

Our Stories

Firefly for Syrians



These stories illustrate the background of some of our children and the people that care for them. They were gathered with great sensitivity as many of these are triggers for the teller. When discussing Ahmed's case with our Syrian project director there was a flood of emotion as she recalled the river massacres in Aleppo in 2013. Memories are stored and not often recalled. All our staff carry these stories with them to work every day and they are a part of those very important early years for our children. The impact on them is immeasurable. Children's names have been changed to protect them and their families.



“I dream to be a doctor in the future I want to help all the children in my country” *Mariam from Idlib village 13 years old*

Mariam lives in a refugee camp near the Turkish border inside Syria. All the time she remembers her old school and friends. She really wants to study. The tent she lives in is very overcrowded and small – she says she doesn’t know what quiet is anymore, it is hard to study in these conditions. She spends a lot of time helping her mother. She comes to the Firefly Center after school every day for our workshops.





Jalal has no brothers or sisters.

His father was killed in 2013 and was one of the 230 massacred by the Syrian government in the river massacres in Aleppo. Jalal hadn't been born when his father was killed. He came with his mother to Turkey. She married again, her new husband has three children from a previous marriage. She now lives in Gaziantep and Ahmed is being brought up by his very elderly grandparents who are extremely poor, the only income for the household is from the part time work his grandfather does selling hummous.

He speaks with his mother on the mobile and visited her in the summer, but her new husband doesn't want him to visit again. Jalal is very happy in our center he is a quiet child but at home asks many questions about everything. All the time he misses his mother and often wants to leave the center in case he misses a telephone call from her. He gets very excited at home if there is a whats app message from Rasha our teacher - she gives



The time Jalal spends at Firefly is his only contact with children his own age.



Fatma

Fatma attended school until 2015 in Syria. Fleeing Syria, they lived in a camp in the desert in southern Turkey for a year. She attended school at this time, receiving a very low standard of teaching. She registered in a Turkish school on arrival in Antakya. Her mother walked her to school every day for two months due to her anxiety. She was placed in a class with ten-year-olds and spoke no Turkish. Fatma did not present PTSD symptoms but was depressed, withdrawn and had very low self-

esteem when joining our center. She was grieving for her late sibling and wider family. She was living in crowded basic accommodation in a very low-income family. She suffered anxiety in unfamiliar surroundings having recently left the refugee camp where she had been confined to a tent for nine months as it was too dangerous for a teenage girl to move freely. Fatma needed to be re-socialised gently, and be placed in a teaching group with children her own age.

What firefly provided - Initially Fatma was mentored by our project leader, Fadia, who spent a great deal of time talking to her, nurturing her ambition and self-esteem, sharing her own personal story with her - creating trust and empowering her to understand that there is choice and she could turn her life around. They set a goal-based programme individually tailored for Fatma. This started with one-to-one maths tuition with our lead teacher and support with her school homework. She dedicated herself fully to this. After a year of support, she was moved into a class with children her own age and was competent in Turkish.

In July this year she completed her school year coming top in her class: she starts her baccalaureate studies at the beginning of the next academic year. She is registered to join our maths scholarship class that focusses on preparing our students for further education and has close links with SYE based in America, a mentoring programme for young Syrians supporting them with university scholarship applications.



Yousef six years old

Yousef had been burnt during an attack on his home in Northern Syria. He had a series of skin grafts when he arrived as a refugee in Turkey. His family receives red crescent support and live in very cramped impoverished conditions.

Our center was his first experience of being with children his own age. He had no PTSD but was clingy to his mother and had very little confidence when first arriving at our center. Youseff was put in a small class with children his own age, encouraged to play, and daily we worked on his dexterity and nurtured his self-confidence. By the end of the three month course at Firefly International's center for Syrians, Yousef was able to use a pencil, to colour and draw and was beginning to be able to form his letters. He was fully integrated with children his own age and had become a very active energetic member of the group.

Using Mecanno to develop mobility as a physiotherapy exercise. This six-year-old boy couldn't hold a pencil when he first came to our center due to his war injuries.





Walid 10 years old

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 six years ago. Recently his mother remarried. She lives in Damascus with her new husband –she left all 6 children living with the grandfather in the camp. It is a small space with no electricity and extremely cold in the winter.



Walid is highly intelligent and comes to our center for Science workshops. He is currently working on the second level of our applied science programme. He is highly creative and a dedicated student making rapid progress with his maths, literacy and applied science.

Walid walking back to his tent to care for his grandfather after attending one of our workshops.

Walid's grandfather was disabled from a bomb so Walid spends a lot of his time



*"Syrian children have been caught up in adult atrocities and became shocked dormant seeds - Firefly for Syrians is nurturing, mentoring and exciting the power of creativity and curiosity in these children so that they can learn again. **This project isn't about the survival of Syrian children: it is about their revival.** Our Syrian staff provide a climate of possibility to achieve things you can't expect..." Maria Chambers Project Coordinator*

Sharooq 16 years old



"I left Syria four years ago, I am from Idlib. I went to a Syrian governmental school for the first four years of my education. We left our town because it was too dangerous. We stayed inside Syria for 6 months before we were able to cross the border. It was very frightening, we travelled in a group of about two hundred people at night. I will never forget the sound of the Turkish border guards shooting at us. We arrived in Reyhanli where I went to school for one year before coming to Antakya.

It was hard to learn Turkish to begin with but now I can speak it well enough to make good relationships with Turkish people.

My parents are both doctors, but they are open minded and are happy for me to follow my dream to be a space scientist. I have been interested in space since the age of ten.

I am really happy to come to the center to use the computers to research about space and to learn more about science. The teachers here really help us and encourage us to understand many things deeply. I must improve my English and I am working hard at this as many articles on the internet are in English. Hamdudilla I am strong at Maths. I want to thank you for this opportunity at the Firefly center and giving me the chance to research my dream and support me in this."

Ahmed 5 years old



Ahmed was registered in our center a few weeks after arriving from Syria, the family had been repeatedly displaced in Syria due to intense fighting in Northern Idlib corridor.

He is the eldest of five children and has four younger sisters.

Baseline needs when joining our center – Ahmed didn't make eye contact, he was very clingy to mother, was completely mute and very withdrawn with violent behavioural outbursts. He had no experience of being in a group of children his own age and no formal education. All his life the family had been repeatedly displaced. We have very little detailed information about their war experiences. His family's basic needs of shelter and food are currently being met and his parents are from a well-educated background.

What firefly provided – Ahmed has attended our center for a year and a half. Initially he was placed in a class of five children the focus was on learning to play and interact with peers. He was withdrawn, mute and wouldn't participate in activities. Ahmed was very fearful of coming into the building.

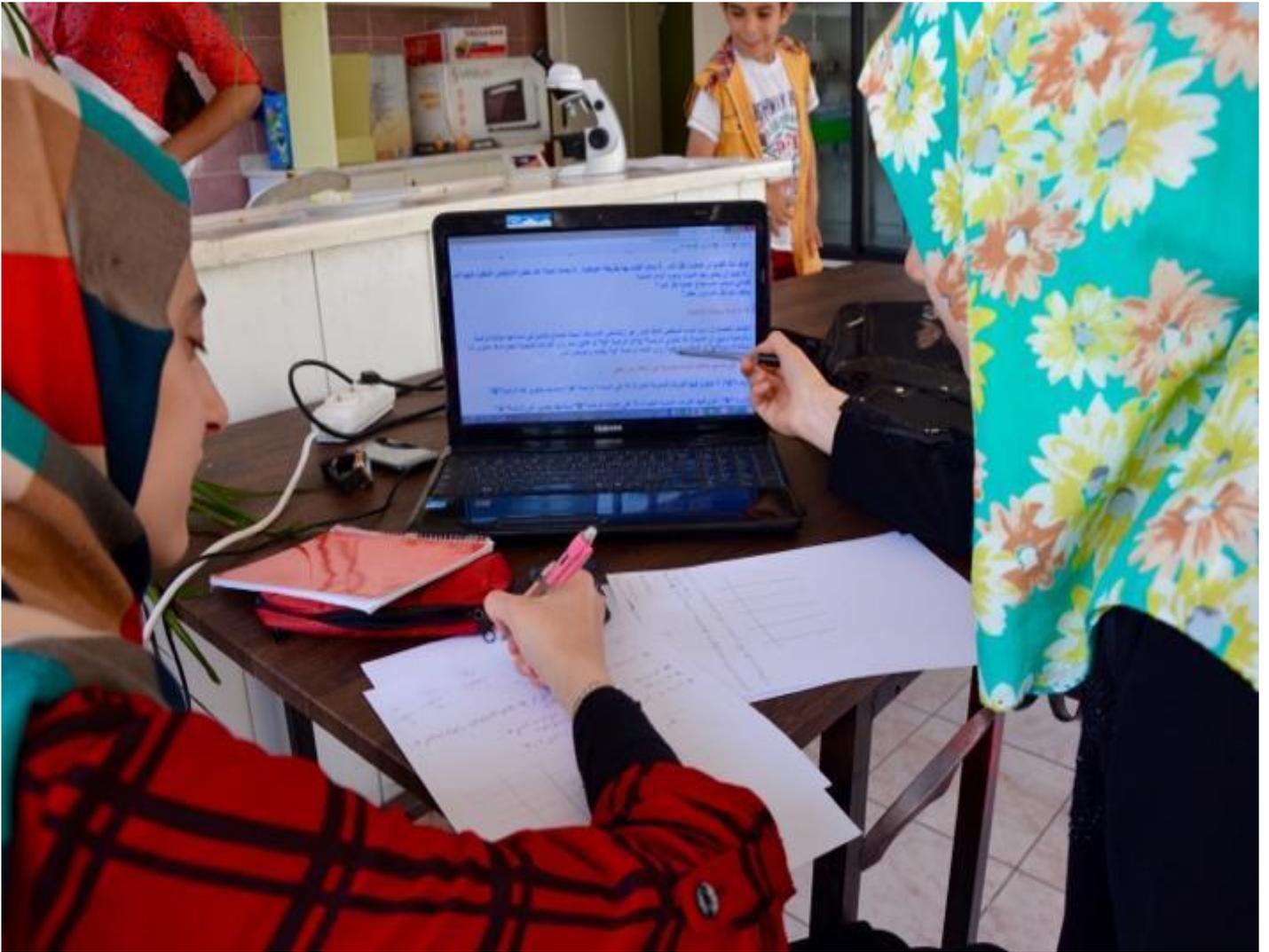
After about two months he was participating in group activities and speaking in monosyllables. Staff noticed that Ahmed had positive interactions with girls and so they set up a series of group activities for him with girls. This was highly successful and boosted his self - esteem and confidence. After nine months this was so successful that he actually became quite disruptive and needed to be separated from this group and integrated with boys his own age. This was a huge milestone in Ahmed's progress and it was from this point that staff really focused on stimulating him academically. At this time a staged programme was developed with his mother teaching him to come into the building with a member of staff who greeted him at the gate gradually developing greater independence overcoming his separation anxiety.



Ahmed has attended our programmes in Maths, Arabic language and science activities.

He is fully engaged in his learning, overcome separation anxiety and is focused and now making huge progress academically. He is now one of our high achievers.

On-going needs -Ahmed is a gifted and talented pupil and requires a stimulating curriculum to achieve his high academic potential. He can now read, speak and write both Arabic and Turkish.



"I am from Latakia in Syria. We left Syria four years ago because of the bombing.

First, we lived in Tripoli in Lebanon for a while and then we travelled to Beirut.

Life was hard in Lebanon so then we moved to Cairo and I went to school there for nine months. The education wasn't good, we didn't have books and it was hard to learn.

So, then my family moved again, this time to Turkey. I have been at school here for three years in a Syrian School. One of my friends was talking about how a hydraulic arm worked and I was interested she told me she came to this center so I came and registered for the science programme. I really enjoy learning Physics and Math's here and doing Science Activities. At school we learn theories but at the center we taught how to really understand how things work by making things. I haven't decided yet what I want to do in the future, but I am really interested in both Pharmacy and Engineering."