



blossom hill

BLOSSOM HILL

A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Investing in peace through innovation

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

Close your eyes for 30 seconds. Imagine you are eight years old. You have been instructed to grab a few belongings. You have five minutes. Then, suddenly, you are leaving. You don't know how long you're leaving for – maybe for good. What would your eight-year-old self grab from your home? Now open your eyes.

I know what I would grab – because I did just that. I held on to my sticker book and a few photos. And my family never returned back home. That was nearly four decades ago; yet when the news is on and I see families today fleeing conflict and war, I'm overwhelmed. I feel like a child all over again.

My childhood was changed forever in 1978 with the start of the revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war. We went from playing on swings and slides on the playground to hiding in our basement for fear of being bombed. We did homework by candlelight so the enemy couldn't find a target. We waited in line for rationed food. We worried about our father being sent to war. We went to bed not knowing if we'd wake up the next day. I survived because my family had an opportunity to leave. Many did not.

Today, one in every five children in the world is living in a country affected by armed conflict and war – that's 420 million children. It's a staggering increase of 30 million in just one year and double the number since the early 1990s.

That is why I founded Blossom Hill a decade ago – to give voiceless children, trapped in a cycle of violence, a chance to start anew. Blossom Hill's vision is a world where conflict-affected children thrive. By investing in innovative ideas through our Fellowship Program for social entrepreneurs, we seek to make breakthroughs that can transform the lives of the most vulnerable children from the Middle East whose lives have been uprooted by conflict.

The success of our Fellowship Program has deepened our belief that by supporting the brightest minds and most passionate



individuals, we can work towards our goal of a more peaceful world. Our Fellows are courageous change-makers who believe that one does not need to wait for war to end before supporting the dreams of the next generation.

In the last four years alone, 28 Fellows have implemented innovative programs in child development, education, technology, vocational training and girls empowerment that have put tens of thousands of children on a path to a better future in ten countries across the globe.

The success of each Blossom Hill child is a story of resilience and determination to thrive under the most difficult conditions. It is your support that makes this possible. As we mark a decade of achievements, please join us in our continued efforts to invest in peace through innovation.

Thank you.

Shiva Sarram
Founder and Executive Director

Blossom Hill

Founded in 2009, Blossom Hill grew out of the need to develop innovative ways to connect children living in communities fraught with conflict to programs that would invest in their childhood and realize their dreams. Experts agree that the future is bleak for these children. Their communities are broken, they are separated from their families, and they return from war with no skills and few, if any, opportunities to heal themselves. In many cases the psychological impact of toxic stress on children who have witnessed horrific trauma is profound and can lead to a vicious cycle of conflict. Blossom Hill's goal is to invest in these children – specifically those from the Middle East who have been displaced internally and across many countries – through novel ideas that will transform their lives so they can thrive.

To spearhead change, Blossom Hill launched its Fellowship Program for social entrepreneurs in the spring of 2016. The Fellowship is designed to spur innovation by investing in individuals who are committed to developing creative, empowering, and solution-driven initiatives in childhood development, education, vocational training, and technology to address the needs of refugees and internally displaced communities.

The focus of large scale humanitarian work is to provide services that respond to these core needs. Blossom Hill seeks to provide unique opportunities for children to become active participants and leaders in their own communities. That, we believe, is the key to sustaining our innovative work.

Through this model, Blossom Hill provides critical start-up capital for bold ideas, breathing life into the dreams of young girls and boys reached through the Fellows' initiatives.

VISION

A world where conflict-affected children thrive.

MISSION

Blossom Hill funds innovative ideas to help children affected by conflict in the Middle East.

IMPACT

Over the last ten years, Blossom Hill has invested \$2 million supporting over 57,000 war-affected children in 24 countries.



"We are grateful being Blossom Hill Fellows. Their support gives us the strength to overcome obstacles and move forward. Their belief in our project feeds our hope and determination to grow. Blossom Hill Fellowship allows us, through our Puppetry Theater Project, to give Syrian refugee children a voice and a safe creative platform to express and cultivate dreams...dreams of a bright confident future."

- Leonie Vikos and Ruth Lockwood, 2019 Blossom Hill Fellows

PROBLEMS:



One in every 108 people

on the planet has been forced to flee from home due to conflict and persecution – nearly 70.8 million people, the highest number since WWII.



Every two seconds, one person is displaced.

More than one in 20 people living in the Middle East are displaced.



With the average displacement lasting 17 years,

an entire generation is losing out on their childhood and the ability to reach their full potential.

SOLUTIONS:

Blossom Hill is responding to the needs of conflict-affected children from the Middle East by seeding innovative ideas that transform their lives. Our current Fellows have implemented the following initiatives benefiting children and youth.



\$100 gives a refugee child an opportunity to engage in sports as a pathway to social inclusion in their host communities.



\$120 gives a refugee child technology apps that boost literacy skills, access to education and employment opportunities, and legal services.



\$250 prepares a youth for standardized testing needed to attend a university.



\$300 provides entrepreneurship workshops that guide a young girl to start her own business.



\$333 starts the healing process from trauma for a conflict-affected child.



\$470 gives a young child the opportunity for a Montessori-inspired early childhood education.



\$600 teaches a girl to code and enables a livelihood.



\$650 puts a refugee child center stage in an orchestra performing alongside peers from a host community.



\$750 gives 500 children a STEM activity kit as part of our science curriculum

OUR PILLARS



CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

- 750 children overcame the trauma of war through psychosocial puppetry or art therapy in Turkey
- 200 children pursued a socially inclusive music program in Greece or sports education in Turkey
- Over 80 children benefited from a nutrition education program and over 250 refugees and locals in New Haven, CT participated in social inclusion events



EDUCATION

- 60 children enrolled in our Montessori-inspired early education program in Jordan
- 15,000 STEM science kits were distributed to refugees in Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria
- 97% of students from our college preparatory coaching program are currently enrolled in top universities; \$14 million in scholarships and financial aid were offered to our students over 3 years



VOCATIONAL TRAINING

- 230 girls and boys were trained in Entrepreneurship and English Language Teaching Methodology in Afghanistan
- 400 youth pursued 60 various trade courses from carpentry to IT in Greece



TECHNOLOGY

- 80 girls completed a program in graphic design and coding in Afghanistan and many were hired by local companies
- Multiple youth were trained for 30 hours a week as software developers, with more than 40% women, in Yemen and Turkey
- Over 10,000 refugees and asylum applicants are successfully using our technology platform in Farsi and Arabic for legal, health and employment applications



BLOSSOM HILL FELLOWS IN ACTION

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The development of the “whole child” from early childhood through adolescence supports children as creative and engaged citizens who can strengthen the wellbeing of a whole society. It is critical to long-term development and success of all children. Blossom Hill is committed to providing innovative initiatives for refugee children that will not only prepare them for learning and academic success, but empower them with life skills as they continue to live under difficult conditions. Some key challenges include healing from the trauma of war and integrating into host communities.

Through innovative psychosocial puppetry and art therapy programs in Turkey, children are expressing their feelings in a safe environment and overcoming the conflicts they witnessed, so they are able to learn once again. In Jordan, a sports program not only gives children an opportunity to engage in physical activities but integrates refugees and their peers in host communities through their love of sport. Likewise, in Greece, refugees enroll in music lessons to develop their talents and perform alongside Greek children in an orchestra, shining a spotlight on their mutual achievements.



EDUCATION

Millions of refugee children are missing out on an education. Teaching displaced children and youth in informal settings is especially difficult. But without an opportunity to learn, they risk becoming a lost generation with little chance for a better future. Through sustainable programs, our Fellows are working to ensure refugees can learn and develop the skills they need to succeed in life.

In Jordan, exceptional early childhood learning opportunities in our Montessori-inspired center are giving the youngest learners an early start to education. By providing a nurturing environment where we can cater to the personal and intellectual development of each child, we can enable them to develop to their full potential. Our unique STEM curriculum uses innovative hands-on kits that transcend language barriers for widespread use across refugee settings. And for youth hoping to pursue higher education, one-on-one coaching for college tests and navigating the application process through trained mentors has enabled their admission to top universities in the US and Europe.



TECHNOLOGY

Refugee children live under difficult conditions with little or no access to technology that can improve their lives. Spending only a few hours a day in informal education settings, they need the opportunity to learn beyond school walls in order to succeed. In addition, refugee youth face a host of social and institutional barriers to continue their education or gain employment. With their innovative programs, our Fellows are reaching a wide range of refugees with groundbreaking technology that empowers academic and employment mobility.

In Afghanistan, Turkey, and Yemen, our state-of-the-art coding schools are empowering young girls and boys with 21st century skills. These students have developed literacy apps and social impact games, and are outsourcing their graphic design skills to various internet companies, bringing income to their families. Literacy apps in multiple languages composed of lessons and interactive games on digital devices enable children to gain critical reading and writing skills to continue learning in their mother tongue. For refugees on the move, a technology platform makes immigration, health and other legal forms accessible in native tongues to break down bureaucratic barriers.



VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND GIRL EMPOWERMENT

For refugee children whose education has been interrupted and their ability to earn a livelihood undermined by war and conflict, the future is bleak. Unaccompanied youth are especially at risk with no family support to help guide them. Without opportunities to pursue productive lives, they are vulnerable to exploitation, including child labor and even trafficking, due to a lack of legal documentation. Today, there are tens of thousands of refugee children who are either unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Our Fellows are dedicated to empowering refugee youth to break from the cycle of poverty and avert risky behavior by providing them with an alternative – vocational training in various fields. In Afghanistan, our Fellows have opened a center where girls and boys learn to become entrepreneurs or English language teachers. Their students are developing their own business plans and are able to earn a livelihood. In Greece, our vocational program empowers youth by teaching them various trades such as carpentry, IT, media, tailoring, culinary arts, electronics and others in collaboration with local organizations. These youth are then able to obtain employment and earn a living.



BLOSSOM HILL FELLOWS



Leyla

Psychosocial services in Turkey



George

SAT and TOEFL tutoring in Syria



Fereshteh

First girls' coding school in Afghanistan



Dimitra

Orchestra in Greece



Lexi

Early Childhood Center in Jordan



Erika

STEM science kits



Alaa

Sports program in Jordan



Sarah

Vocational training in Greece



Fereshteh

Health and nutrition in the US



Furogh & Wali

Entrepreneurship and Language Instruction
Training in Afghanistan



Alexandra and Marcello

Coding schools in Turkey and Yemen



Leonie and Ruth

Puppetry workshop in Turkey



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WAYS TO HELP

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