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A passion for helping children...



Norma Nashed Abdul Nour

By Linda Hindi

AMMAN - Norma Nashed Abdul Nour is passionate about helping underprivileged children.

The Jordanian American founder and director of "Reaching Hearts for Kids" (www.reachinghearts4kids.org) currently is in the capital, where she has sponsored 25 impoverished children's education in private schools.

Her organisation, which is run as a one-woman show, has expanded from helping neighbours to offering humanitarian aid in eight countries.

Abdul Nour's Amman visit has brought back memories of what it was like to be born poor.

As a child, she remembers that the Roman Amphitheatre was her playground, as her family of nine lived nearby in a one-room house with no bathroom.

"Sometimes there was no food to eat," she told The Jordan Times.

When she was 10-years-old, she had to clean the school she attended in exchange for tuition.

But her distant memories are fond ones of her mother helping their impoverished neighbours by

sewing for no charge, or visiting a church twice a week to cook for the needy.

“My mother was a woman of faith; she would always tell us it is not about what you have to offer, what is important is that it comes from the heart,” Abdul Nour said.

Losing her father at 15, she recalls how an American missionary invested in her.

“He took me into his home, took care of me as a daughter and paid for my education. Eventually this allowed me to land a decent job and take care of my mother and six siblings,” she noted.

In 1985, Abdul Nour emigrated to the US and three years later she was diagnosed with a rare form of skin cancer.

After suffering the effects of clinical medication, she turned to natural therapy and prayer, describing this as a pivotal period in her life.

“God healed me and I knew it was a calling to stop working for myself and to help end human suffering in anyway I could.”

Using her modest pension and savings, the philanthropist started by buying clothing and food for underprivileged children in her community in Maryland, in the US.

Realising there was an overwhelming need for aid, she started soliciting superstores, who gave her free food and clothing. She then scouted neighbourhoods and made lists of the most needy, personally visiting them with the items.

The in-kind donations began to pour in and in 2001, her charity initiative officially was born.

“By then, I was convinced that the only way to help someone out of poverty is to give them an education, and I longed to go back to Amman to help children there,” she told The Jordan Times.

Seven years later, she still works out of her home office with the help of two part-time volunteers, but has managed to sponsor 25 Jordanian children (until Tawjihi).

“I now have three boys who have graduated high school... I will do my best to start paying university tuitions for the most gifted,” she said.

She has also travelled to Egypt, Pakistan and India and, with the help of family and friends’ donations, offered similar support to children in these countries.

But, the former administrative assistant stresses that “love has no boundaries” and has found herself drawn to Africa.

“In Africa, I have seen destitute and helpless people like nowhere else. I am broken when I meet a child who has no mother because she died of starvation, or the countless orphans living with AIDS and sleeping on sticks with no blanket, no food, no shoes,” she said, her eyes filling up with tears.

“I have seen orphans three and four years old rummaging through the garbage for something to

eat and not finding anything because the older kids got there first,” she added.

Abdul Nour’s determination and love has borne some fruit and through her organisation, she has built orphanages and is supporting schools in places like Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kenya.

One school, which “had nothing but one teacher, one principal and nothing else,” now has books, more teachers, a fence, supplies and its 130 students receive one hot meal a day.

The religious humanitarian explained that what she has done so far “is not much” as she mainly funds the projects with donations from a handful of individuals, but for her, each child counts.

She eventually wants to live in one of the orphanages she has built so she can “touch and teach the children” and let them feel they are loved.

“When I look at poor children I don’t see beggars, I see what they could become if someone would help them,” Abdul Nour told The Jordan Times.

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