

OVERCOMING DISABILITIES

MIDDLE EAST PROJECT SUMMER 2013 UPDATE

Thank you so much for supporting this outstanding project. Over the three years, with your support, the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) in Lebanon and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the occupied Palestinian territory will be directly helping 1,000 people with disabilities to access training and gain employment. They will also be working with key government institutions, around 250 businesses and alongside 20 other civil society organisations to improve the lives of, and opportunities for, people with disabilities.

Salah's story

When Salah Mohammad Ahmad Al-Halayqua was 10, he started experiencing pain in his legs. The condition had an increasing effect on his life in his teens, but it was several years before he was eventually diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, a degenerative condition with no current treatment or cure.

Coming to terms with his condition and understanding that it would get worse was difficult and upsetting, but with the support of the YMCA, Salah says: 'Slowly I accepted it. [When] I first came to the YMCA in 2003, I was confined to my house and to my neighbourhood. When I got the chair, it helped me quite a bit. Through my sessions with Nader [his counsellor at the YMCA], I was able to gain more confidence. I started to be able to interact with neighbours, with strangers and with people who did not know about my condition.'



Salah's life has been transformed by the YMCA's programme. Your support will enable it to help many other people like him

Salah was a bright student at school, achieving excellent grades in his exams, and was ambitious for his future: 'My plan was to study IT or graphic design, but most universities offering those subjects were not near my home and not modified [to accommodate wheelchair use]. My friends told me about the Palestine Technical College where I could take a diploma in accountancy.'

But then came a blow to his plans: 'After finishing my studies, there was a vacancy advertised at the municipality, and I applied for it. They told me that I was not fit to do the job. I was very upset. My dad and I went to the president's office and showed them my grades and how good I was. We knew about the law [that states people with disabilities should make up at least five per cent of employees within ministries and governmental organisations] through the YMCA. Within a month, I was employed. The credit goes to the YMCA for telling us about the law.'

**'Thank you for everything
that you have done for me.'**

Salah Al-Halayqua

Salah continues: 'The YMCA has stayed with me since the beginning and I am confident that it will continue to support me when I need it. It has really enriched my life.'

'I am part of the youth group. We raise awareness of, and advocate for, implementing the law for people with disabilities. It inspires me to be more resilient and stronger. Through the group, I have learnt to be confident. We meet with influential people – like the Minister of Health – and lobby at a national level to make change happen.'

Your support will help both the YMCA and the LPHU to reach many more people like Salah.

The wider picture – Lebanon

Life for many people in Lebanon at the moment is uncertain. Lebanon borders Syria, and the impact of the conflict in Syria can be clearly felt in Lebanon. There are currently estimated to be more than half a million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, a country of 4 million people. With such a high number of additional people trying to access public services, the infrastructure has been placed under huge strain.

The LPHU is concerned about the refugees with disabilities whose specialist needs are not being met, and is exploring ways to address these.

Additionally, the Lebanese government has been dissolved and elections, originally planned for this summer, have now been postponed. This makes it difficult for organisations like the LPHU to try to influence policy change at government level. However, despite these challenges, the LPHU is continuing to do all it can to bring about positive changes at the national level.

The wider picture – the occupied Palestinian territory

For the YMCA, as with the LPHU, political uncertainty impacts on its ability to carry out advocacy work and bring about policy change, but nonetheless it is continuing its efforts to improve the policy situation for people living with disabilities. The YMCA has recently purchased a specially adapted vehicle, which allows the team to travel around the West Bank carrying out employment assessments for people with disabilities. The team hopes in the future to be able to fit the vehicle with a wheelchair lift.

Looking ahead

In the months ahead, the YMCA and the LPHU will be working on a report that addresses the gaps that still exist in the laws regarding people with disabilities in Lebanon and in the occupied Palestinian territory. The report will focus on rights around employability and access to work. The main report will be in Arabic, but we hope to have extracts in English to share with you in our next update. This will be a key document in helping these organisations and others to decide on the most important campaigning actions to take next in their work to improve the rights of people with disabilities in the Middle East.



Salah at work in the local municipality office

Please pray with us

As well as our financial support this project, we believe that our prayers make a real difference. Please pray with us:

- **for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria. May the voices of those calling for peace be clearly heard**
- **for the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have had to leave Syria, and the people of all the countries hosting them. May their needs be met, and may the uncertainty in which they are now living soon be brought to an end**
- **for the work of the LPHU and the YMCA. May they maintain a steadfast determination and show unending patience in the face of obstacles. May they be strengthened by our prayers to continue to work for people with disabilities**
- **for Salah, whose generously shared his story with us. May he be strengthened in his job and in his positive influence on other people living with disabilities who lack his confidence. May his life continue to be an example to others.**

If there is any way we can help your group, please contact your local Christian Aid office or visit christianaid.org.uk/partnerships



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POVERTY