

Two Stories of Firefly for Syrians children

Walid 10 years

Walid's family left Akrud mountain when the Russian bombings made it impossible to live there anymore. They live in Selma camp close to the Turkish border.

His father was killed when he was two, before he could even start talking.

His mother recently abandoned him as she remarried and left him and his young brothers and sisters with his elderly grandfather in the camp.

His family live in an extremely small space, with no privacy, no electricity, no space to study, and open to the elements of the extreme cold they will face this winter.

Walid has had to focus on survival and thus has had no opportunity of a formal education.

He is highly intelligent, eager to learn and dedicated to visiting our center for every available Science workshop. His incredible perseverance has meant that he is currently working on the second level of our applied science programme.

Without the opportunities Firefly provide, he would have no access to education and no escape.

He is a highly creative and a dedicated student making rapid progress.

Walid is just one of the 800 children who eagerly came to our centres in the last month.

Upon his return from our workshop, rather than relaxing or playing with his friends, he then has to spend the rest of his evening caring for his grandfather who was disabled from a bomb.

Our workshops are a lifeline for him and hundreds of other children whose responsibilities far outweigh their age and who are just seeking a space to learn, laugh and play.

Azeemas story

I met Azeema three weeks ago when I was in Antakya: today she is healthy mentally and physically, has stored her tragic memories and is excelling in her studies. We drank green tea together, ate baklava and celebrated her being the top student in recent exams. This is her story.

Azeema was 13 when her family fled the heavy bombardment and destruction of her home in Latakia mountain, Syria.

They moved to her aunt's house which was also bombed shortly after their arrival.

Her older sister and many of her wider family were killed.

Her younger sister had significant shrapnel wounds.

Azeema survived.

The family made the dangerous journey to Turkey in order to get medical support.

When they arrived they were driven to a refugee camp, they thought they had arrived in a place of safety.

They are mountain people who found themselves in the desert in an overcrowded tented camp during a summer of extreme heat and the bitterly cold winter that followed. There was no electricity and just enough food and water to survive.

The camp was too dangerous for a teenage girl to move freely, young girls are a target for sexual attack and vulnerable and so Azeema couldn't leave the tent for a year.

The family decided to move again to Antakya.

It is here that Azeema registered in a Turkish school, her only education for two years. She was placed in a class with ten year olds as she spoke no Turkish.

She suffered acute anxiety in unfamiliar surroundings, it was necessary for her mother to walk her to school every day.

I met Azeema when she first joined our centre She was very thin and had sallow skin, she was depressed and withdrawn. She was grieving for her sister.

Azeema needed to be re-socialised gently, and be placed in a teaching group with children her own age.

This is how Firefly helped

Initially our staff secured red crescent food supplies for her family and we employed her mother as the cleaner for our centre.

Azeema was mentored by our project manager who spent a great deal of time working with her - creating trust helping her to understand that she had a future and that SHE could to turn her life around.

Our staff created an individual programme starting with one to one maths tuition with our lead teacher and support with her homework.

After a year of this she was moved into a class with children her own age at her Turkish school as she was competent in Turkish.

In July this year she turned 16 and came top in her class.

She is registered in our Maths scholarship class that focuses on preparing our students for further education.

Firefly has lead Azeema from a very dark place to a place of hope and opportunity.