



TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2023



All you need is a spark.

Light the Fire campaign will reignite hope in refugee communities

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Teacher Testimonies from Ukraine | Spark List 2024

Creativity and Connection Fuel Healing in Jordan

Students benefit from art therapy and caring relationships with their teachers

When asked what she thinks Principal Dawlat Hijazeen's strengths are, TSI's Rawan Haddad isn't sure where to begin.

"She has so many gifts. She's patient, she can listen and understand anyone. She'll say to a student, 'Show me what happened. Let's sit and talk about it.' She knows everything that happens under the school's roof, and she keeps track of older students she used to see in elementary," Haddad said. Then, with a smile, she added, "Dawlat wants her babies to do well."

Haddad visits Tent Schools International (TSI) partners in the Middle East as part of her annual visits home to see her family in Amman, Jordan. This gives her an opportunity to observe each school's daily routines. What stands out to Haddad at Good Shepherd Center is that student-teacher connections are a key to healing for displaced Iraqi children, the majority of the student population.

"There's a maternal connection between kids and teachers there," Haddad said. "It's like they're home and feeling loved - warm in winter, cool in summer, never hungry. They have joy at school."

Each student's case is different at Good Shepherd Center. Staff meet the needs of single-parent families, children with disabilities, post-trauma situations, and sometimes abusive relationships at home. Haddad says staff are trained to handle each child's case with a customized approach.

Art therapy is one technique that works for most children, no matter their background or challenges.

"They don't speak English or Arabic at first. Their first language is Assyrian or Chaldean, so they start to communicate with their

"It's like they're home and feeling loved - warm in winter, cool in summer, never hungry. **They have joy at school.**"

- Rawan Haddad

teachers through drawings. They sketch out their feelings about what happened to them [in Iraq]." One teen girl told Haddad, "I express myself and can relax when I paint or draw. When I have no words, I put it into my drawing."

Alongside art, Good Shepherd staff are intentional about ensuring students have a deep understanding of math concepts, Arabic and English, all key subjects that will help them thrive in Jordanian, Iraqi or English-speaking cultures; some Good Shepherd families have resettled in Switzerland and Australia over the last few years.

In order to teach the subject matter well, Principal Hijazeen must purchase quality curriculum, textbooks, and school supplies, a perennial challenge due to budget constraints. As a Christian outreach ministry, Good Shepherd is neither a public nor traditional



Welcome to the Board!



private school. They are unable to receive public funding, but they also do not charge tuition from Iraqi families, an ISIS-displaced population that is barred from working in Jordan. Hijazeen avoids asking parents for anything she knows they have no ability to provide.

"[Private] Christian schools in Jordan sell books to their students," said Haddad. "It's \$100 for one English book, which is not reachable for Good Shepherd, so Dawlat asked the private schools for their leftover books. She works hard to find these, but she needs more of them, plus workbooks. Sometimes she makes color copies, but that's expensive, too."

Despite material challenges, Good Shepherd is still growing. Staff at the new secondary school walk alongside students as they reach those turbulent, in-between years as teens navigating who they are, what they want, and how they can serve in the world they see before them.

"Before secondary students were in school here, there was no future for them [as displaced people]," Haddad said, "They are very smart, perfect in English,

and they are talented. They are attending the church and leading the worship. They love their classes. So how do we move forward? This is really important."

As TSI supporters, you play a part in both student healing and the formation of dreams, whether this happens through art therapy, teacher-student connections, or their awareness that people

on the other side of the world care about them. At Tent Schools International, we never underestimate the latter. •

Year-end 2023's Light the Fire campaign will deliver safe schools to displaced children in Jordan. Give today using the enclosed envelope, or visit TentSchoolsInt.org/GIVE.



Landon Mendes has a background in the financial industry and is now a job developer for Bethany's Refugee and Immigrant employment services. He was raised in Brazil and returned to the U.S. to pursue higher education.



Keija VanderSlik helped launch the West Michigan Friendship Center for resettled families. She has a degree in nursing and is passionate about showing God's love to Muslim children and their families.

Landon and Keija join Galen DeYoung and Mark Diekema on our 2023-2026 Board of Directors. Interested in leadership at Tent Schools International? Contact Emily Klooster, Executive Director, to learn more about joining the Board: eklooster@tentschoolsint.org or (616) 988-8261.

Photos: Good Shepherd students in class and on the playground in Amman, Jordan.



A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR SYRIAN GIRLS

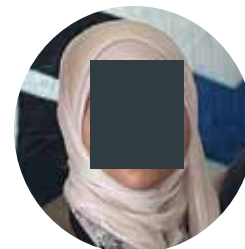
An interview with Salam [REDACTED], a teacher at our mobile school in Lebanon, reveals passion, heartache and hope for the future of Syrian girls.

Salam [REDACTED] was only 16 when she fled Syria in late 2010, shortly before the civil war there broke out. Traumatized after witnessing the murder of her two sisters by ISIS, Salam pushed through personal anguish to seek safety in Lebanon.

Salam knew she needed to claim new meaning for her life, or the trauma she had experienced would consume her. She resumed her studies in Lebanon and soon took a job tutoring students in Arabic and math. She also began attending trainings and Bible studies offered by Pastor Joseph, co-founder of TSI's partner, Warm Heart Lebanon.

At the time, Salam was a cultural Muslim and had been raised to view Jesus as a prophet. As she learned more about Jesus' teachings, she chose to dedicate her life to him. Salam has been working with Syrian girls in his name ever since.

"I tell them: you need to have a purpose in your life. **You are not 'just a refugee.'**" - Salam [REDACTED]



Now, at the age of 29, she is married, has three children and recently logged her eighth year with Warm Heart as a classroom teacher for Syrian refugee students at the mobile school.

"I love to work with kids. This is my passion; it's what I've always wanted to do," she said.

Salam is deeply dedicated to her work, particularly with Syrian girls. "I've witnessed her passion," said Rawan Haddad, TSI's liaison to the Middle East. "She wants the girls to learn and take advantage of the opportunity to be in school. She wants them to do something with their lives, so she is very structured and direct with them."

Salam's job is not without its challenges. On some days, twice the number of students show up for class than she expected. School arrival and departure times vary due to traffic or road construction, and parents don't want kids sent home late from school due to safety issues in Bekaa Valley camps. After a long day of classes, Salam must also spend time negotiating with parents about the value of education for their girls in a culture that would rather keep them home.

"Parents are not always educated, so I take care of the mom first so she can understand why her daughter or son needs the opportunity," she said.

There are sad stories: the girl who disappeared from school after an early marriage at age 14 and was later kept home indefinitely due

Photos, left to right: 1) Shaima and Rania show off their handiwork from the sewing class they attend at the mobile school. 2) The mobile school in Bekaa Valley. 3) Boys take part in an electrical class delivered by the school. 3) Syrian girls hold up thank-you cards they made in class.



to shame surrounding her divorce one month later. "After that she had to be accompanied by a male relative wherever she went," Salam said. "I tried to convince her to come back to school, but her family wouldn't allow it. This broke my heart."

There are hopeful stories, too. Seventeen-year-old Rania left her Bekaa Valley school at age 11 after mistreatment from other students and her teachers. Her younger sister was attending the Warm Heart school, but Rania refused to consider it after her negative experience. Salam kept calling and visiting the family, and weeks later Rania agreed to accompany her sister for one day. The next day, Rania told Salam that she wanted to come back.

"Now Rania is doing excellent," said Salam. "Her behavior and academics have changed. She is trying to establish herself and go to university. I told her: you are not here by mistake. You need to have a purpose in your life. You are not 'just a refugee' waiting for help. Become something good and you will be successful in the future."

Another Syrian girl, Shaima, worked hard at school until she was top of her class. To congratulate her, Warm Heart staff gifted her with a cellphone.

"We had never done this before," said Salam. "We wanted Shaima to receive the message: we care about you personally, and your education."

Salam's commitment to Jesus comes through to her students in part by showing them The Jesus Movie. The students beg to watch the film and memorize the lines, crying out in protest as Jesus' hands and feet are nailed

As flawed humanity, we do shocking things to each other. But as God's people, we can meet the darkness with light.

to the cross. Muslim parents are welcome to visit Warm Heart's classes so they are in touch with what is being presented. They tell Salam, "This doesn't freak us out. We know about Jesus."

Pastor Joseph described Warm Heart's purpose as the four legs of a chair: education, health, faith, and food. All of these things result in friendship with the children and their families. "I am always clear that I am sharing the gospel," Pastor Joseph said. "The moms come to worship because they want to. We don't force anyone to be involved [because their kids



attend our school.]"

During the years she worked with refugee women and girls in Jordan before coming to the U.S., Haddad says she was devastated by stories like Salam's. "I went home every day in tears. I couldn't believe that such terrifying things happen among human beings."

Salam's story didn't end in Syria, and now she works to ensure other girls have the same chance. As flawed humanity, we do shocking things to each other, especially in war. But as God's people, we can meet the darkness with light and educate, heal, pray for and feed one another - the four legs of a support system based in love that will never collapse. •

Year-end 2023's Light the Fire campaign will deliver safe schools to refugee children in Lebanon. Give today using the enclosed envelope, or visit TentSchoolsInt.org/GIVE.



In their Words: Letters from Bucha, Ukraine

Teachers working amidst conflict send letters of struggle and gratitude

The Russian invasion of Ukraine forced students and staff at Academy of Wisdom in Bucha to scatter and later regroup as they resumed classes. Here are notes of thanks from two of the teachers you've supported, Inna Favorska and Nellya Bulatova.

My name is Inna Favorska, and I would like to share my experience as a teacher during the war, and thank those who have helped our school.

When the war started, the students I taught were finishing 3rd grade. Due to constant attacks, my husband and I temporarily moved abroad. We did not know the language, we knew no one there, and we had only enough money to live one month without work. We were worried about what to do next.

Our school was closed for two weeks, and I thought we would not be able to resume work because our city was occupied. I also assumed I would not



Inna Favorska, a teacher at Academy of Wisdom, with her students in Bucha, Ukraine

be able to work because of displacement. But thanks to our administration, our school began to offer classes online and I was able to work with my wonderful students. I didn't want to leave my class because the war is stressful for them, if they had a new teacher it would be even more stressful. I really wanted to help my students survive these difficult circumstances and finish elementary school together. My students graduated this year, and I am glad I had the opportunity to be in touch with each of them throughout the process. I am

grateful for the fact that I was given a laptop from which I could conduct lessons every day.

Thank you to the TSI donors who responded with help for our school and financial support for our teachers. Your help cannot be overestimated, especially in times of war. May the Lord bless you! All Ukrainians are going through difficult circumstances, but I believe that thanks to God and caring people, we will be able to survive this and return to a peaceful life.

Inna

SHOP REFUGEE-MADE >>

This season, give a gift with impact! The TentSchoolsShop supports Iraqi artisans whose children attend Good Shepherd Center in Jordan. Proceeds from sales of these beautiful items benefit families and the school. Find us at www.TentSchoolsShop.Etsy.com.

Photo: Amo ("Uncle") Julian, an Iraqi father now living in Jordan, works with olive-wood to support his family. Inset photo: Bethlehem Star olive wood ornaments for purchase in TSI's Etsy shop.





Nellya Bulatova

I am Nellya Bulatova, a teacher in Bucha, and I would like to thank everyone who helped us during this difficult period in our country's history. During

the academic year 2022-2023, I had the opportunity to lead the first class of 16 children within the walls of Academy of Wisdom since the war began. Before, our entire school studied remotely with only the the youngest students having the opportunity to study in person.

I enjoy working with children. Their trusting smiles and eyes motivate me to continue. This year, our work was mixed with anxiety and sheltering drills. My students posed numerous questions about the war and its conclusion, to which I honestly replied that I did not have an answer, but that I had faith in God. We read the Bible, analyzed and reflected, and I'm glad the kids have learned to pray and believe.

Since the war began every Ukrainian has faced despair, but human kindness and compassion help us feel we are not alone on this planet. In the midst of our difficult situation when people lack work, housing, and hope, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to work and live on the school grounds. Thank you so much to our wonderful TSI donors. You are God's children who have served us with all your hearts! Teaching would simply not be possible without your support. We pray for God's protection, good health, and wisdom in this worthy cause.

Nellya

Spark LIST 2024

Here's how your support will reignite hope for refugee families in the year ahead!



Annual operating costs for holistic ministry with a **mobile school**

\$48,000



Emergency food boxes to feed school families in need for a week

\$700



Medical supplies for school families without healthcare

\$900



Teacher training to better serve students with special needs

\$2,000



Home computer for a resettled U.S. family for job training, language courses or remote learning

\$400

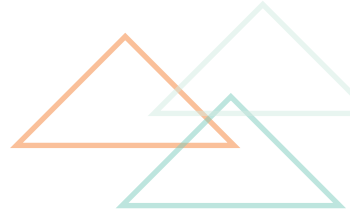
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629 Ionia Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503



INSIDE: ALL YOU NEED IS A *spark*

LIGHT THE FIRE OF LEARNING

REIGNITE HOPE

SHOW THEM THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT.

Thank you for supporting this important work. Find us on social media: @TentSchoolsInt



Tent Schools International™

A / 629 Ionia Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

P / (616) 531-9102

W / tentschoolsint.org

DEVELOPMENT

Rawan Haddad rhaddad@tentschoolsint.org

DONOR SERVICES

Kathy Fauble kfauble@tentschoolsint.org

ACCOUNTING

Karen Hilverda khilverda@tentschoolsint.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR + EDITOR

Emily Klooster eklooster@tentschoolsint.org

PRESIDENT

Scott Vander Kooy svanderkooy@tentschoolsint.org

OUR MISSION

TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL demonstrates the love of Jesus for displaced children through safe, compassionate schools.

TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a proud member of ECFA, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

