

International Orthodox Christian Charities Launches Campaign for Children's Programs in Syria



Dream Centers offer Children, Families Safe Spaces, Support Overcoming Trauma

International Orthodox Christian Charities [IOCC] is launching a new fundraising campaign, aiming to raise \$250,000 for programming that supports children and families who have survived trauma and tragedy in Syria.

Children are among the millions affected by the conflict in Syria, including many displaced in their own country. Whether through exposure to violence or the loss of a home, family member, and stable daily life, children are especially susceptible to mental distress and uncertainty about the future. Working with Church partner the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development, IOCC has created safe spaces called Dream Centers across Syria to help address these needs.

Dream Centers are safe spaces for play, learning, and psychosocial support that help children (and their caregivers) deal with trauma and difficult experiences. Programming prioritizes unaccompanied children, those separated from caregivers, and orphans. Specialists work to help children become more resilient to trauma, and to emotionally reconnect with family and community through positive interactions and learning.

Four centers in various locations (urban and rural) have so far served thousands. Children ages 4 to 18 take part in three-month courses of twice-weekly sessions and interactive activities like sports, theater, games, and art. The sessions aim to improve children's learning, memory, focus, and creative thinking, as well as to foster healthy emotional expression, communication, and responsibility. Children also gain body-boundary awareness and learn ways to protect themselves against harassment.

Parents, too, find support at the Dream Centers through workshops in topics from nutrition to helping children communicate, protecting them from abuse and violence, and addressing behavioral disorders.

"I'm so grateful for all the support my son received in the Dream Center," said one mother, whose eight-year-old struggled to concentrate and connect with peers when he first enrolled. Both mother and child gained skills to help them address the tragedy they've experienced in healthful, positive ways.

This is the Dream Centers' goal, and additional funding will allow this crucial programming to reach even more families and children in need.

IOCC has been working in Syria since 2002, serving both Syrians in need and Iraqi refugees. Responding to the more recent crisis, IOCC has worked throughout the Middle East and Europe to meet humanitarian needs. Since 2012, IOCC programs have served more than 3 million people in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Armenia, Serbia, and Greece.

To support IOCC's Dream Centers in Syria, please contact IOCC online or by phone (877.803.4622).

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is the humanitarian and development agency of the Assembly of Canonical Bishops of the United States of America. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC has provided more than \$692 million in humanitarian relief and sustainable development programs in over 60 countries worldwide. Today, IOCC applies its expertise in humanitarian response to natural and manmade crises in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States,

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