

# Harvest

Awareness Foundation: building peace through education

[www.awareness-foundation.com](http://www.awareness-foundation.com)



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# Little Heroes Lattakia, Syria, August 2019



We welcomed 190 Syrian children in Lattakia to Little Heroes, our year-long mentoring programme.

## The Little Heroes Ethos

- After experiencing the hell of warfare, the children of Syria need to be supported to recover from their traumatic experiences.
- They must learn how to:
  - live their lives without fear;
  - forgive and to accept each other, despite differences;
  - trust again; and
  - look to the future with hope.
- The children need to find a sense of self-worth, to regain a little of their childhood and develop the confidence to make new friends.

Our sketches teach the children about the lives of the sea creatures, and about the sea in which the fishers work. We stressed the importance of caring for our environment, not polluting the sea and beaches with litter. In one sketch, one of the fish was caught in a plastic bottle, and only the crab, with its sharp pincers, could save the day (see photo, below)!



We really opened the children's eyes to their responsibility to care for the world around them. After that, the children made a special effort to collect any litter they could find and put it in the appropriate receptacle.

In the plays, the same characters would reflect on the theme of the day. The characters were brilliantly played by four of our leaders.

After the play and the sketch, the volunteer leaders teach the children a new song to sing, reflecting the theme of the day (see photo, below left.)



For the sixth year in a row, our programme took place in the National Evangelical Church in Lattakia, thanks to the constant support of their priest, The Revd Salam Hanna, and the elders of the church. We are very grateful to them for their generosity, and especially to their Sunday School department who helped so much throughout the event. This programme welcomes children of every denomination, regardless of gender or disability. Our gratitude goes

to all of the churches who sent their children to take part. The title for the starting event was **"The Fisherman and the Sea."** The children followed the Disciples' journey with Jesus as He called them, taught them, showed them miracles, and then sent them to spread the Good News.

Each day, the main teaching is propagated through a funny sketch and a short play. For this event, we introduced the children to four characters, (2 fish, a sea horse and a crab) who would feature throughout, the story continuing over the three days. The different creatures would have adventures that related to the children's own lives and experiences, and always find a way to work together, despite their obvious differences.





They also sing the songs they learned at previous events, and of course each day they sing the special Little Heroes song:

*"I am a Little Hero, in the hands of Christ I grow,  
my life in His hands, and my hope in Him.  
When I hear His words, He fills me with His peace.  
Despite my young age, He is always close to me,  
and he always encourages me, and he makes me a Hero."*



The children then play a game to help them learn the Bible verse of the day (see photo, above).

After a short break with refreshments, the children are then divided by age into discussion groups, where they talk about the story and reflect on their own lives. An important part of this discussion is where the children express their own feelings and talk about how the teaching can fit into their own lives. This is where our mentoring process begins, as the children get to know the volunteer leaders and vice versa (see photo, below).



After lunch, we have a session of handicrafts in which everyone takes part, and then the children are encouraged to discover their own creative

talents in a range of activities.

Children could choose from painting, music, drama, media and writing. Many of these children have never had an opportunity before



to try any of these art forms due to the nature of life in the midst of conflict in Syria. We concentrate on promoting peace through the arts, as well as a means of self-expression. Every year, the Little Heroes discover

talents which are totally new to them see photos, above and right).

Prayer and reflection are essential parts of the event, bringing the children together for a time of quiet reflection on the challenges they face and how as Little Heroes they can overcome these challenges.







Games (see photo, above) are also an important part of the day. The children release a lot of energy, they practise communication, and they learn to respect each other. When the children compete, they experience the highs and lows of victory and defeat in a very safe and supportive environment, teaching them to be magnanimous in triumph and to accept loss and move on.



At the end of the three days, parents and family are invited to come and see what their children have learned. The children sing songs and perform plays, and there is a display of the children's art and handicrafts, which the children take home with them. We give awards to six of the children, recognising them for their exemplary commitment, good behaviour and how friendly they were to the others.

The volunteers who lead the event are all fully-trained Ambassadors for Peace, and they give up considerable time before, during the event and afterwards. At the end of each day, we gather all of the leaders together to discuss how the day went and what lessons we can learn, and especially to talk about the individual children and how they are progressing.



Children engage in a mentoring relationship with a trained Ambassador mentor during the event itself. Every child is then given the opportunity to enter into a long-term mentoring relationship, with the consent of their families. The relationship is sustained after the event through the children's own places of worship, safe and welcoming locations where we can continue to provide the children with a mature guide who aims to build a long-term relationship with them and give the support and encouragement they need. As the Ambassador mentors build a relationship of trust with the children and their families, we have found that the children's families share much more about their children with the mentors.

#### STORIES FROM THE LITTLE HEROES, LATTAKIA, AUGUST 2019

- Nadi, an 11 year old boy, talked for the very first time about his mother's death. He was very confused and angry as he had prayed to God to save his mother's life, but she had died. Nadi told his mentor that he could not trust God anymore, because when it really mattered God had not listened to his prayers. She explained to him that God always answers our prayers, but in His own way. Because he had shared his pain, we saw a change in Nadi and that he was now better able to cope with the dreadful loss he had suffered.
- One very happy little boy who took part in all activities, asked lots of questions, and was well-liked by the other children surprised everyone when he gave his name: Mohammad. This name is only used by Muslims. The leader told us that none of the children treated him any differently once they realised that he was Muslim, and that they continued to spend time with him in a wonderful way despite the great tensions that now exist in the region between the different faiths. The leader did remark that things might have been different among adults, and that children are so ready to embrace people who are different.
- We discovered that many of the children included the Awareness Foundation in their prayers, praying for us to be strong enough to come back to help them in the future.



We were delighted this year that we were joined by 12 children and 2 leaders (see photo, above) from Baniyas, a city in Tartous Governorate, 55 km south of Lattakia and 35 km north of Tartous. The children were Christian and Muslim. They hired a minibus and travelled from Baniyas to take part each day!







# Little Heroes

## Al-Yazdia, Syria, July 2019



We welcomed 90 children from all denominations to come together for our first ever Little Heroes programme in Al-Yazdia, near Homs.

We were invited by The Revd Elias Jabbour, priest of the National Evangelical (Protestant) Church in Al-Yazdia, to bring the Little Heroes programme to the area. Previously, he had been a deacon in Lattakia, where he and his wife Petra had helped with our Little Heroes work there. We were also hosted by Father Dawood Ibrahim at the local Greek Orthodox church.

As this would be the first time Little Heroes had come to this town, we chose to begin with the "Story of the Field". We have five different events which we use according to the needs of the children. The Story of the Field uses the analogy of farming and gardening. As we plant seeds and carefully tend the soil, we can expect a good harvest. In our own lives, this is also true; if we work hard and we look after ourselves, then we can live good lives.

The event was attended by children of every Christian denomination, as well as some Muslims. Three disabled children participated fully.



For this event, the sketches featured Apple and Orange (see photo, above), with our Middle East Coordinator, Elza Nasra, playing Apple.



### STORIES FROM THE LITTLE HEROES, Al-Yazdia, JULY 2019

- Jad, a young boy from Homs, was very aggressive and over-competitive when he began Little Heroes. The leaders gave him extra help, listening to him and encouraging him to ask questions whenever he needed. He began to become calmer, better able to listen and take part. By the end, the leaders described him as "like another person." They saw marvellous changes in this child, such as Jad taking the time to help younger children.
- Two girls wrote a letter to the Awareness Foundation, saying that they had never attended a programme like ours. They were overwhelmed with everything, and wanted to us to come back as soon as possible.
- Bashar told us that Jesus had come to him in a dream when he was three years old to tell him that he would die when he was young. A leader said that "He is counting the days until he dies and his life is a mess." The leader prayed with Bashar and is now working with his mother and priest to help him.

We are so proud that this year we have been able to bring the Little Heroes to a new area in Syria. With more resources, we can help so many more children to become Little Heroes across this war-torn land, changing the lives of wonderful young people who are in genuine, desperate need.







## HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO meets our Syrian AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE in Lebanon

During the first official royal visit to Lebanon on June 12th 2019, HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO joined The Revd Nadim Nassar to meet six Syrian graduates of our 'Ambassadors for Peace' programme.

Ambassadors for Peace is an ecumenical educational programme for young people in Syria and Iraq, empowering them to develop their own creative projects to promote peace and reconciliation in their own communities. The Countess is Patron of the Awareness Foundation. Also in attendance at the meeting was Lord Ahmad, Baron of Wimbledon, the UK's Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN with special responsibility for peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

The Revd Nadim Nassar said: *"The small number of Ambassadors for Peace represented the whole group in a wonderful way. They gave a clear and deep picture of the challenges of living in a war zone, but also of their resilience. We are very proud of them."*

The young people told The Countess how much their lives have changed as a result of participating in the Ambassadors for Peace programme. The young women in particular were passionate about promoting the role of women in rebuilding Syria.

After talking with each of the young people, the Countess expressed how, after hearing so much bad news about Syria over so many years, it was refreshing to witness the light and hope of the young representatives of the country. She assured the young Syrians that they are not forgotten and that *"we are with you and we are supporting you"*.

The Ambassadors for Peace programme demonstrates the potential of young people to overcome great challenges in order to work for a better society. Earlier in the day, The Countess also visited a tented settlement in the Bekaa Valley and met Syrian refugee families.



## Strategy Meeting May 2019

For the first time ever, the Boards of the Awareness Foundation and Awareness Foundation America came together to discuss joint strategy for the Foundation.

This unique meeting had five objectives:

1. Bring the Boards together
2. Review the strategy for 2019 – 2021
3. Discuss and reach agreement on a fundraising Plan for the next three years.
4. Identify top priority Action Items for 2019 – 2021.
5. Agree on a set of next steps to follow this retreat.

A very important early topic was how we describe the Awareness Foundation. Those present agreed on the following terminology to be

used to describe the Foundation and its work:

*"We are an international charity which builds peace through education, equipping and empowering children and young people in Syria and Iraq to be agents of love and reconciliation."*

Over two days, we reviewed our strategy and worked to produce a global Action and Fundraising Plan for 2019-2021. Each action point has a firm deadline and a Board Member responsible.

We are very grateful to all who took part.





# Festival of Preaching

Oxford, September 2019

## Festival of Preaching

CHURCH TIMES   
at Christ Church, Oxford

For the first time, The Revd Nadim Nassar was invited to give a seminar at the Festival of Preaching in Oxford.

On Tuesday, 10th September, Nadim taught about "Preaching the Culture of God in the Cultures of the World." He reminded those present that Christ was not only from the Middle East, but that he was, technically speaking, a Syrian. At the time of Jesus's birth, Judaea was merely a satellite of the Roman Province of Syria. Nadim warned that Christ had been Westernised by many, including by some of the other speakers at the festival!

He stressed that we must all pay attention to culture: our own culture, the culture of the Biblical texts, and especially the culture of God as revealed by Christ.

Afterwards, one participant told him, "I came for a talk, but found a revolution!"

# Explore cultural nuances in the Bible with PAX



We are delighted to announce the first three in a new series of PAX Videos, "Think you Understand your Bible?"



In this series, The Revd Nadim Nassar and St. John Wright explore the huge cultural significance of bread in the Feeding of the Five Thousand - and why the scraps were collected in baskets; what really would have happened at the Last Supper, and why could the Disciples not identify who was dipping in Jesus' bowl; and what does it really mean in the Near East when men are intimate in the way that Jesus and John are shown to be in the New Testament?

This new series can be found on YouTube - just look for "PAXVideos"!



# Toronto, Canada

## May 2019

We are delighted to announce that on Tuesday 7th May, The Revd Nadim Nassar received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa), presented by James Appleyard (Chair of the Awareness Foundation Board of Trustees) and hooded by the Provost, the Very Rev. Andrew Asbil.



Nadim addressed the Convocation. At the end of his inspirational remarks to the 17 graduates of the Class of 2019, he left this final message to the graduating class: "Congratulations to all of you! Together let us keep the flame of passion, hope and love burning in our hearts and lives so we can make a difference in the world of difference."



Nadim was joined by many friends for this very special occasion including James Appleyard and Tamara Rebanks, Christopher Bunting, Tony Whittingham and Bob Davies, as well as his sister Huda Nassar and his nephew George Nasra and his wife Maria.



# Gala Dinner 2019

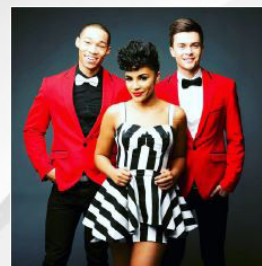
Help us raise £20,000 for our Ambassadors for Peace in Syria and Iraq!



## GALA DINNER

Monday 28th October 2019

Performing at our Gala Dinner!



## CRYSTAL STARR

In the last year, two time Hollywood Music Awards winner Crystal Starr has performed in support slots for *Lady Gaga*, *Drake*, *Tito Jackson*, *The Cure* and *J Lo*. Crystal has performed regularly to crowds of over 80,000 people as official support act for artists such as *Paul Stanley (Kiss)*, *Ariana Grande*, *Kanye West*, *John Legend* and *Stevie Wonder* over the past ten years, and she is a regular face on American TV, featuring on *'Ellen'*, *'Tonight with Jimmy Fallon'* and NBC's *'The Winner Is'*. A personal highlight of her career was being selected to perform on *Broadway* as a lead role in *Warner Brothers hit musical 'Baby It's You'*, the story of The Shirelles.

"Crystal Starr is a beauty, her voice is the best, bring her to Britain anytime we'll have her!"

BBC

"Starr nails a tune with searing passion and skill"

Rolling Stone

**Tickets £95 each** are available from [www.awareness-foundation.com](http://www.awareness-foundation.com)  
Just click on the **"Gala 2019"** link in the top menu!

## How to support us

United Kingdom

Please visit <https://www.awareness-foundation.com/donate-1> to donate through our website or to find details on how to transfer funds to us.

Alternatively, please send **cheques**, made payable to "Awareness Foundation", to the address of the Main Office, below.

United States

In the US, Please send **checks**, made payable to Awareness Foundation America, to the person below and clearly marked for deposit to the account of Awareness Foundation America:

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