Mercy Corps in Jordan
During refugee crisis, American Community School donate to schools in camps

In March, 2011, civil conflict in Syria began to force refugees across the Jordanian border. The government of Jordan estimates that more than 200,000 Syrian refugees are now living in Jordan, thousands of them in transit camps.

The arrival of so many people in need has not gone unnoticed by the local Jordanian population. The effect of the conflict has reverberated to the capital, Amman, where the refugees’ plight has inspired concerned people to step up and help. They’re doing so via Mercy Corps, an international non-governmental organization that’s working in Jordan.

A focus on helping vulnerable displaced refugee children
Mercy Corps is helping displaced Syrian refugees in Jordan maintain some semblence of normal life in a very challenging situation.

Our focus is on children, who are most vulnerable during times of conflict and upheaval. We are building playgrounds, sports facilities and child-friendly spaces to make life more bearable for refugee kids. More than half of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are children under 18, so it’s vital to create an environment that supports and comforts them during an uncertain time.

Donation helps create a more comfortable and welcoming environment for students
In September, Mercy Corps received a large donation of Astroturf from the American Community School (ACS) in Amman. This material was used to insulate the floors of 18 tent schools UNICEF built in the Zaatari refugee camp. It was a very welcome addition to the school facilities.

As explained by Rob Maroni, Mercy Corps Jordan Country Director and Regional Program Advisor, “It took our three organizations (ACS, Mercy Corps and UNICEF) to coordinate the effort to obtain these useful construction materials – which would otherwise have been discarded in a landfill – and instead put them to good use for the benefit of refugee kids who are trying to get by far from home. We very much appreciate the generosity and creative thinking of the parents and teachers at ACS who thought up this idea.”

Raad Nimri, Mercy Corps Deputy Country Director in Jordan, checks out the Astroturf donated by the American Community School. The covering was used to insulate the floor of 18 UNICEF schools in the Zaatari refugee camp. Photo: John Holroyd/Mercy Corps

The idea was born when the American Community School in Amman began a scheduled project to replace the turf on its soccer field. A group of thoughtful parents and teachers had the idea that instead of throwing it away, the ground covering could be reused.

Tons and tons of green ground arrives just in time to be installed in new temporary schools
After ACS removed 39 rolls of Astroturf (weighing about 1.2 tons each) from its field, the material was donated to Mercy Corp to be used in the Zaatari refugee camp. The turf arrived at the camp just before UNICEF began building the schools, opening the door to a much-improved tent school design that provides greater comfort and cleanliness to students and staff.

Mercy Corps project provides labor and wages
With the turf donation, Mercy Corps also saw an opportunity to help Syrian refugees earn desperately needed income. We set up a cash-for-work project in which refugee laborers were hired to cut and install the turf, earning daily wages for their
labor. We hired four workers to put in the turf, as well as two guards for the project. All six workers received the standard local hourly wage (about $1.40) to do their jobs.

Once in place, the ground covering greatly improved conditions in the tented, temporary schools. The Astroturf insulates the rough gravel flooring and helps to create a more comfortable space for kids in the dusty, sandy desert environment. As Larry McIlvain, Head of School at ACS, said, “Through this small gesture, we hope to make life a little bit better for the Syrian refugee children who are so far from home.”

This project has already made a difference in the lives of many refugees, providing a safe space to recover from loss and injury. In addition, ACS organized a ball drive which resulted in the collection and donation of more than 250 balls for Syrian refugee children in the camp.

As Mr. McIlvain explains, “At our school, this project has also raised awareness — among our students, teachers, parents and staff — about what’s happening right here in Jordan, and encourages our community to have compassion for the misfortune of other people.” Students at ACS continue to volunteer their time to community service projects through outreach programs in Amman.

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