DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program (WFP) (2018) estimate that 1.5 million displaced Syrians now reside in Lebanon, with 54% under the age of 18. Lebanon’s Syrian displaced community faces poverty and political marginalization (around 20% of all families reside in informal tented settlements). As of 2019, the school-aged Syrian refugee population, ages 3 to 18 years, totals 488,000 (estimated), yet only 48% of the school-aged refugee population are enrolled in formal education (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2018). Jusoor’s Refugee Education Program aims address this enrollment gap for displaced Syrian children.

Jusoor, founded in 2011 by members of the Syrian diaspora, aims to provide a brighter future for Syria’s youth. Jusoor’s Refugee Education Program operates three primary schools, teaching kindergarten through Grade 8, in Beirut and Beka’a Valley, serving over 1,200 displaced Syrian children annually. The mission of Jusoor’s Refugee Education Program is to serve as a bridge for Syrian students to enter Lebanon’s schools.

When the Refugee Education Program began in 2014, Jusoor’s Academic Director spearheaded a teacher recruitment process within the displaced Syrian communities in Beirut, Central Beka’a, and West Beka’a. Within the applicant pool, 60% of candidates lacked teaching experience. Of the 40% with teaching experience or an education degree, few demonstrated skills in child-centered learning or teaching in emergency education contexts.

These recruitment challenges were particularly acute in light of the challenges of working with refugee children and youth. Refugee children face three main barriers for their learning and recovery: (1) challenges to psychosocial well-being, (2) struggles with a new language of instruction, and (3) limited capacity to catch up without targeted support (Save the Children 2018). The majority of children that matriculated at Jusoor had been out of school for an extended period of time or had not attended school. Further, some children suffered from psychological trauma and fatigue due to displacement.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

To maintain a safe and vibrant place for primary-aged Syrian children to succeed academically, Jusoor needed to devise a strategy to recruit, to train, and to retain qualified teachers amongst the displaced Syrian community. Further, Jusoor needed to ensure that these teachers were equipped with skills to teach in emergency education contexts and to meet the specific needs of children and youth displaced by war.

Jusoor adopts an adaptive management strategy to the recruitment, training, and retention of qualified teachers for Jusoor’s three schools. Jusoor maintains a forty-plus person staff of teachers and administrators across schools, serving around 1,200 children on an annual basis.

To accomplish this strategy, Jusoor relies on continuous needs assessments, beginning with a preliminary needs assessment in 2013 and a pilot training program in 2014-2015. These needs assessments are conducted by Jusoor’s Academic Director and school principals on a semi-annual basis. Further, Jusoor uses three approaches to assess training impact and to continuously adapt training to ensure that Jusoor’s training best meets student needs: (1) classroom observations, (2) peer learning communities, and (3) teaching learning communities.

Jusoor’s teaching training program provides two annual modules to our forty-plus teaching staff across three schools. The training program focuses on the
Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies’ (INEE) core competencies for primary school teachers in crisis contexts.

**EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES**

Our training approach relies on published research by Save the Children, INEE, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education regarding the importance of child-centered learning in refugee education. Save the Children reports that “teachers may adopt a teacher-centered or authoritarian approach to instructing refugee learners.”

After completing hiring in our first year, we conducted a pilot evaluation. Three members of our team – the Academic Director, the Principal, and our School Counsellor – conducted classroom observations. We identified the prevalence of the teacher-centered approach and designed training programs to shift pedagogy. In particular, we focused on three areas:

- need for differentiated learning;
- need for training on psychosocial support for students;
- training on hands-on materials in the classroom.

Regardless of how experienced the teacher is, he or she is given initial training in emergency education methodology, based on the INEE Minimum Standards for Emergency Education, and best practices to teach core competencies, adapt available materials and resources, prepare constructive activities, and evaluate learning outcomes.

In addition to initial training for teachers, Jusoor uses three approaches to ensure continuous teacher professional development:

- **Classroom Observation**: Classroom observations remain an integral part of our community of practice. Teachers are usually observed by one of three people: the Academic Director, the Principal, and the Counsellor. Teachers receive training on classroom observation during annual trainings to ensure that the observation is not intimidating to the teacher or disrupts the course. Each usually observes with a different objective in mind, and Jusoor has designed a toolkit aligned with each objective. Our Principals and Academic Director designed a rubric to assess student engagement and classroom management in Jusoor’s classroom. Our Counsellor designed a rubric designed to assess student psychosocial well-being at our schools. There are two kinds of classroom observations: the walk-in observations, which are short pop-in visits, and whole class observations. Observations are based on how trainings are being implemented or if a teacher requests help in a specific area.

- **Peer Learning**: Some members of our teaching staff face tremendous personal constraints and must leave us during the school year. For example, some staff members choose to relocate to a third country. Therefore, we sometimes must on-board staff members mid-year to fill the gap. We identify top performers amongst our skill areas and have the on-boarded teachers shadow these staff members. These outstanding teachers also serve as trainers during our training. This technique allows us to maintain quality standards despite teacher turnover.

- **Teacher Learning Community Program**: Beginning in 2017, Jusoor initiated a new community of practice technique in partnering with Education Development Trust: the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) Program. The program provides a community of practice, in which teachers meet on a monthly basis to reflect on three core elements: (1) teacher well-being, (2) curriculum training, and (3) language training. A teacher video tapes her/his class and the show a part of it to the rest of the teachers. Then a facilitator takes on the lead to discuss what was observed. All teachers have been trained on the TLC protocol.

**Evidence on Student Outcomes**

According to our key performance indicators (KPIs), 72% of our students show significant improvement in their numeracy and literacy rates. All of the students who are 12-14 years old who come to school illiterate where able to acquire a level of Grade 1. Furthermore, 66% of the students who have enrolled in public schools have not dropped out.

Jusoor continues to refine its evaluation techniques. We also carry out qualitative interviews with teachers at private schools where our students have matriculated. According to a teacher interview at a private high school in Beqaa, Jusoor students stand out among the others because they come will prepared and truly engaged in the learning process.
Teacher Testimonies

Jusoor’s staff complete evaluation forms after each training. This helps our organization to better understand teachers’ needs and collect feedback for future programs. Three testimonials are included below:

Suzanne, teacher, Jurrahiya Campus: “There is a big difference between how I used to teach in Syria and the methods I have learnt at Jusoor. I hope to be able to use them when I go back to Syria.”

Sarah, principal, Jurrahiya Campus: “When I go back to Syria my dream is to start a training centre for teachers and train them in the way we have been trained here.”

Samer, former teacher, currently relocated in Canada: “The training I did at Jusoor helped me get a job here as a teacher for refugees in a small community center.”

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Turnover: While Jusoor’s training model aims to address the challenges posed by high turnover, turnover nonetheless still remains an important challenge. Many of Jusoor’s talented staff members relocate to third countries due to political or familial issues that are out of Jusoor’s control.

Trainers and Language Barriers: Jusoor recognizes the wealth of resources available for education in emergencies and has actively sought partnerships with local, national, and international NGOs. Yet, most of our teaching staff only has Arabic reading, writing, and spoken language competencies. Therefore, the translation and facilitation of international partners in English can prove challenging.

Certification: Jusoor offers no formal certifications with its teacher training. While many Jusoor teachers have found other teaching opportunities when they are relocated away from Lebanon, having a professional certification would facilitate professional growth. Student certification is less of a concern – Jusoor runs a “homework club” to help students prepare for the Brevat exam to enter into the Lebanese public school system.

Workshop Travel: Jusoor has partnerships with many NGOs and working relationships with universities, both in Lebanon and the United States. Many partners invite Jusoor staff and teachers to participate in workshops, yet the costs to travel can be prohibitive. This even includes providing transport from our Beka’a locations to Beirut for the entire teaching staff.

REFERENCES

Save the Children. 2018. Hear it from the Teachers: Getting Refugee Children Back to Learning. Washington, DC: Save the Children