LIFE AS A SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILD

BY ABIGAIL WOODCOCK – MEDAIR
There are now more than 1.4 million Syrian children living as refugees since the war in Syria began.

400,000 have fled to Lebanon where thousands are living in makeshift tents in informal settlements in the Bekaa Valley. Medair, a relief organisation based near Lausanne, is providing families with materials to stay warm and items to build shelters that can keep them dry. Megan Fraga, a relief worker for Medair, regularly visits the overcrowded camps and gives us a peak into what life is like for a Syrian refugee child.

“Every time I visit the settlements, children constantly run in and out of the flimsy tents, dodging piles of rubbish and stagnant water. The little ones play with broken plastic toys or old shoes while the older ones try to find work. Teenagers are caught in between childhood and adulthood. Most have seen and experienced the horrors of war and often become the heads of their family at 15 or 16. They try to provide for their mother and brothers and sisters but at times only the youngest children are hired in their place.”

Abu is 16. He loves to play football. His favourite team is Brazil. Abu stopped going to school when he was 11 years old and started to sell fruit and vegetables to earn some money for his family. He fled from his home in Syria to Lebanon when the fighting started.

“Oh my way here, I had to cross a very big lake in a tiny boat,” said Abu. “There were too many people in the boat and the lake was not very calm. The military can shoot at you when you cross and it is very scary. The most difficult moment was when my father died, then my brother. I don’t wish anyone to suffer like we have suffered.”

Abu misses going to the swimming pool the most when thinking about Syria. “When I came here I got bored a lot,” he said. “There is nothing for me to do.”

Ma’an is 15. He used to live in Homs. He has been his family’s breadwinner since his father deserted them when he was 12. To earn money, he painted and washed cars. Now he lives in a tent in the Bekaa with his younger twin brothers and mother.

“I want to live like you. I want to live a normal life like other people. I miss everything about Syria - all of my life, everything, I lived there, it was my home. I used to take care of some birds, I miss the birds. I want to return to Homs and help my people.”

Medair is committed to helping Abu and Ma’an. It provides thousands of refugee families affected by the war in Syria with shelter, household items and nutrition support. Medair began responding to the Syrian Crisis in 2012 and is active in Jordan and Lebanon. In the Bekaa, its teams are helping families living in the informal camps to plan their sites better, establishing water drainage systems and promoting good health and hygiene practice.

*All figures taken from the UN.*