

## IBBY CHILDREN IN CRISIS FUND: IBBY LEBANON



### The Syrian Children's Bibliotherapy Project in Lebanon 2016

This is a continuation of the project implemented in 2013. The success of that was impressive and since the influx of refugees into Lebanon has increased the need has become even greater.

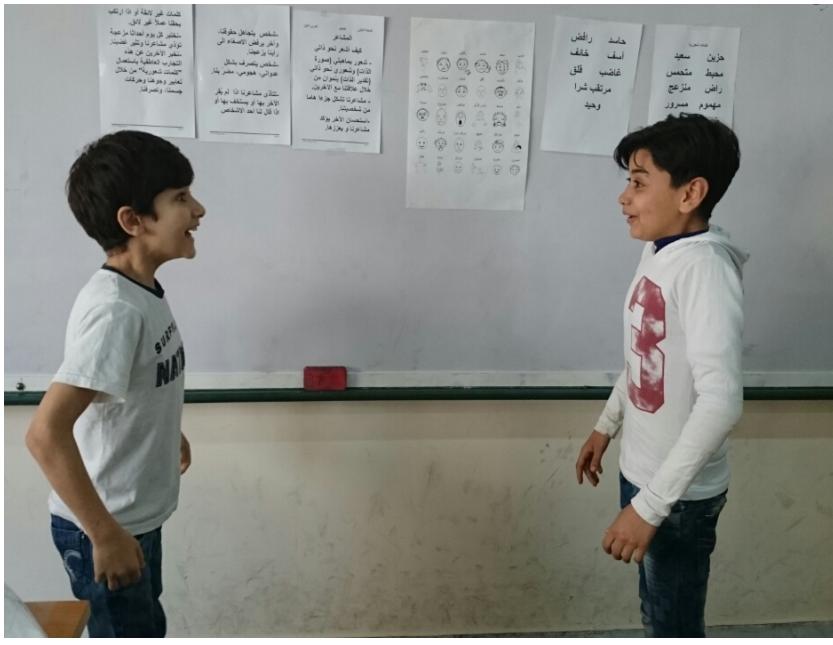
During the month of November a request from IBBY Lebanon (LBBY) was submitted to the Lebanese Ministry of Education to secure permission for implementing the Bibliotherapy project in two public schools that accommodate Syrian children. The permit was eventually granted in January after several trips to the Ministry. Training was given at the end of January to a group of 15 teachers from the Shakib Irslan Public School in the use of the programme. Four teachers were selected to proceed with the project along with one coordinator. One hundred children were recruited from the student body of that school that qualified for the project. Attendance has been very encouraging and there is very little absence.

The programme with the children was started on Friday, 5



February will continue to mid-May, at which time the final State exams will start and the school premises will not be available for our use. Friday is their day off and the children attend from 8:00 to 11:00, after that many of the children go to the mosque for Friday prayers. The programme

includes a fifteen minutes break and a snack that the children thoroughly enjoy.



The 2015 programme in the Burj Hammoud school was interrupted at the end of July and because of changes in personnel in the Syrian-refugee national programme the sessions could only restart in February 2016 and ended in March. On the last day the teachers and the children cooperated in making Pizza and some local dishes that everyone enjoyed. The head of

project wrote to say that it was hard to describe the children's happiness.

On 12 March a new session began in the school with a new group of 80 children, four teachers and a Coordinator. This will go through mid-May, this time for four hours every Saturday, the day off in this school, from 8:00- 12:00, with a break of half an hour and a snack.

Julinda Abu Nasr who is the leader of the project, is very present during the sessions and moves from one classroom to the next observing the children's behavior and listening to their trials and tribulations. She wrote, "I also observe the performance of the teachers who are trying their best to change their authoritarian approach to teaching and learn to listen



rather than talk. At the end of each session I sit down with the teachers and together we evaluate the session. I give some of my time to work with individual children who need more attention than others."

The Ministry of Education sends delegates from their Guidance and Counseling office to observe and check on our work. They were so pleased with the programme that they asked if their personnel could also be trained in its use.

As in previous groups, the children are reporting horror stories of experiences they have been exposed to of severe violence on them, their families, friends, towns, villages, schools. A new trend in children's behavior is the use of knives to hurt others. If knives are not available they use well-sharpened pencils to hit other children with. The anger, hate, bitterness, aggression and anxiety are so apparent and intense in these children's behavior. Fighting over a ball can create a serious problem: a few children who are playing ball in a group may end up wounded or bruised.

It is rewarding to learn of the changes in their behavior on the playground, in the classroom, and even at home. At the beginning their immediate

reactions in all situations were to hit, kick, curse, use foul language, snatch what they want, stab with a knife or a pencil or any sharp tool they get hold of, but after a few sessions you see a dramatic change in their social skills. Parents are reporting change in the children's behavior at home as well. The parents are very supportive of the programme. Although the sessions take place in the children's free time, they insist on coming and the parents cooperate in sending them even though there is no form of transportation for them.

Julinda goes on to say, "There is no doubt in my mind that the work we are doing with these children is lighting a candle in the dark tunnel they have had to cross too early in life. I am sure the love they are given, the opportunity to express themselves in a variety of means, the possibility of meeting characters in books who set examples of good behavior, the privilege of being heard and



sympathized with are all saving them from the danger of harping the anger and hate in their burdened souls that may lead them into crime and misbehavior in the future. This program is helping them deal with their hate and anger by trying to channel these negative destructive feelings into more positive venues rather than directing it towards self or others."

We need to continue this worthwhile project. The crisis in Syria is not over and there is no sign that it will be any time soon. These children continue to flee their homes and continue to have difficulties in returning to their childhood. This project shows how careful training and group sessions can help them get their emotions and thus their lives back. It is a small project that has potential to grow throughout the school system reaching many more children in need. With your support IBBY will be able to continue to fund this work.



#### *Funding from IBBY*

*The appeal first launched in 2013 has raised USD 45,575 to date.*

*Funds sent to Lebanon to date: USD 44,900*