



Malak, 12 years old, a grade four student at Nicolas Kluiters Centre in Jbeil. This is her first year with JRS.*

Online learning in Lebanon

The sudden shift to online learning due to the spread of Covid-19 has affected everyone at school from tutors to students to parents. Teachers give lessons using mobile phone applications, videos and other technology; students now learn through the use of mobile phones instead of the traditional classroom setting, and parents must facilitate the learning process so that their children get the most out of their daily lessons.

Malak*, age 12, fled to Lebanon from Syria with her family eight years ago. She is a fourth grader at a local public school in Jbeil and simultaneously attends JRS's learning support programme at the Nicolas Kluiters Centre (NKC), which gives extra help to students so that they can thrive in school.

Despite the transition to learning online, Malak has quickly adapted to studying on WhatsApp and participates in all of the daily JRS classes from 8am to 11am.

"Online learning is not complicated for me. The lessons are being explained very well through WhatsApp videos, and if there is something unclear, I can ask about it," she says.

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Although she admits that she sometimes has difficulty asking questions in the WhatsApp group. "I feel embarrassed among my friends in the group. I can ask the tutor in private, but it is preferable to ask the questions in the group so everyone can benefit from the tutor's answers." She is a conscientious student, who watches the videos shared by her tutors several times in order to fully understand the lessons.

Malak's mother, Alaa, has also had to adapt to online learning quickly, and had to equip her home with wifi so that her children could attend. Both Malak and her brother, Ahmad*, also in the fourth grade, have class at the same time, but with only one mobile phone in the household they must take turns using it.

"For me, the first two days of online learning were very strange and I was very confused, but after that it became normal and I encouraged my children to stick to the schedule, and send the solved homework on time. Now, I make sure that they both start together to stay on track," says Alaa.

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Online learning has taught her that education can be pursued regardless of the obstacles that we face

Before online learning began, Alaa was supporting her children with their homework assignments, but now must also commit to explaining any lessons which her children do not fully understand. "I really like this experience because I am receiving lots of information and refreshing my memory," she says.

"Communicating with the tutors is easier on WhatsApp. I can reach them at any time to check up on my children's performance. Before, I had no option but to visit the school and spend time to do this, so it is time saving for me on WhatsApp."

Malak still misses her tutors and her friends at the school. "The tutors used

to motivate me in the classroom when they used to congratulate me on my performance, saying "Bravo," and my friends used to encourage me by applauding for me all together. I used to feel so proud of myself in these moments."

She is making the best of her time during the quarantine by practising drawing, her favorite hobby. "I draw anything that comes to my mind because it expresses what's inside me. I started drawing at age six." She dreams of becoming a pilot in the future and traveling the world. Online learning has taught her that education can be pursued regardless of the obstacles that we face.

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**names changed to protect the identity of the individuals.*

A Word from the Director

Going to the frontiers and reaching out to those in greatest need is the Jesuit mantra for mission.

Our Irish missionaries travelled to China, Japan, Africa to work with and for communities in need, and they remained among the people they served for the remainder of their lives. Building safe, resilient communities and sustainable livelihoods is the key mission we support today with the local Jesuits and their lay partners. The key difference between a missionary and NGO response to people on the margins is the long-term commitment and insertion in communities.

In our newsletter Martina Madden writes about this singular missionary approach. Tim Flynn gives an example of the impact of the MAJIS project in South Sudan, where mothers learned to grow their own fruit and vegetables from Irish Jesuit Richard O'Dwyer SJ –

something that has transformed the health of their children. The story of Wycliff, who fled from Rwanda and is now thriving in Nairobi, Kenya shows the resilience and ingenuity of refugees. In Lebanon, 12-year-old Malak, a refugee from Syria, is showing the same spirit as she adapts to online schooling during the pandemic.

Being present across the boundaries of culture and being always attentive to people and places where the needs are greatest and often hidden is what inspires our lives and mission. We look with compassion at present on the suffering of the people of the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. It has not been covered widely in our media but we are doing our best to respond to their needs.



We wish you a very happy Easter 2021. We are all enduring hard times as we live the Covid-19 pandemic and our thoughts are with those who are enduring the isolation and loneliness of lockdown. The arrival of vaccines brings new hope. We remember those who have passed away and especially those who have been bereaved. Thank you for your support and you are all in our Easter prayers.

Fr John K. Guiney SJ
Director



Wycliff's Journey and the Mikono Refugee Craft Shop

Wycliff's family fled Rwanda in 1995, when he was only four years old. With his parents, three sisters and brother, he ran through the woods of Akagera National Park under cover of darkness to escape.

Now the 29-year-old makes beautiful greeting cards for Mikono Refugee Craft Shop in Nairobi. 20 years after his arrival in Kenya, Wycliff has started his own family - he has a beautiful four-year-old boy, and is happy to have a space to make a living from his art.

A difficult journey

After the most violent years of the genocide ceased, Wycliff and his family, of mixed ethnicity - both Hutus and Tutsi - were being pressured and harassed by both parties and obliged to take a side. When his grandmother was killed as a consequence of this, the family made the harsh decision to flee the country.

They first reached Muzungura Refugee Camp, in Tanzania. On the way, his youngest sister got pneumonia and due to a lack of proper medical treatment at the camp, she died soon after arrival.

At the camp the family faced the same issues that prompted their escape when

they encountered Rwandans and were forced to leave. However, their problems followed them to the next refugee camp as discrimination against Rwandans and by their own countrymen continued. In the early 2000s, the family had had enough of camps and moved to Nairobi, Kenya, where they have remained ever since.

Mikono Refugee Craft Shop

Mikono Refugee Craft Shop in Nairobi was started in 1993 to enable refugees to make a living from their hand-crafted products. Since then, refugee artisans from all over the region have been offered space and resources to showcase and sell their wares. The shop started at the Jesuit Refugee Service

(JRS) compound, where people passing could buy things ranging from peanut butter to wood-carvings and patchwork aprons.

Wycliff's mother was the first to find out about JRS, which was already very well known among the urban refugee community in Nairobi. She started supplying cards to the shop and taught all her children her handicraft. Wycliff was particularly talented and soon started to produce cards to supply the shop. Now he is one of Mikono's most stable suppliers. The 29-year-old makes beautiful greeting cards for the shop, and even supplied Irish Jesuits International with their Christmas cards last year.

Response to Covid-19

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the shop had to close its doors in early 2020. However, this prompted the opening of website - its virtual window - in July, available to customers in the US, Canada, and Europe. Thanks to the new international demand, Mikono's artisans are growing steadily in numbers and revenue.

The shop works with the vendors to meet quality standards, and to agree on designs that are loyal to their traditional techniques. It is part of the fight against fast fashion, by promoting sustainable consumption and production practices. Every purchase at Mikono contributes to the livelihoods of over 350 people.

The next generation

Since he arrived in Kenya, Wycliff has been blending in among Kenyans, learning local languages and making local friends, hoping not to be pointed out as a Rwandan to avoid facing grievances ever again. 20 years after his arrival in Nairobi, he has started his own family - he has a beautiful four-year-old boy, and is happy to have a space to make a living from his art.

Author: Paula C Aguirregabiria, JRS Eastern Africa Communications Officer

Good news from South Sudan

Tim Flynn, Irish Jesuits International's Roving Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor has lived and worked in East Africa since 1999. Over the years he has seen first-hand and heard stories of how people's lives have been impacted in significant ways by missionaries - in particular Irish priests, brothers and sisters.

Visit to MAJIS in Rumbek

In November 2020 I visited the Multi-Educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute in South Sudan (MAJIS). Since this programme started in Rumbek, hundreds of people, most of them women, have been trained in agriculture and farming here. When I arrived at MAJIS, its Kenyan Director, Fr Augustine Ekeno SJ introduced me to the programme participants as being from Ireland, the same country as its former Director, Fr Richard O'Dwyer SJ. The women got very excited and wished for me to send their appreciation to Richard, who is now back in Ireland and based in Gardiner Street Parish.



Ayem Mayom Buoc graduated from a vegetable production course at MAJIS. She joined the programme in order to raise some income to support her children.

Women self-sufficient from selling crops

Mary Amer was eager to share with me how Richard's work had impacted on her life, saying that since she was born she had never eaten fruits until he showed the women how to grow them. Theresa Ayeta said that from the sale of the vegetables, which she now knows how to grow, she can buy maize flour for her children, clothe them and get medical treatment when they are sick. She told me that women don't have to depend on their husbands now. Last year she managed to buy a lactating goat and her child is now getting milk. Theresa wanted Richard to know that the women in MAJIS are now using bulls for ploughing rather than digging by hand, and buying goats, all from their vegetable money.

"Tell Fr Richard we are healthy and we don't get sick. You are seeing the result of what he started here at MAJIS. If I was a dog you would see my tail wagging! We are not

educated. In the past we didn't get greens in the dry season but Fr Richard taught us and didn't get tired of teaching us". Mary Apet Cheroil, MAJIS

Missionary impact is long-term

Everywhere I travel in East Africa, I hear similar testimonies from local people about what missionaries have done for their community and how the long-term presence of missionary organisations have had a positive impact on peoples lives. While Irish missionaries are elderly and there are few remaining in the field their spirit and charism continues both in energetic younger African priests like Fr Ekeno, and in lay partners who continue the work.

I shared the messages from the women in MAJIS with Richard on my return to Ireland, bringing some much-needed uplifting news during the bleak winter period at home, where

Covid-19 continued to restrict people's movements and cause worry and fear. He said "I am really delighted to hear that the work we did back between 2013 and 2016 has continued to have an impact. We encouraged the women in Akol Jal to plant tomatoes and fruit for their families. They were subsisting on a very limited diet of posho (maize flour) eaten sometimes with some greens and often just on its own."

MAJIS offers alternatives to community

In a country where only four percent of land is cultivated, MAJIS strives to help the Dinka people in diversifying their agriculture into crop production. This will give them an opportunity to generate income from the land in an alternative way, and will contribute to the dilution of the violent cattle culture that dominates the lives and dictates the prospects of many young boys & girls.

The women attending MAJIS often bring their children with them to the farm to play, as there is nowhere else for them to go. The nearest school is 8km away – the route is too far to walk and too unsafe for a primary school child. Over time, MAJIS has responded by setting up an informal school for these 120 children and plans are now underway for the construction of a primary school that will cater to 250 children within the next three years.

Part of my visit to the MAJIS project included assisting the team in drawing

up a proposal for finishing a kilometre of fencing around the farm to tackle the wild boar that were destroying the crops and deter the illegal felling of mahogany trees. The women had erected temporary wooden fencing around the plots but it was eaten by termites and would collapse.

Harvesting and beekeeping

In the last 12 months, funding from the IJI and five other Jesuit mission offices in Canada and Europe has helped the women plant and harvest local vegetables (sukama, wiki,

kudra, onion, tomato, maize, sorghum, groundnuts, cowpeas, and green-grams). So far, a borehole has been drilled and two 5,000 litre tanks erected giving people access to clean water. 25 acres of land has been cleared for farming, and is now ploughed and planted with vegetables. Beekeeping on the land has resulted in 30 litres of honey being harvested.

IJI's commitment to local communities means that we will continue to fund and support programmes where people are marginalised, like South Sudan, and work with them to create a sustainable future for everyone.



A student sings during morning activities at the JRS Special Needs Centre. JRS Special Needs Centres provide protection and education to an average of 200 children living with disabilities in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. (Photo: Fredrik Lemeryd)

that each person has a unique dignity and is deserving of real respect. Our work reflects this in its dedication to the mental and spiritual wellbeing of the people we work with, many of whom are traumatised by their experiences.

Investment, connection and commitment

Irish Jesuits International (IJI) and our Jesuit partner organisations overseas, including the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), have deep roots in the countries they work in. Unlike other NGOs who enter and then move on from a particular region within a few months or years, Jesuits' long-term investments in the communities they work with spans generations.

Jesuit organisations are the ones who will go where other NGOs will not venture. The current conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis. The Jesuit Refugee Service is one of only two organisations present in the field on a permanent basis (as of February 2021).

What makes Irish Jesuits International different?

Jesuits are different. The instruction from Ignatius of Loyola, their founder, was to 'go to the margins', the places at the edges of our society and our world where the people who are overlooked are to be found.

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The work of Irish Jesuits International, the Jesuit Refugee Service and all Jesuit agencies is based on a foundation of Ignatian spirituality and the belief in 'cura personalis' – care for the whole person. Jesuits believe



LJI and our international partners focus on education as a tool that can provide people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to navigate their life and with qualifications that can propel them to a better one.

LJI is part of a worldwide network of Jesuit organisations. The global reach of the Society of Jesus means we have friends and colleagues near and far. This interconnection means that we know what the situation on the ground is, in remote regions of the world affected by war and natural disasters and can respond quickly to the humanitarian needs that emerge.

Another characteristic of the Jesuit approach is staying with the people who need help, even when conditions become too precarious for other NGOs. When Maban, in the northern part of South Sudan was hit by devastating flooding in late 2018, Irish Jesuit Tony

O’Riordan, and other JRS staff were among the few people who remained in the region, to continue to support the refugee and host communities throughout the crisis.

Education as a tool

LJI and our international partners focus on education as a tool that can provide people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to navigate their life and with qualifications that can propel them to a better one. Whether it is a refugee woman who is learning to become a dressmaker so she can work to provide food for her family, or a young girl who avoids the fate of forced early marriage because she is attending school,

education helps people to escape a life of poverty.

Why donate to us?

Irish Jesuits International differs from other Irish charities in how our funding is allocated. Our Director, John K. Guiney SJ is a Jesuit which means that – unlike many other charity directors in Ireland – he is not on a six-figure salary! As an agency of the Irish Jesuit Province, which covers our overheads and staffing costs, the income we raise through fundraising goes to the people who need it, in countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Jesuits and their lay partners in Ireland, and internationally, work with and for people who are left behind because of poverty, disability or other reasons beyond their control. We go to the margins of society, and of the world, because we care.

Author: Martina Madden, LJI Communications Officer.



Thank you for your continued support. Your generosity changes the lives of people affected by global injustice and inequality.

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www.iji.ie

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Education Refugees Area of greatest need

Are you eligible for PAYE Tax Relief for donations?

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Please pass this newsletter on to your family and friends so we can share the positive impact of our work with them.

To learn more about our missions or to make a donation, please contact:
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For more information on the issues in this newsletter, visit www.iji.ie



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