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Finnish-Arab Friendship Society (FAFS)

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An overview of sponsorship cooperation in 2017

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Report 1/2018, prepared by Tuija Halmari, Sirkku Kivistö, English language consultation Krista Igarria, Helsinki in cooperation with Fatima Khaizaran, coordinator of sponsorship program, Beirut, March 2018

Partners: The National Institution for Social Care and Vocational Training (NISCVT), commonly known by the Palestinian name Beit Atfal Assumoud (BAS) (www.socialcare.org), Lebanon and Finnish-Arab Friendship Society (FAFS), Finland

This is a summary report for 2017 on cooperation between the Palestinian organisation, BAS, and Finnish organisation, FAFS, to assist Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides basic education, health, relief and social services to refugees living in the area. In addition, there is a significant number of international and national organisations working with and helping the refugees, BAS being one of them.

Over the 41 years of its existence, BAS has developed into a highly professional and reliable organisation. Unfortunately, the difficult situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has not improved and even exacerbated by the Syrian conflict, which is bringing increasing numbers of refugees to Lebanon.

Background

BAS has several long time partners and donors, and it is able to run a variety of programmes improving social and cultural welfare of the Palestinian refugees in the most vulnerable situation. BAS has developed appropriate and effective working methods for the challenging situation of the camps, as well as reliable reporting systems. FAFS is one of the long-time sponsors and partners of BAS.

Family Happiness is the basic social programme of BAS. It is a sponsorship programme targeting children and families in the most difficult situation in UNRWA refugee camps in Lebanon. The inclusion criteria of BAS are:

1- Loss of both parents, 2- Disability of the father that prevents him from working., 3- Loss of the father in a large family in which most of the children are under 13 years of age, 4- Hardship cases (Socially Orphans).

Chronic disease care places a large financial burden on households (AUB & UNRWA 2016).

In 2017, the programme helped in total over 1,000 children, 47 of whom had sponsors via FAFS in Finland. This overview discusses these 47 children, aged 2-19 years, 24 girls and 23 boys in 10 UNRWA camps. In Finland, each sponsor (or group of sponsors) has signed an agreement to pay €30 a month or €360 per year to the programme via FAFS. The total amount of sponsorship assistance in 2017 was €18,516.72 / LL 27,775,500 (€1=LL 1,500).

BAS has identified the children/families most in need of the services provided through the Family Happiness programme.

The social workers of BAS visit and regularly monitor the children/ families, discuss their situation, assist when possible and keep record of progress. Annual reports are written

and sent to FAFS and FAFS forwards the reports to the sponsors. Correspondence and visits complement the follow-up.

The reports contain basic data of each child, remarks on his/hers health, performance in education and activities, as well as an overview of the family relationships, domestic situation and social workers follow-up remarks. The sponsorship continues until the child has grown adult or/and found a path forward.

Sponsored children by year of birth and age group (n=46, 1 missing information)

Year of birth	Age in 2017	Number of children
1998-2002	15-19 years	10
2003-2007	10-14 years	20
2008-2012	5 - 9 years	14
2013-2017	under 4 years	2

Sponsored children by camp and gender (n=47)

Camp	Number of children	girls	boys
Bourj el Barajneh	5	4	1
Shatila	16	9	7
Mar Elias	2	1	1
Beddawi	2		2
Nahr-el Bared	5	3	2
Ein- el Helweh	5	1	4
Rashidieh	4	2	2
Bourj-el Shemali	5	3	2
El-Buss	2	1	1
Baalbeck	1		1
TOTAL	47	24	23

BAS pays the designated families a monthly scholarship to cover the special needs of the child. The sponsorship money also covers some activities in the BAS Centres, in which the children are encouraged to participate, and part of the salaries of social workers, who support and follow up the families and write reports.

The share of the sponsorship money (rate €1=LL 1,500)

Monthly scholarship to the family	LL 30,000	€20
BAS activities for children and parents	LL 7,500	€5
Social workers' salaries	LL 7,500	€5
Total	LL 45,000 LL	€30

This way of sharing the scholarship ensures support to the child and the family in the best possible way. In addition, FAFS and BAS have sponsorship cooperation on Kindergarten children (31) in two camps and sponsorship cooperation to support elderly people (17) in four camps.

Health and educational situation of the sponsored children According to the annual reports, 27 children were in good health, 13 had a chronic health problem (thalassemia, asthma, autism, rheumatism, anaemia, depression) and seven were suffering from consequences of malnutrition and negligence.

In total 35 children were in UNRWA schools, three in Kindergartens, two dropped out of school, four were in vocational training, one in the university and one in a private special school. One 17-year old child was not attending school due to a severe autism disorder (there are no affordable special schools available to autistic adolescents).

Social workers described the educational situation of the children (n=47) as follows: In case of 15 children, studies were described as “successful”, “very good”, “good marks” Two children were reported to have improved and being more active than before.

In case of seven children, school success was described as “acceptable”, “average”, “medium marks”

In case of two children, school success was described as “weak” or “low average”; four children were repeating their class.

Five children were in need of more support and time, daily follow-up, help to go regularly to school

Five children needed help in some subject (English, science).

Seven children had no special description, except “continues”.

The social workers are in a crucial position to support the children who have learning difficulties and are not getting help from the family members (due to illiteracy etc.).

Challenges

The living conditions, i.e. housing conditions are often difficult. About half of the houses and apartments are not of a good quality and especially the cold and humid winter season causes problems. There are efforts to improve the situation but, unfortunately, there are seldom alternatives due to the bad economic situation and refugee status.

The social workers report various challenges in the family relationships. About half of the parents suffer from mental problems such as depression or mental illness. Unemployment is alarmingly high; there are various restrictions concerning the status of Palestinians in Lebanon, and all families have economic problems. There are many one-parent households. Grandparents or other elderly relatives share the small apartments. The conditions at home naturally affect the children. However, the social workers often tell about caring parents who do their very best to encourage their children in school and hobbies.

Sponsorship is bridging people

The cooperation partners have found out that knowing there are sponsors far away in the North, who care and share their concerns and encourage them via greetings and sometimes small gifts, give the families remarkable moral support in their challenging situation. The programme has been running for 35 years and there are many long-term sponsors following the life of the children. There is an ongoing bridge of friendship between Finnish and Palestinian people and families.

Thanks for the cooperation

FAFS wishes to express its hearty thanks to the 17 social workers for preparing the annual reports to sponsors, in cooperation with Directors of the ten centres. May our cooperation continue successful.

The FAFS/BAS Report 3/2016 “How are our sponsored children?” describe the challenges, which are more less the same in 2017, with examples and exact numbers. (<http://akys.kapsi.fi/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AKYSraporttisarja032017.pdf>)

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