

Assalamu Alaikom! (Peace be upon you)

I am Arwen, Eleanore's eldest sister, and I currently serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jordan. I work in the Special Education Program, teaching music to young students with mild to moderate mental disabilities. My students do not have physical challenges; but as I visited the communities where some of my friends work, I learned that Jordan has a large population of people who do. Many who have severe physical handicaps are not often seen because of the social stigma attached to having a child with any sort of disability. Until recently it was the norm for kids with special needs to simply be kept in a back room and hidden from sight. That is changing slowly, but there is undeniably still a "shame on the family" mentality regarding people with disabilities, particularly in more rural areas of Jordan. The services for children with severe disabilities are limited, and availability is dictated by a family's geographical location and financial state. Hospital-style folding wheelchairs are around, but I have not seen any child with disabilities using a wheelchair that fits even close to properly according to standards I know at home.

One of the first children I met and measured for an Eleanore's Project wheelchair is named Ghassan. He lives with his mother and siblings in a village in northern Jordan; his house is on a hillside with a footpath down from the road. I was enchanted by this boy - he has physical and mental disabilities, but also the most delightful, joyous smile; he and his mother are very close. His family situation is sad, but not unusual. He is the eldest son, a role which in Jordan carries with it much importance. Because of Ghassan's disabilities his father not only took another wife, but divorced his mother - yet another social stigma. Ghassan has spent his 13 years hunched and scooting around on the floor in an unbalanced position, resulting in a severe back deformity. This additional complication of his condition might have been limited or even avoided, if he had been given a wheelchair with a supportive seating system at a young age. Ghassan cannot leave his house, as he is too big for his mother to carry, so he lives his life on the floor. He has never been able to sit at eye level with his siblings and relatives; his back is so deformed that he is uncomfortable in a regular chair when he is lifted into it. A wheelchair would change this boy's entire life - but not just any chair. A wheelchair with a special seating system would give him comfort and mobility that is beyond his dreams.

This is only one child's story - as I spend more time here, I realize more and more the need for specialized adaptive equipment in Jordan. Eleanore's Project hopes to bring approximately 100 specialized wheelchairs to Jordanian children and young adults this summer, together with education about wheelchair positioning and how to maintain the chairs long-term. But we need your help. The families I have visited over the last year do not have enough money to heat their houses properly in the winter, let alone dream of buying a specialized wheelchair. We have a responsibility as human beings to help those less fortunate than ourselves. I have given my word to many families that we will try to provide wheelchair mobility for their children; in some cases two, three or four in one family need help. I ask each of you to carefully ponder this situation and imagine yourself in their shoes. You can make a tremendous difference in the life of a single child through a tax-deductible donation of \$300 (or a portion of that amount), to provide a specialized wheelchair that will be fitted by professionals. If we do not take the initiative and try to improve the quality of life for children like Ghassan, who will?

We live in a time of war, and I live in what I refer to as the "Eye in the hurricane of Middle Eastern politics." From my house I can see the disputed territory of Jerusalem and the West Bank. I know Iraqi refugees who fled their family homes to escape war; and yet I live in a tremendously peaceful and strong country. I love Jordan and its people, and I firmly believe that an Eleanore's Project Expedition to this country will not only change the life of each recipient, but also celebrate the fact that there are people of peace in every country as we reach out to others.

Allah Khaliku (God be with you)