

The little inventor: a hidden talent in one of our schools

Amro Al-Masmoum, 10 years old, is a student at one of the JRS schools in Baalbek. A refugee from the western Syrian city of Homs, he and his family fled to Lebanon after the violence of the Syrian conflict drew closer to their home.

He was only three years old when he arrived to the city of Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley. Due to the hardship of moving the family to Lebanon, and their economically challenging circumstances, Amro's parents were not able to enroll him in school until they came across Al Noor 1, a JRS school that offers free education.

At the beginning of his academic journey, Amro encountered various learning difficulties. He was very shy and lacked any prior experience of fitting in at school and with other students.

Amro struggled with receiving poor grades in most subjects. When he was in the second grade, he began to focus his attention on drawing. His art tutor noticed his artistic accomplishments and began showcasing them to his classmates, the school administration, and other teachers.



One of Amro's creations: a cardboard car for waste sorting

Amro's mother shared that her son had a passion for drawing as a young child, and that during difficult times, he grew even more attached to his vibrant creations. The support that Amro received from the school team helped to foster his creativity. "Whenever he heard a word of admiration and praise from his tutors, he would return home full of confidence and new ideas that he seeks to implement," she said.

Amro's skills and abilities have grown significantly over time. He began to explore engineering inventions and applications with the help of his tutors. Amro is also very interested in learning about electrical circuitry from his father. And with the guidance of his mother, he started showcasing his skills and inventions on social media (TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook).

His techniques and inventions are remarkable for a twelve-year-old kid. He collects building materials from the garbage, a noteworthy practice in a time when there is so much waste.

Among his most notable inventions is a floor-cleaning robot made of discarded console boxes and paper that he can control, a cardboard car for waste sorting, and a battery-operated water mill.

His inventions made him well-known in school and amongst other students. "In all honesty," the mathematics tutor says, "I believe Amro Al-Masmoum is a brilliant engineer in spite of his limited resources".

Meanwhile, the principal of his school says, "Amro is one of our hidden treasures. By giving, we can help him achieve his dream, as well as our dream of being a school that is proud of its students. The little inventor of today will be great in the world of tomorrow."

Amro's future projects include attempting to solve the problem of power outages by obtaining electricity from sources that have yet to be revealed. The story of this young life, his dreams and his ambitions show the potential of youth when they are empowered.

It is this kind of accompaniment, the attentiveness to the abilities of each child, that we hope to provide for all of our students for them to be free to pursue their dreams.



One of Amro's creations: a boat powered by batteries.

We are using the student's real name in this story at his request. Please keep this in mind when sharing or publishing.

The power of a caring community: a student finds the confidence to speak

Muhammad* is a student at Dar al Hanan, a JRS school in Baalbek. It has never been easy for him to speak and express himself. He began pronouncing his first words at the age of two, right after his parents escaped a bomb attack at their home in the Syrian village of Mhin.

They fled to Karatayn, another Syrian city, yet violence followed them. One day, Mohammad's father had just returned home from getting bread for the family. While the rest of the family was taking refuge underground, they heard a colossal bomb. When they came out of their shelter, they saw their car destroyed and realized that their father had been killed. This tragedy deeply impacted Muhammad, and he started to stutter.

His mother described what happened next: "After his father passed away, we left for northern Syria and travelled to Jordan, where we stayed for seven months. Then we had to return to Syria to complete all of the necessary paperwork for my children's identification". Meanwhile, the children were transferred among various schools for refugees. Eventually in 2016, she managed to cross the Lebanese border and brought her three young children to Baalbek without any external help.

They currently share a three-room home in Baalbek with three families who are relatives. According to his mother, Muhammad struggled with all that occurred and started stuttering more often, especially when feeling angry.

Muhammad enrolled at Dar al Hanan school in 2019 and started his learning experience in Kindergarten Level 3. He is currently in third grade.



Muhammad playing at JRS school (DAH).

When he started school, he was shy and hesitant to participate in activities such as reading in class. He was insecure about his abilities and constantly afraid of being bullied.

"Muhammad is a sweet student who struggled with social interactions", his English tutor says, "he was bullied by some of his classmates. They used to say: Faster, Muhammad! Hurry up! You cannot speak at all! Your tongue is just like a turtle."

The school's social worker found out that he was depressed and lonely. However, through hard work, awareness sessions, and collaboration among his mother, tutors, the school principal and JRS staff, Muhammad started to regain his confidence and other students began to accept him as he is.

"At Dar Al Hanan School, we collaborate as a team to disseminate positivism and acceptance of everyone for who they are", the social worker said. She added: "Together, we did awareness-raising sessions about bullying, gave him daily encouragement, and followed up with his mother in order to assist him".

The school staff also watched over him during breaks to ensure that he was having fun with his peers and provided him with opportunities to express himself.

Muhammad's academic performance improved from good grades to very good grades as a result of the close care and attention he received. He is now much more at ease, self-assured, and knows how to correctly manage his stuttering. He is also the first student in class to raise his hand to participate, read, and freely share his ideas.

This is only one of countless stories of refugee children, and it serves as a reminder that any child can thrive when given the opportunity to belong to a caring community.

This story comes to a moving conclusion with these words from the school's principal: "Muhammad has changed since then; he is a new person. Nothing is more inspiring than seeing him raise his hand to speak as we pass by his class daily. I hope we can always find ways to serve, advocate and accompany our students."



Muhammad pursuing his academic education.

**Name has been changed to protect privacy.*

A 6-year-old boy wants to realize his dreams through education and learning

Tarek* is a 6-year-old who was born in Lebanon in 2016. Ten years ago, his family fled from Latakia, Syria, and settled in Nahr Ibrahim, Lebanon. He is the youngest member of the family and the only brother of three sisters.

His parents separated when he was younger, and he grew up with a single mother. He was not having a stable childhood and used to spend most of the time with his mother selling vegetables at the market. His 17-year-old sister was also taking care of him sometimes. When asked about his relationship with his older sister, Tarek replied, "She is everything to me, she is like my mother," And his sister added, "Tarek gave me the opportunity to experience the feeling of motherhood".

His mother's frequent absences from home due to her lengthy work hours and the family's poor living circumstances presented numerous difficulties and risks.

Enrollment in JRS Jbeil

His three sisters had the opportunity to enroll in JRS Lebanon educational programs, one as a KG3 student in 2016 and the other two as LS grade 3 students in 2019. His mother insisted on her kids completing their education despite all the challenges that they faced.



Tarek, a grade one student, attending the JRS learning support program in the morning.

The experience of her daughter's participation in JRS Jbeil convinced her that JRS does not exclude anyone when providing academic, psychological, social, and other services. Most importantly, as a parent, she felt that she could respect and trust JRS staff with the care of her children, she felt that she is also part of the JRS community.

Therefore, she didn't hesitate to register her son Tarek in the early childhood education program in 2020 and re-register him in the learning support program in 2021 and 2022.

"JRS Lebanon contributed to the development of my daughters' personality, self-confidence, and talents, and then it was Tarek's turn," the mother said in a conversation. "Despite the distance and high cost of transportation", she continued, "I know that Tarek, like his sisters, would benefit a lot from studying at JRS".

Tarek spends the mornings at the Nicolas Kluiters Centre (NKC) in the JRS learning support program and the afternoons at a nearby public school in Jbeil. The purpose of the learning support program is to help children in public schools improve their language and do their homework. Additionally, it offers extracurricular educational programs to support students' academic success.

Learning difficulties

Tarek experienced a variety of learning difficulties while pursuing his education online during the Covid-19 pandemic. His sister assisted him with the online lessons during the distance learning phase, when he developed his language abilities, and improved his listening and communication skills.

Tarek initially struggled to solve the worksheets remotely, but as his sister noted, "We used to submit anything he didn't understand to his teacher, and she used to answer everything and re-explain". He was spending all of his time on the phone, and everyone at home was confused about what should be done. As a result, the mother requested that he attends counselling sessions with a social worker, in which he received the appropriate care.

Following the completion of the Early Childhood Education certificate in 2021, Tarek continued with JRS via the Learning Support program, where he participated in distance learning groups until the end of February 2022. When JRS switched to face-to-face learning on March 1, 2022, Tarek was happier, but his teachers noticed some troublesome issues. "We discovered that Tarek's social skills were unstable - he had no friends and resorted to violence to defend himself. [We realized] that this was because he was being bullied, mocked, and abused at the public school", according to the school principal Eliana Harb.



Tarek enjoying the numerous activities at JRS Jbeil (NKC).

He has been refusing to attend public school, preferring to spend more time at JRS Jbeil. "I wish they would love me as much as you do here and that they wouldn't expel me from class. You never yell at us. In the public school, the boys always beat me, and we spent our time outside of class sitting on the road."

Educational and psychosocial support

While JRS Lebanon could not influence the conditions at the public school, a team of JRS staff including his teacher, the social worker, and several members of the administration, decided to help Tarek develop skills during his time at learning support. They integrated him into classroom and extra-curricular activities and entrusted him with responsibilities such as

helping kids to line up and shadowing the teacher. They helped him also develop his talents, including football and drawing.

Furthermore, they encouraged him to talk to the social worker and psychologist if he was ever harassed or felt uncomfortable. Sahar Haidar Ahmad, the social worker at JRS Jbeil, met with him several times to go over classroom rules and regulations, bullying, and behavioral skills using stories and drawing exercises. Following his sessions with the social worker, Tarek felt better, and his behavior in class and with his friends also improved. Tarek once told her, "I always look forward to talking to you Miss Sahar".



During a session with the social worker.

Tarek found that JRS school fosters positive relationships and respect, offers protection and a high-quality education, and friendship with others. He shared that JRS helped him to advance academically and socially. His sister said, "The whole family is proud of Tarek's progress".

One of Tarek's interests is swimming, and he enjoys going to the sea because it is limitless, just like his aspirations for the future. Tarek wants to join the police force so he can defend his family and his neighborhood from crime and corruption.

These instances once more demonstrate the importance of giving kids a secure environment in which they can receive a high-quality education for them to succeed in the future. We are constantly committed to accompanying, serving, and advocating in order to accomplish this noble goal.

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

The Power of Education to Combat Child Labor

Moe*, a 10-year-old boy and his family fled Syria to Lebanon ten years ago following the outbreak of the conflict. He was a newborn baby when they arrived in Jbeil.

Moe joined JRS Jbeil in 2019 and is currently a third-grade student today. Moe attends the JRS learning support program at Nicolas Kluiters Centre (NKC) in the morning and a local public school in Jbeil in the afternoon.

The JRS learning support program is designed to provide language and homework assistance to kids registered in public schools, as well as other educational activities to help the students succeed in school.

Moe is one of many children who, for a variety of reasons, had to flee his home country to seek safety. He had to overcome numerous obstacles, particularly because he belongs to the generation of distance learners. He was both working and learning remotely during the mandatory quarantine, implemented by the Lebanese government due to the outbreak of COVID-19.



While working in a supermarket with adults, he was subject to numerous forms of harassment, the most serious of which was an attempt for the adults to persuade him to drop out of school and work full time... But his mother's persistence, as well as the administration's and social worker's support prevented this from happening.

His previous work experience in supermarkets, coffee shops, and sewing encouraged him to study harder and to complete his education as to not need to work in these conditions.

"Without learning, I can't accomplish anything", Moe stated. Building positive relationships, earning respect, feeling safe, and receiving a high-quality education are his favourite parts of school.

His life at home is not easier, "I wish my sister could hear and speak, I wish I could acquire a bike, and I wish to complete my education at university", he says.



His younger sister, Lamia*, who is now four years old, was born with hearing difficulties. She is now able to use about 30% of her hearing abilities due to medical aid and provided equipment. Screaming or expressive motions are the only ways she can express herself, and the medical treatment is taking a long time.

Moe's sister situation has a significant impact on him. He remains depressed because he attempts to play and spend time with her, but she does not respond to him, which makes him feel that he is unable to communicate with her as he wishes. He is also impacted by his mother's situation, as she travels between hospitals in an attempt to secure the required care.

Moe wishes to assist in through providing support for the treatment for his sister, which is constantly on his mind.

In the future, he aspires to be a police officer for him to "defend society from criminals and fight corruption." He wants to finish his education in Lebanon and then relocate to another country where he can find more security and stability.

He also hopes that the situation in Syria improves to the point where it was before the war, when it was safe and secure. And then, just maybe then, he may return to his homeland with his family.

**Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.*