

REGIONAL

Irishman raises funds to build school for Syrian refugees

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An ex-Irish soldier is helping raise thousands of euro for a school for deaf children in Lebanon which is taking in terrified refugees from war-torn Syria.

Big-hearted Christy Kinsella (62) set up Lebanon Trust which gives vital assistance to the Father Andeweg Institute for the Deaf (FAID) in Beirut which caters for more than 70 local kids including 11 who have fled across the border from Syria.

DUBLINER Christy and friends set up the charity in 2009 to help poor families he met while serving on UN peacekeeping duties in Lebanon.

Lebanon Trust volunteers regularly travel to Beirut and recently delivered funds to help hire a speech therapist while tradesmen on the trip carried out repairs to the FAID school grounds.

Christy said: "We provide financial support and practical work and we rely on a network of volunteers."

School director Krikor Khasholian said: "We are so grateful for all the support we get from Ireland because it wouldn't be possible to run our school without this assistance."

The conflict in Syria, which was sparked by a brutal crackdown by President Bashar Assad on peaceful protests against four decades of rule by his family, has killed more than 125,000 people including an estimated 11,000 children.

Syrian pupil Achmad Mishmishtin (13) from Damascus was forced to flee the country after his school was destroyed in a bomb.

He said: "Soldiers came and took away children. I had to leave the country with my four sisters and three brothers. I was terrified."

Syrian siblings Samia (10) and Hamad Karkas (6) and have also been forced to flee the neighbouring country for safety.

Samia said: "We came to Lebanon to start a new life because it is too dangerous in Syria at the moment."

School director Krikor said: "We cannot turn away the children from Syria because they need our support and so we welcomed them into our classrooms."

The school is supported by the Lebanese government but desperately depends on donations from Ireland and elsewhere in order to run its day-to-day activities.

Former Defence Forces soldier Christy said volunteers in Ireland raise funds by holding charity events and some travel on annual visits to the projects to see where the money goes.

He added: "We always pay our own expenses such as flights and food – the accommodation is free as we stay with friends.

"All donors are sent detailed regular reports on where their money goes."

FAID was founded in 1957 by Dutch Anglican priest Rev Arie J Andeweg who devoted his life to training deaf people to maximise their quality of life. The facility is a private, non profit organization with no political affiliations and is now considered a model school in the Middle East.

Donations can be made by credit card, PayPal account or bank transfer to:

Lebanon Trust (Ireland)
Account number 16253669
Sort code 99-06-51
Bank ID (BIC): IPBSIE2D
IBAN: IE23 IPBS 9906 5116 2536 69

Permanent TSB Bank
134 Blanchardstown Shopping Centre
Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.

About Senan Hogan

Senan Hogan (@senanhogan) is a journalist with the Irish Daily Star in Dublin and he contributes feature articles to The Clare Herald. Senan is from County Clare.

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Discussion