

Team



Empowering People
Inspiring Change

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Talk

AMURT Lebanon assists Syrian refugees

Young Zahraa, and her family fled their home in war-torn Syria with just a few possessions. Their first two weeks in Lebanon were spent sheltering at a construction site before they found temporary housing. AMURT helped Zahraa go to school and provided her family with bedding and other necessities for the winter.



Zahraa and 82 other children now attend school after AMURT made arrangements and paid fixed costs.

More than one million Syrian refugees have poured into neighboring countries as a result of the escalating crisis at home. In Lebanon, over 400,000 refugees had reported to the UNHCR by March 2013; the real number is likely to be much more. Most Syrian refugees end up in large camps, but in Lebanon they usually find a host family or several families share an apartment.

AMURT Lebanon has been helping with this, operating case management services for Syrian refugees in underserved Chouf district since September 2012. In September and October 2012, AMURT focused on getting the kids into schools. Since October 2012 AMURT provided deeper coverage of the mountainous Chouf district and shifted the emphasis to winter items and food distribution.

“Families came and stayed with their sons already in Lebanon”, explains Lamia Mashri, AMURT Lebanon’s President; “relatives then followed.” The resulting crowded living conditions and dwindling resources have led to some serious issues for the most vulnerable, such as young children, single mothers, the aged and infirm. The winter season, in particular, has presented huge challenges for the poorest families.

“Yesterday we visited five families, all living in a place that doesn’t have windows or doors.” Lamia described the clan of refugees: five women, three of them pregnant; four unregistered school-age kids including a ten-year-old boy with epilepsy, yet to consult a doctor for his medication; and a senile grandfather showing symptoms of psychological trauma, who also required medical care.



Winter goods distribution at Boqaata, Chouf. AMURT and a partner, PU-AMI, perform many project tasks: from packing goods, to paperwork and data entry.

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Their makeshift bathroom and sleeping room are enclosed with curtains. "Wind can enter easily", Lamia says. A girl of two years hadn't bathed for a week. "The water isn't sufficient for all the family". Despite poor conditions, they must pay rent. Three men are able to work, "but they work five days a month, because it is wintertime, and that doesn't cover anything." So far, they obtained food on credit. "Some local shops are being easy with them", Lamia comments.

There are families in worse conditions, reports AMURT's Program Coordinator and Community Outreach Worker, Anas Abu Fakher. Anas does most of the legwork for the project. "Anas is doing a great job," raves Lamia, "sometimes he covers 20 cases in a day!"

Through referrals, house visits and interviews, AMURT has so far identified and assisted 730 different families in 23 locations with food, school fees, clothes, bedding, heating or medicine; many receiving several of these services.



AMURT representative Dania conducts semi-structured interviews as part of an ongoing assessment of refugee needs in the Chouf district.

AMURT works with refugees in the mountainous Chouf district, acting as an effective intermediary, connecting refugees to available services and delivering specific assistance in partnership with larger donors. "We are building trust with the refugees and facilitating resources from larger NGOs and United Nations", summarizes AMURT's International Disaster Liaison, Karl Andersson.



Abedrahman meets Anas, AMURT's Project coordinator, to collect blankets for his family.

AMURT collaborates with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on registration sensitization programs and fast-tracking emergency cases. The Lebanese government's departments of education and health, as well as local municipalities, have all helped in identifying local resources and referring new arrivals to AMURT. Throughout the winter AMURT partnered with the Saudi Relief Committee, the Emir and Government of Qatar, and Islamic Relief to distribute food rations and winter items.

In addition, Syrians already settled in Lebanon have a strong sentiment to help, and assist AMURT as volunteers on a daily basis with logistics, information-sharing and community outreach.

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Volunteers deliver in DC

It's Saturday morning in downtown Washington, DC. A church hall hums with activity, as twenty volunteers scamper left and right with boxes. It's been like this most Saturdays since 1990: a cheerful frenzy of sorting and packing food for delivery to needy residents scattered across the metropolis. In a city marked by glaring contrast between the haves and have-nots, these Food for All DC volunteers endeavor to bridge the divide.

The United States capital on one hand flaunts all the exuberance of money and power; on the other hand, however, food insecurity is a reality for many residents. The Food Research and Action Center found that in 2009-10 more than one-third of DC households with children reported they were unable to afford enough food: the worst rate in the country. Last year local people joining the monthly Food Stamp/SNAP program leaped 6.3 percent; but the average recipient runs out after 2 ½ weeks, according to a recent Hunger in America report. Affordable, healthy food is also difficult to access for many DC residents, particularly those with disabilities or health complaints that affect mobility.



Rallying the troops: "I give my little song and dance", Kathy admits.

Food for All DC provides groceries to people bound to their homes, primarily disabled and elderly people, but also single mothers with

young children. Many of the clients are referred by social workers who are grateful for Food for All's delivery capability. The majority of the food is obtained from the Capital Area Food Bank, but supermarkets and farms donate goods as well.



Local volunteers pack boxes of groceries for DC area needy families.

Kathy Winters, Food for All's volunteer site coordinator, displays an obvious talent for logistics and rallying volunteers. "We have a core group of five to six people who come every single week", notes Kathy. Other volunteers are supplied from various sources: corporations, fraternities or sororities, and church groups. A local volunteer placement center, Greater DC Cares, brings around 10 helpers every week. "Without them we would run short", she says. First-timers are common: people who enquire or hear from a friend and want to spend a Saturday morning giving something back to their city.

Food for All is a non-profit charity established in 1985 in affiliation with AMURT. It started as a small operation providing hot meals for the homeless and transitioned to grocery delivery fifteen years ago. "For many clients, we are their only weekly contact",

Kathy explains, "They are very appreciative to have human contact." All along, Food for All has maintained its grassroots mentality, remaining

entirely volunteer operated. With the assistance of federal and other agency grants, and program space provided by the Universalist National Memorial Church, it has been able to grow in capacity over the years to serve on average over 100 individuals each week.

Kathy warmly recalls one woman in northwest DC, who was homeless before joining the program: "She had written a song about how grateful she was for all the support she received from Food for All and others, and she sang several verses for us when we visited one day."

At the opposite end of town, Food for All delivers to Pearline Hardy, who has benefited from the program since moving into the area four years ago. Three generations live together in her small apartment. She must feed nine grandchildren aged between seven and twenty, the eldest graduating this year. "It's wonderful support for us, trying to live on a fixed income", she says. "I don't know what I would do without Food for All.



Pearline Hardy: "The Lord is wonderful. My kids pray for all of you at Food for All."



Dedicated volunteers pack delivery vehicles during a snow storm in Washington DC



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