does not have formal refugee camps like Jordan and Turkey. Many of the refugees live in informal tent settlements or among poor communities, competing for jobs and stretching Lebanon's infrastructure to the breaking point.

Refugees also have borne some of the blame for recent attacks here by militants who have beheaded two Lebanese soldiers and killed another held in captivity after the Aarsal fighting. Some of the refugees' tents have been burned.

"You can safely assume that the majority of the population coming from Syria have some form of distress," said Anthony MacDonald, the chief of child protection at UNICEF in Lebanon.

MacDonald said that children and adolescents experience a "re-trauma" when they arrive in Lebanon as a result of poverty, living conditions, bouts of violence and a lack of schooling that adds to tensions at home.

A survey of 1,100 Syrian youth conducted by Save the Children and published earlier this year found that 41 percent of Syrians in Lebanon between the ages of 15 and 24 have contemplated suicide. The figure is more than 50 percent for women in the same age group.

Psychologists and doctors who work with Syrian children here report symptoms of phobia, hysteria, night terrors and regression in development through bed-wetting.



EMRAH GUREL/AP

Syrian refugee children who fled violence in Kobane play outside their tents in a camp in the border town of Suruc, Turkey. Kurds drive Islamic State fighters from strategic town of Kobane.

Some are still in a "survivalist" mode and are likely to exhibit symptoms later on in life, when the crisis subsides, medical professionals say.

"The sad thing is the legacy of early childhood trauma is really lasting," said Alaa Hijazi, a psychologist at the American University of Beirut who worked with American war veterans and Iraqi refugees who survived torture. "The framework through which people view the world shatters for a lot of people after trauma."

Refugees and aid workers say donors focus on providing immediate shelter and food assistance while neglecting mental support.

Most aid organizations here

provide what they describe as "psychosocial support" for youth who have been displaced from Syria, including activities and awareness programs aimed at highlighting issues of abuse and early marriage and teaching parents how to positively discipline their children. They offer accelerated learning programs, communal activities involving refugees and Lebanese families hosting them, and drama and art therapy.

They also have set up "child-friendly spaces" aimed at getting the children to relax and express themselves. The walls are adorned with artwork by Syrian children, and young aid workers organize play activities.

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BILAL HUSSEIN, FILE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Syrian refugee woman walks near the tents of a refugee camp in the eastern Lebanese border town of Arsal. Inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Syria's uprising began in March 2011 from the southern city of Daraa. It has since evolved into a civil war in which more than 220,000 people have been killed.

Children gather in little circles to tell their stories of how they fled Syria. At a recent gathering in a “child-friendly” space run by War Child Holland, children told stories of fleeing the shelling of their homes and of parents being maimed by shrapnel.

Two 14-year-olds, twins from the village of Quneitra on the border with Israel, barely held back tears as they described their mother slowly dying from lack of medicine during a siege of the town. They blamed

themselves for not insisting that she be evacuated earlier before the fighting reached their town.

The refugee crisis often leads to worse problems because the distress facing parents leads to tensions at home and an increase in domestic violence against children.

“This conflict is resulting in more problems, more delinquency, crimes, rape, all these kinds of crimes, and there is not enough funding to protect these children,” said Nadine Abdul Sater, the child

protection coordinator at War Child in Lebanon.

But most aid organizations lack the expertise and resources to provide one-on-one therapy and treatment to children who witnessed brutality and are suffering from distress in Lebanon, and have to refer them to specialized personnel, officials say.

And mental-health care is prohibitively expensive for the refugees who need it.

“There is no mental-health infrastructure in Lebanon,” said Zeina Hassan, the mental-health technical manager at International Medical Corps, one of the few aid groups that provides psychiatric and psychotherapist support to refugees in Lebanon.

A lack of “mental-health literacy” among aid workers and the lack of specialized mental care mean that developmental disorders go untreated.

“It’s just a very heartbreaking situation because it’s almost a lost generation, the children not in school and children with trauma,” said Nathaly Gattas, an area manager with International Medical Corps who has worked with trauma victims in Lebanon. “Everything should be a safe space for children, but unfortunately nothing is.”

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The most important soccer is not being played in Brazil but in refugee camps in Jordan

BY CURTIS S. RYAN

• Originally Published June 20, 2014

“There is no passing. That’s not a pass,” says Coach Marwan Azar, shaking his head. “I’ve never seen such stubbornness,” he complains in mock seriousness, even as his face breaks into an even broader grin. “But can I blame them? No. Not after all they’ve been through.” The Jordanian coach is talking about the dozens of under-13-year-old Syrian boys, engaged in a day-long soccer tournament in the Zaatari refugee camp. But there is no annoyance in his voice. No frown on his face. On the contrary, he is smiling as he says this. And his smile reaches his eyes. His voice and tone convey a warmth and tenderness toward these refugee children that he coaches every day.

And then it happens. After seven scoreless games. “THAT’s a pass. You see? Pass, cross, and GOOOOAAAL!” The boys careen away as the ball glides into the net, arms outstretched, joy on their faces. Joy — in one of the world’s largest refugee camps. Joy — amid displacement, poverty and despair. Joy, happiness, and laughter do not abound in Zaatari refugee camp. But when they do, it is sometimes on a football pitch.

Some of these boys are wearing jerseys of their favorite international



BY CURTIS RYAN

A soccer tournament in the Za’atari refugee camp, complete with donated Brazil jerseys.

teams and players, those represented in person at that very moment in Brazil for World Cup 2014. The contrast could not be greater, however: the World Cup features the world’s top soccer teams, featuring players who are often wealthy professional athletes, sometimes even with celebrity lifestyles. But here, in Zaatari, the story is not of salaried, adult professionals, but of impoverished refugee children. During the World Cup, the attention of global football fans remains focused on the stadiums of Brazil. But is it here, on dirt and gravel pitches with not a single blade of grass, where football may actually have far greater importance.

At least 100,000 Syrian refugees are housed in Zaatari camp, perhaps

65 percent of whom are children. And these are but a fraction of the overall numbers of Syrian refugees, a million of whom are now in Jordan, some in camps, but most in urban communities such as Irbid, Mafraq and Ramtha. The influx of refugees has placed hardship not only on the refugees but also on the host communities. Jordan is a poor country, with few resources, and was already undergoing its own economic crisis before the refugees began flowing across the border. The situation in northern Jordan has been difficult therefore for all concerned, but of course mostly for the refugees themselves.

So what does soccer or football have to do with this otherwise dire political, economic and social

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situation? Simply this: football is the key tool being used by the Asia Football Development Program (AFDP) to attempt to ameliorate the lives of the children in both refugee and host communities. It may not be as glamorous as the World Cup, but it is far more inspiring. And it is nothing less than an attempt to save Syrian refugee children in particular from becoming a lost generation.

Led by Prince Ali bin Hussein, FIFA vice president and head of the Jordan Football Association, the AFDP has taken a unique approach to dealing with the refugee crisis. Other NGO's provide schools, clinics and field hospitals and distribute foodstuffs and supplies. AFDP has augmented these important efforts with a project of its own, a project meant to bring football even to refugee camps. In my own recent conversation with Prince Ali, he was very clear on the point of AFDP efforts. "Food, water, and housing are all priorities," he said. "But kids also have to have something to do. And sport can build a community spirit. It's a test case of how you can use sport for good."

Prince Ali is a member of the ruling Hashemite family in the kingdom of Jordan. And frankly, he could be doing something else. But he chooses not to. As FIFA vice president for Asia, Prince Ali had already made his mark expanding soccer programs especially for women and girls across Asia. When the Syrian war and refugee crisis began, he and his team made sure that refugee children would not be forgotten in the organization's football outreach

efforts. "Football is not an elitist sport, it's a game for everyone," Prince Ali noted in our discussion. "And it can help promote the health and well-being of girls and boys."

Partnering with the UNHCR and PepsiCo, Prince Ali and the AFDP have sponsored a series of programs called "Kick for Hope." In addition to bringing soccer to the camp, the related "Spirit of Soccer" campaign has actually used football as a teaching tool to educate children about the risks of land mines, while also training them in soccer fundamentals. Importantly, all the AFDP efforts address both boys and girls. AFDP program has also brought coaches, two from Europe and three from Jordan, to train Syrians to be coaches themselves, who then in turn organize boys and girls in teams and leagues.

But soccer also requires fields. So the AFDP has partnered with the Football Association of Norway to construct eight soccer fields — for both Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities. One is in Ramtha, two are in Mafraq, one is in the small village of Sareeh, two are in the new Azraq refugee camp, and two are in the Zaatari refugee camp.

The results of these efforts are clear on the football fields themselves. By the thousands, boys and girls play, they learn skills, they laugh, and they get some semblance of community despite the loss of their homes and communities in Syria. And most importantly, their faces radiate joy. Joy, and perhaps also hope.

Friday, June 20 is World Refugee Day. And in northern Jordan, World

Refugee Day will be marked by — what else? Boys' and girls' soccer tournaments, bringing together local Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees. The political and economic circumstances may be difficult at present, but as Prince Ali notes on behalf of AFDP, soccer is a "common denominator" that bridges ethnicity, religion, class, nationality and circumstance. In northern Jordan, soccer is being used as a tool to help give children direction and hope, and to build — or rebuild — communities.

Soccer, or football, will not in any way stop the refugee crisis. It will not help hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees return home. And it will not stop the savagery of the Syrian civil war. But it can, at least, provide some respite to these children. And it can be used as a tool to teach other values too, as in the many AFDP programs. That, in fact, is the point of bringing football to the life of the refugee camps.

And today, right now, there is no soccer match in the world as important as those being played on the pitches of northern Jordan and on the gravel fields of Zaatari.

Curtis Ryan is associate professor of political science at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. The author thanks Merissa Khurma, without whom this article would not have been possible.

Before You Get Involved, Know the Issue

Read the News

Learn about local, national and international people and issues by reading *The Washington Post*. Check out the foreign bureaus and *The Post* correspondents (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/foreign-bureaus/>) who report from these bases.

Learn About the Political, Economic, Geographic and Social Situations

Is this a local issue that will allow you to be directly involved? What is at the core of the problem? Is this a complex situation that involves more than one government, organizations and groups? Are people internally displaced or refugees?

Get Acquainted with the Country or Region

Who are the leaders? Look at demographic profiles: economic, political, ethnic, religious and education factors. Population composition including internally displaced, migrant, asylum-seekers or stateless individuals and families.

Know the Numbers

How many people are impacted by the issue or situation? One or thousands? Who can provide accurate numbers?

Select a Situation, Issue or Person

Of the many needs and problems, which is the one that interests you the most?

Identify Reliable Sources

In addition to *The Post*'s foreign correspondents and local reporters, who know what is happening? The work of which organizations are covered? Who is quoted in articles? What organizations are respected for their humanitarian and social work?

Connect Your Interests and Skills to the Cause

Consider how you can best help to solve the problem. Can you knit items or build birdhouses? Help with social media communication or entertain shut-ins? Organize others to contribute?

Focus on an Aspect of the Whole Issue

Those who have made a difference advise: "There are lots of issues crying out for attention, but the sharper focus, the bigger your impact."

Talk to Those Whom You Want to Help

If possible, communicate with the person(s) who need help. Find a representative of an organization that is working in the same area or contact the reporter who covered the topic. Be sure your idea will help the right people.

Solve a Problem

News coverage informs the public about conditions and situations at home and abroad. Human experience spans luxurious spas to refugee camps, from new playgrounds to garbage dump workplaces, from collaborations to enmity. Form groups to read *Washington Post* articles to learn about the human condition in various parts of the globe.

When you have completed reading your group's article, answer four questions:

1. What is the problem revealed in the article?
2. Name the groups that are influenced by the problem.
3. What challenges must be faced to solve the problem?
4. What aspect of the larger problem interests you most?

For each aspect of the larger problem, brainstorm solutions. Use the chart for the ideas.

PROBLEM

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SOLUTION

PROBLEM

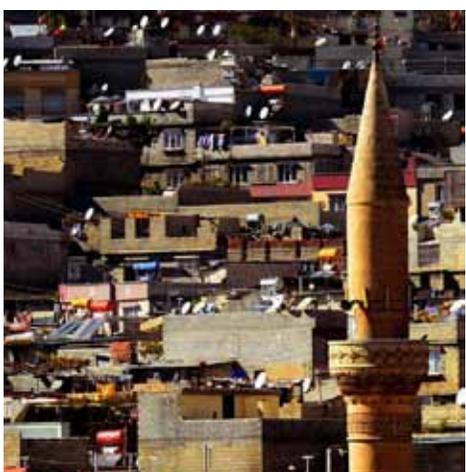
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SOLUTION

5. Summarize the article and present the problem your group identified and potential solutions.
6. As a class, discuss the problems and your ideas for a solution.
7. Are there any organizations or individuals working on this problem? Should you share your ideas with one of them? Could your class contribute to one of the solutions?
8. What motivates people to solve problems that are in their communities?
Why do people work to solve problems in other parts of the world?

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Refuge | *Linda Davidson, Washington Post photographer*



IN OCTOBER 2014, WASHINGTON POST PHOTOGRAPHER LINDA DAVIDSON AND FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT KEVIN SULLIVAN VISITED TURKEY, JORDAN AND LEBANON TO REPORT ON THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS, ONE OF THE LARGEST FORCED MIGRATIONS OF PEOPLE SINCE WORLD WAR II.