

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.*