

IMPACT REPORT

ART OF HOPE'S Türkiye - Syria Earthquake Response

Mental Health & Psychological Support For Syrian Refugee Caregivers, Adults & Children Affected By The Tragic February 2023 Earthquakes In Southern Türkiye & Northern Syria

2023 - 2024

ART OF HOPE is a US-registered 501(c)3, non-profit, non-governmental, non-religious, charitable organization with the tax-exempt code of: EIN 81-2553473 that's strictly committed to the mental health a psychological well-being of war-torn refugees, IDPs, and vulnerable host communities worldwide.

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Mental Health & Psychological Support For Syrian Caregivers, Adults & Children Forced To Seek Refuge In Southern Türkiye



On February 6, 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck southern and central Türkiye as well as northern and western Syria. The tremor and its aftershocks left towns and cities in ruins and affected more than 9.1 million people in Türkiye, including 1.7 million Syrian refugees who fled their war-torn country and remain under temporary protection in Türkiye. In the southern Türkiye region, more than 50,000 people were killed including 1,500 Syrian refugees as well as a death toll that exceeds 5,900 inside Syria. This is while, for over a decade, Syria has been ravaged by the trauma and destruction of a civil war that was topped with a brutal ISIS occupation that until today is felt by many.

A Message From Our Founder

At ART OF HOPE (AOH), we remain committed to supporting some of the most vulnerable refugees, IDPs (internally displaced persons) and vulnerable members of host communities cope with the deep scars of war, conflict, and displacement. We remain a growing grassroots, diligently curated, and bespoke operation as we believe that mental health support, trauma-relief, and healing are not about the numbers served; but the impact made among those supported in the field. At ART OF HOPE - as done in the past, we went to the most underserved and devastated communities, and supported a population deeply re-traumatized with the aftermath of the earthquake while still struggling to cope with the horrors of war they left behind in Syria.

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The prolonged exposure to war, stress and uncertainty means that many refugees are in a constant state of toxic psychological stress.

Nancy Yamout - Art Of Hope's Lead PsychoSocial Specialist

A POPULATION COPING WITH RE-TRAUMATIZATION

According to Yamout, "they feel as if they escaped death in war back in Syria and now in Türkiye they also faced death. For this population, there is absolutely no sense of stability, safety, and support. All the while, many of them are living with a constant fear of forced repatriation back to Syria." According to Ashley Dorr - AOH's lead Art Therapy advisor, "the effects of trauma after trauma after trauma for the group of Syrian refugees who have fled war and then experienced the earthquake in Türkiye are what can create more PTSD symptoms that can very deeply affect their sense of safety," begging the dreadful question of "where can I ever be safe?

Impact 110 Adults & Care Givers Served Snapshot 60 Children Served

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"When you have an empty cup, you cannot pour for others. Caring for mothers and caregivers should be the first step in any rehabilitation and therapy; as mothers need to be healed and supported first before they can help heal their children." Nancy Yamout

Phase 1 - Emergency Response

As part of AOH's first phase of its trauma-relief task force and after three months of intense research in finding the right partners and beneficiary community on the ground, the organization supported a group of 20 Syrian refugee mothers and teachers during the span of three months with intensive virtual psychotherapy. Each beneficiary was provided with bespoke one-on-one therapy online (three times a week), in addition to participating in a week-long trauma-relief group workshops specifically focused on caregivers and those working with children. For this unique mission, AOH worked closely with our local Syrian NGO partner KAREEMAT in Kilis near the Turkish-Syrian border. Together, we incorporated tailored Art Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy programming to support and improve our beneficiary's mental wellbeing as they dealt with a state of re-tramatization due to their experiences fleeing the war in Syria and now the aftermath of surviving the deadliest earthquake in the region's recent history.





In addition, ART OF HOPE provided our local NGO partner KAREEMAT with the proper training and tools to use AOH's Arabic Positive Affirmation Cards for our young beneficiaries in the field. This unique training was done in parallel to conducting trauma-relief exercises appropriate for this age-group during our field visit.

In 2020, ART OF HOPE created this effective tool and used it since among a diverse group of Arabic-speaking youth beneficiaries in Lebanon, Syria, Southern Türkiye and beyond. The cards help build emotional literacy and support healing among some of the youngest victims of war, conflict & displacement.



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Phase 2 - Intervention & Therapy

"It's as if we escaped death in Syria and are now once again chased by it here in Türkiye." Explained one of AOH's beneficiaries - a young Syrian Mother who fled her hometown of Aleppo for Kilis in 2013.

During our second field visit and additional groundwork in July - August 2023, and in partnership with another local NGO partner VIOLET, AOH conducted an intensive trauma-relief assessment and intervention for 90 Syrian refugees in southern Türkiye. The group included a diverse demographic (age range from mid 20s to late 40s) who fled the war in Syria and relocated to Southern Türkiye - and living in some of the worst hit areas affected by the February 2023 quakes. Our team of therapists conducted intense psychological assessment and met with each 90 beneficiaries individually. Extensive assessments revealed astonishing aspects of a constant state of fear amidst survivors of the February 6th earthquakes. Almost all the Syrian beneficiaries felt that they "had nothing more to give" and that they lived in a constant state of terror. Beneficiaries were experiencing issues with concentration, sleep, constant feelings of alertness, and ongoing grief.





"We escaped death at home in Syria; but my family died here in Türkiye." Explained a male beneficiary who fled his hometown of Idlib for Hatay - another hard-hit region in southern Türkiye.

Phase 2 - Intervention & Therapy

Our clinicians observed that many beneficiaries were experiencing complex grief not only from recent losses but also from previous traumas endured fleeing the war in Syria and relocating to a new, unfamiliar, and challenging environment. After our intensive assessment on the ground, AOH team of professional mental health clinicians devised individual treatment plans for each beneficiary that followed a three phased model. Each intense treatment plandesigned for a duration of five months—used an integrative approach to help beneficiaries find a place of self-actualization so that they can begin to reprogram maladaptive behaviors and, as a result, lessen the impact of past and ongoing trauma in their lives.



"What we heard, were unprecedented stories of survival guilt, profound loss, and fear." Nancy Yamout

Phase 2 - Intervention & Therapy

PHASE I

beneficiaries focused on adapting to the initial emotional shock and disorientation that often accompany loss. Beneficiaries explored their personal histories of trauma and loss with a trauma informed therapist who worked with them to adapt to the changes and challenges triggered by their bereavement experience, including addressing symptoms of PTSD.

PHASE II

beneficiaries continued to work through deep emotions that surfaced as they confronted the changes and challenges brought on by loss. This phase aimed to help beneficiaries confront the realities of loss and its impact on their lives, and therefore, gain insight to their own emotional responses. Bereaved individuals were invited to reassess their values and beliefs and foster acceptance of the changes brought on by loss.

PHASE III

beneficiaries were supported in processing issued related to death and the effects that it has had on them. They were invited to focus on their social networks and to rebuild social connections. They were encouraged to rediscover and nurture their own sense of self and to understand one's responsibility to one's own well-being and life choices moving forward.



Phase 2 - Intervention & Therapy

Treatment Focus

- · Recent Exposure to Trauma
- · Survivors Guilt
- Grief Relationships
- Sleep Quality
- · Feelings of Fear
- Feelings of Inadequacy & Injustice Because of Faced Oppression

Treatment Modality

- Integrative approach Psychotherapy
- CBT
- TF-CBT
- EMDR
- Gestalt

Treatment Modality

PHASE 1 Acclimation & Adjustment

- Trauma and Loss History and Processing
- 2. Adjusting to Changes Brought by the Loss, Trauma, and PTSD
- 3. Functioning Appropriately in Daily Life
- Keeping Emotions and Behaviors in Check
- 5. Accepting Support

PHASE 2 Emotional Immersion & Deconstruction

- Contending with Reality and Dealing with Loss
- 2. Development of Insight
- 3. Reconstructing Personal Values and Beliefs
- 4. Accepting Changes and Feelings, Letting go

PHASE 3 Reclamation & Reconciliation

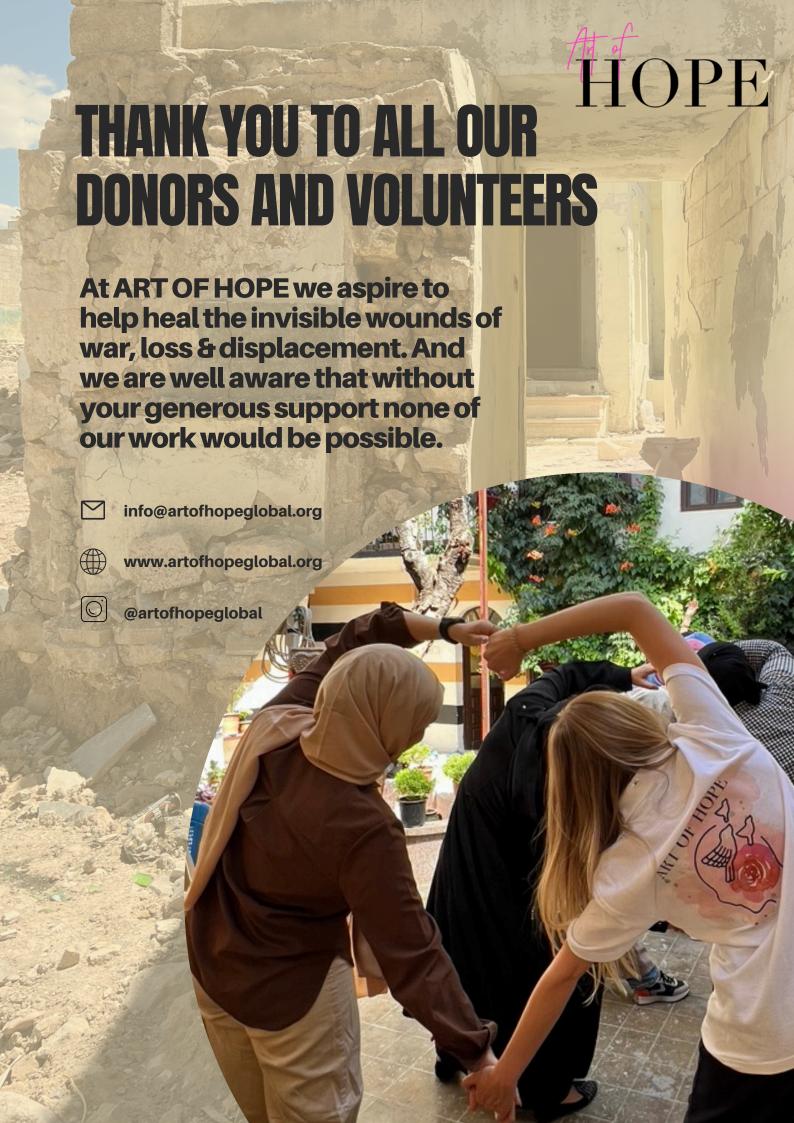
- Development of Social
 Relations
- 2. Decisions About Changes in Lifestyle
- 3. Renewal of Self- Awareness
- 4. Acceptance of Responsibility

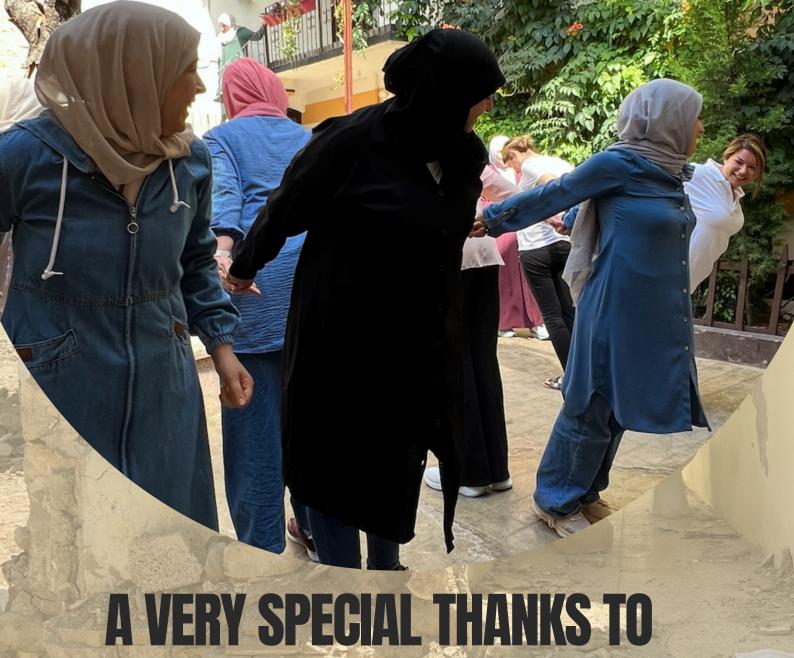


According to Yamout, "when you support a mother's or father's mental health and also allow them to understand the logic behind mental wellbeing. It is then that they can actually help support the mental and psychological wellbeing of their children—otherwise it's impossible," adding that if the adults and caregivers, in times of crisis or in rehabilitation stages in the months after war, displacement, or a natural disaster, remain in fear, "they cannot support their child who may very well be suffering from trauma, PTSD, fear and anger."

One cannot pour from an empty cup. At AOH, we believe in the power of supporting caregivers, teachers, and parents in order to best equip them with the tools that can help them better assist their children, dependents, and students who too are suffering from severe trauma, loss & grief.







A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR TEAM, PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD

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