Fratelli Project

Third Report of the Socio-educational Project for refugee children and youth of Syrian and Iraqi nationality in Lebanon
Third Report of the Fratelli Project

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Scan the QR codes inside the report and select the English subtitles to watch the complete interviews and get to know the children of the Fratelli Project!

*At the request of the person being interviewed, some commentaries were not recorded.
Fratelli Project
“Fratelli really did something great”

“Fratelli is the only thing I will miss when I return to Syria”

“At Fratelli, studying is fun”

“I’ll remember my happy time here and when I grow up, I’ll tell my kids about Fratelli”
"A Mother"

"I love everyone here, Fratelli is my home"

"We play here, eat here, learn here, make friends and share our dreams... what else could you ask for?"

"When I grow up, I want to work with Fratelli and help kids like Fratelli has helped me"

"Fratelli is the smile on the faces of these children"

"We are children of Fratelli and always will be, even when we grow to be 100 years old"

"Happiness"

"I love everyone here, Fratelli is my home"
The year 2019 marks the eighth anniversary of the Syrian war.

For eight years, a bloody civil war has raged which caused the death or disappearance of about 500,000 people. The war created the most severe social, economic, and humanitarian crisis the Middle East has experienced. By land and sea, more than five million Syrians have left their homes. Of these, one million have migrated to the nearest country: Lebanon. At this same time, Lebanon was being inundated with Iraqis fleeing to escape the religious persecution orchestrated by ISIS/DAESH in the Mosul region. It is estimated there are more than one and a half million Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. For Lebanon’s native 4 million people, this influx has vastly exceeded their capacity to provide appropriate refugee accommodations and social services.

The living conditions of many Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon are below the “extreme” poverty line. The main problems are insufficient or inadequate housing, lack of clean drinking water, food insecurity, and inaccessible education. Traumatized by the horrors of war still raging in their native country, only 58% of these refugee children between five and 17 years of age attend school.

It is in this context that, in 2016, the De La Salle and Marist Brothers chose to intervene with the creation of the Fratelli Project. Located in both in the city of Beirut and on the outskirts of Saida, the Fratelli Project welcomes refugee children from Syria and Iraq as well as vulnerable Lebanese children. It provides education to those who would otherwise not have access to formal education, helps those attending government refugee schools, and prepares youth for admission to public schools.

The two centers assist more than 600 children and young people per day (about 50% are female), aged three to 15. Normally, these children attend programs from Monday to Saturday. During the months of July and August, the regular socio-educational programs terminate and the summer school begins. This is followed by a summer camp that offers opportunities for recreation, creativity, art, and excursions for children. Both of these socio-educational centers offer professional psycho-social support, educational programming, training and professional development for young adults (often mothers or siblings of children), and sports activities in collaboration with Fundación Real Madrid.

This is the third report on the Fratelli Project. A unique direction has been taken for this report: it will be told by those who live it every day. Through their eyes, we will discover how the Fratelli Project makes a brighter future for hundreds of children and young refugees.
Fratelli is both a call and an answer. As a response to those in need and a call to community life, the Fratelli Project is energized collectively by the Marist Brothers, Lasallian Brothers, lay partners, and volunteers. Our collaborative task is fundamentally to provide socio-educational programming which is focused on assisting refugee children who fall outside the formal Lebanese school system. The Fratelli Project began just over three years ago, and since that time we have assisted more than 2,000 children and young people. One of the ways to measure our success is by the number of people we have enrolled at our centers. More importantly, however, is the high quality of care we provide. With great respect, we have worked diligently with refugee children and youth, offering educational and vocational training courses that enable them to integrate into Lebanese society. Fratelli is both a call and answer to people in need. Along with people from other countries, we join Lebanese and Syrian professionals who provide quality education to youth. All of us come together in service to form our large international, inter-congregational, and intergenerational community called Fratelli.

Br. Miquel general coordinator of programs and human resources

Br. Andrés general coordinator of the economic area, administrator

It is difficult to define the Fratelli Project in a few words. I think it translates into a place of growth where children can recover the childhood that was stolen from them when they had to leave their homes. We work with children, adolescents, mothers, and the whole family. The Fratelli Project has also become a symbol for collaboration among the Lebanese community and the international communities: we cross many physical, social, educational, and psychological borders to assist people from different countries. When we started, the Fratelli Project had only a few programs and a small group of children. Little by little, as we addressed the emerging needs of the refugees, the project grew exponentially both structurally and programmatically. The most significant impact the Project has seen is with changes in the children’s behavior. After a few weeks in the Fratelli Project, the children have a more easygoing attitude. It is clear that Fratelli provides a safe space for the children and they consider it their home. For the future, Fratelli needs to continue building a strong base of committed local people which utilize local community resources. We are making progress in our efforts to ensure Fratelli is self-sustaining and continues without us.
Fratelli is a center for children and young people in need. While primarily we host Syrians, Palestinians, and Lebanese, we welcome all nationalities. We care for children and young people, assisting the matriculation of individuals outside the national school system so that they can continue their education and secure a hopeful future.

We offer various educational, social, and psychological support programs for children aged three to 15 years of age. These programs run from the beginning of the school year until the end of July.

Our families find themselves in challenging and complicated situations. Often the children cannot go to school because the parents cannot pay for transport or because the children are needed for work.

We believe that education is a right for every child. Our role is to assist parents in providing education for their children by assisting with enrollment, providing educational preparation for the children, and offering after-school assistance, which keeps them in school. We have 600 children participating in our diverse educational programs.

We consider Fratelli Project as a "bridge" assisting educationally excluded children to enroll in schools and stay there. Working in collaboration with the Minister of Education, we also help young people who need special education programs.

To help reduce the intense pressure on the Lebanese community for social services, the Fratelli Project provides spaces for Lebanese and Syrian professionals to come together in service to refugee youth. Here the nutritional, social, psychological, and educational needs of the children are met. Our services are unquestionably therapeutic.

Rana, coordinator of the educational projects of the Rmelieh Center

Fratelli is a "bridge" assisting educationally excluded children to enroll in schools and stay there.
Two years after college, I wanted to volunteer for the Fratelli Project. I first learned about this initiative when I was a Lasallian student. Over time, my desire for this experience turned into a social job commitment. In the morning Iraqi children come to this center, while in the afternoon we welcome Syrians and Lebanese. Their needs are many: sometimes several families live in the same house, the children have no access to medical care, and they lack education, security, and stability. Unfortunately, they wait . . . stuck immovably in limbo. At Fratelli, the children have a safe place to learn and recreate; otherwise, they would be on the street. Here they can learn, make friends with other children, and socialize safely with people of other nationalities.

Valeria, coordinator of the educational projects for the Bourj Hammoud Center

This project also provides enrichment for Lebanese teachers such as myself. Thanks to the diversity among the children, we educators have the opportunity to interact with other cultures. Amazingly, it is the children who teach us many new things. What do we need now to move forward? More space to expand our activities. If we had additional space, we could involve more children and more families, extending the benefits of the project to a larger group of people. For me, Fratelli is the smile on the faces of these children. Here they receive something important. Fratelli is a second home for them . . . and also for us educators!

“At Fratelli, the children have a safe place to learn and recreate; otherwise, they would be on the street.”
My name is Mahal and I’m 11 years old. I came here a year ago because of the war. In my country, Syria, I only went to school for two years, then my family and I left. Here I joined the Fratelli Project, and in the afternoon I go to ALP*. Here we learn new things, we play, we do many different activities, and we have parties. I have friends. I like the teachers and lessons. I also like coming here to study... it’s important and I come here for this. What is Fratelli to me? I love it so much, it’s like a home to me!

"I like the teachers and lessons. I also like coming here to study... it's important and I come here for this."

*Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) is a special curriculum for children who have been outside the formal educational system for more than two years.
My name is Ousama. I’m from Syria. I’m 12 years old and I haven't gone to school in four years. My town is Aleppo, but I left when the war started. I didn’t go to school for four years. Now, I am here in Fratelli where I do a lot of activities and I follow the lessons. Thanks to Fratelli I was able to enter the ALP. What do I do in Fratelli?

Here I find my friends, play football, and learn to read and write. I like it because the teachers are very kind and they help me a lot. I have a sister who is in another class, she also likes to come and spend time here. For me, Fratelli is fun and enjoyment. Fratelli takes care of me. It’s like a mother.
I work as a psychologist here in Fratelli, where we take care of refugee children, mainly Syrians, who have many challenges. In my work, I often see children with aggression. They are aggressive because of the severity of the trauma they have experienced. Some of these children have seen their house on fire, seen people murdered, and others have been physically abused. In particular, I remember a child who told me about a time when a soldier entered the house and pointed the machine gun at his chest. The soldier told his mother “either I kill him or you hit him.” It is understandable how these experiences make children aggressive and violent. Many children cannot sleep at night and have difficulty speaking.

When they draw, they use very dark colors.
First of all at Fratelli, we provide a safe place where children can comfortably interact with other children. As they slowly develop bonds of friendship, little by little, they also relate positively to the Lebanese community.
While offering personalized psychological support tailored to the needs of the child, we enable them to rebuild dreams for their future.
I have seen many changes in the children I have followed.
Primarily, I have seen their aggression diminish. Even among older boys and girls, I have seen that they come more willingly to school and are able to express themselves better.

Jacques, psychologist at the Fratelli Project
I am 30 years old. I'm from Afrin (Syria) and I have been living in Lebanon for a year. I have refugee status. I tried to enroll my children in public school, but I was unable to. When I heard about the Fratelli Project, I brought them here. They treat the children well, and my children have fun in a beautiful place. I thank you very much for the great work you do in this place. I hope that Fratelli will open other centers like this one.

Fratelli helps adults too. It allows me to take computer and English courses. Fratelli helps us to continue our studies and to return to the school we had to leave because of the situation in Syria. If it wasn't for Fratelli, we would not have other educational opportunities. Here we have fun. They help us to study. I thank all those who are part of the Fratelli Project.
Jessica
My name is Jessica and I'm 13 years old. I came from Iraq with my family three years ago. Before I got to know the Fratelli Project, I spent my days at home with my mother and helped her with her chores. Then I discovered Fratelli. Here I learn English, science, and mathematics. I come here to learn!

Lucas
My name is Lucas, I'm 14 years old and I'm from Iraq. Before I got to know the Fratelli Project I was always at home, trying to learn English and French by myself. Since I started coming here, I've learned a lot and now I go to school! I learned things in Fratelli that I didn't know before, like English, which will help me talk to people when I travel!

“ I've learned a lot and now I go to school! ”

See full interview
I am 19 years old and have lived here for seven years. I tried to enroll in public school, but I couldn’t. Unfortunately, private school was too expensive and I couldn’t afford it. Fratelli is useful to me because the teachers have taught me a lot.

Mohammad, one of the young people from downtown Rmelieh

I learned new things, new subjects. We left school because of the situation in Syria, we were not educated. Here they teach us from the beginning and we learn. The greatest benefit for us is that we can finally go back to school to learn.
My name is Florian. I am from Germany and I am 31 years old. I studied to become a teacher in my own country, but after graduation I decided to undertake some voluntary activities. I came to Lebanon to work with the Fratelli project where I do various tasks. I take the children to school, I bring them home, and together with others we prepare their breakfast. We also provide the children with lots of activities and sports along with the help provided by Fundación Real Madrid. In the afternoon I work with a group of young adults to improve their English.

For me, international volunteering means living in a community of people from different cultural backgrounds. Sometimes it can be difficult, but it enriches me and opens my mind. The Fratelli project offers a place where children can be children, where they can escape from impoverished refugee conditions, play together, meet other children, and receive an education. The Fratelli Project has had a great impact on my life. Working with the children has enriched me. I understand how important one’s presence can be for the children. I will bring these memories with me back to my everyday life in Germany.
My name is Laura. I’m 28 years old and I’m from Bolivia. The name Fratelli already indicates the sense of community in this project: we do everything together. My day starts with common prayer, after which we prepare breakfast. Then, we travel to the children and bring them to school. In the mornings, I join the staff in teaching music, games, and English. I even learned a bit of Arabic!

This experience enriched me. It has allowed me to be part of a new world, to dream about its possibilities, to build it, and to live it.

The children benefit from educational opportunities which didn’t exist before the project began. When I am with the children, I see hope in their eyes. They come from the gruesome realities of destruction, pain, death, and war. But here in Fratelli, they have found a place to dream, a location where they are loved, and a safe spot where they can play together. For me, Fratelli is a gift. As someone says, small people in small places, doing small things, can change the world. I feel that I am one of these people and that I can contribute to the creation of a better world.
This shelter is called Al Zahrani. It consists of two sections totaling 85 tents, where we have lived for eight years.

Here in the camp, we live in a very painful situation. The polluted river that divides the camp contains mosquitoes and snakes.

The tents where we live are made of plastic, so that the temperature in summer is very high. It almost kills us.

We can't get medical care in the hospital and we can’t find work, but somehow we are supposed to pay the rent for the tents where we live and the school-bus for our children.

I withdraw my three children from school because I could not afford the expenses. We need food and water. Lebanon is a poor country and its financial conditions are not good. Even the Lebanese cannot find work.

What should I do as a Syrian refugee without food, water, help, and living in a tent?

Fortunately, the Fratelli Project has done a lot for the children in the shelter. It improved the level of education of the children, given them a safe place to be together, and has done many useful activities such as sewing classes for adults.

Fratelli are expanding their activities and we are grateful for their presence here with us.

Abu Mansur, head of the Zahrani Shelter
Aisha: We have had an excellent experience with Fratelli. Before attending the Fratelli programs, our children were rude. Now, we see improvements in their behavior and manners. The effects of their learning can easily be seen. Although they previously spoke very little, they now are talking more and speak better. And they can write! Fratelli made a difference for our children and for those of the other families in the shelters.

Maha: I am 18 years old. When I was 15, they told me about the Fratelli Project and I enrolled. I was illiterate at the time but the Fratelli Project taught me to read and write . . and I played sports. My brother also came with me to the educational center. When I arrived I was too old for public school and Fratelli made a difference to me. If I could, I would spend the whole day there, from Monday to Sunday!

“Fratelli made a difference for our children and for those of the other families in the shelters.”
I'm 35 years old and I have five children. I migrated from Syria to Lebanon in 2013 and have been living in this Pepsi* shelter ever since, with my husband and our children.

I can't say I'm happy here, but it's okay. It's definitely better than in Syria.

The children go to school in the morning and to Fratelli in the afternoon.

The Fratelli Project is very helpful with the education of the children. Fratelli helps them with their homework and reinforces their studies.

This is good because we parents are not able to understand our children's homework.

Our children live in confined spaces and have nothing to play with and don't have much fun. As such, they are very happy to go to Fratelli.

I hope the children of the other families will also be able to go there soon.

The children who are not yet registered still wait for the arrival of the Fratelli bus every day, as if it had come for them!

My hopes for the future?

That my children receive a proper education and can go on in life.

And then I hope to return to Syria, but to live there safely and in peace.

Faiza, resident of the Pepsi shelter*

*Taking its name from the old factory in Pepsi, the shelter is occupied by refugee families. Some of the children attend Fratelli.
All the photos and videos contained in this report are the work of Marco Amato, an Italian photographer and reporter, who dedicated his lens to the Fratelli Project with the sole purpose of helping hundreds of children, girls and young refugees. We are enormously grateful for his support. http://www.marcoamato.net/