Building happier and healthier futures for war wounded children

INARA is a 501(c)(3) organization.
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Three years ago, when Shaden was just a baby, her home in Syria was hit by shelling. Her mother ran into Shaden’s room and saw her tiny daughter engulfed in flames. The burns on her face are so severe that she struggled to open her mouth at all. Feeding her was extremely difficult and painful, devastating her mother.

Our team of doctors will be treating the burns on her face and around her mouth. Her parents have seen the impact that INARA has had on other children and have new-found hope for their daughter’s future.

Why we are different

We structured ourselves to be able to fill the gaps in access to medical care when not provided by other institutions or non-profits. We do not compete with but rather complement pre-existing medical programs. Our programs are specifically tailored to cover cases others cannot.

Who we are

INARA (the International Network for Aid, Relief, and Assistance) provides life-saving and life-altering medical care for children from conflict areas, who have catastrophic but treatable injuries, and who are unable to access medical treatment due to war.

INARA was born out of President and co-founder Arwa Damon’s direct experience on the ground in conflict zones for more than 15 years as CNN’s Senior International Correspondent, witnessing how injured children were falling through the gaps of medical care.

INARA’s vision is that no child impacted by war should be denied or unable to access medical care.

INARA is a US registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization currently supporting war-wounded children in Lebanon and Turkey.

Why we are needed

The trauma of war leaves deep emotional and physical wounds for child refugees.

We are currently focused on Syria, where 7.6 million children are now affected by the conflict, either inside the country or as refugees in neighboring countries (UNICEF, 2019). More than half of Syria’s children have only known violence, fear, and displacement their entire lives. They don’t know what it means to have a safe place to sleep or a regular education. A UN report published in January 2020 found that the Syrian conflict has “erased” children’s dreams.

Needs assessments that we carried out in Lebanon in 2015, where we launched our operation, and in 2019 in Turkey, highlighted significant gaps in medical assistance to wounded refugee children.

Humanitarian focused NGOs are overwhelmed and have neither the capacity, mandate, nor capability to provide certain types of treatment. That is where INARA steps in.

The news spotlight on Syria may have faded but there have been countless children injured over the course of the war who have yet to receive the treatment they need, while others continue to be wounded on a daily basis. As some organizations are scaling back their Syria related operations, we are scaling up in response.

“I hope all that we remember of her accident is the horrible memories we have. I hope she becomes a beautiful woman with a beautiful smile.” - Shaden’s Dad
In 2017 a fire started at the refugee camp where Amira and her family live in Lebanon. Her family’s tent caught fire, badly burning Amira’s face, arms and hands. Amira’s younger brother died in the fire. Amira was rushed to the nearest hospital, and the family paid over $1,000 to ensure the young girl’s burns were treated properly. But as the hospital bills added up, the family could no longer afford her care, and she was discharged. After that, they went from NGO to NGO looking for help. They then found INARA. She will have multiple surgeries over the years to help ensure that she can fulfill her potential.

“[I] look forward to the day that she can go to school again, holding a pencil in her hand.”
- Amira’s Dad

Many institutions have strict criteria for which children they can support. For example, some only support children who have been directly injured by weapons of war. Our needs assessments highlighted other types of injuries that were being caused by the unsafe living conditions refugee families find themselves in.

Each of our children has a dedicated caseworker, ensuring best practice, providing a support system for the child and family, and making sure that treatment is followed through.

Our programmes are cost-effective, making your support go further

We build partnerships and networks to secure reduced or pro bono care and provide financial coverage when needed. We work with top medical and surgical professionals; many of our surgeons that operate on our children donate their time and expertise. We negotiate discounted rates for hospital coverage and stays. We also address any post-surgical needs such as physiotherapy and psychological support for the child and family. Our focus is to reverse, to the greatest extent possible, the impact of the injury on the child’s ability to have a healthy future.
Fighting erupted in the town that Nawal’s family lived and an explosion destroyed their home. Nawal’s mother remembers sifting through the rubble trying to find her daughter.

Her visible injuries were treated in Syria, and the family fled to Lebanon for safety. As Nawal got older, they noticed that that dreadful day had even worse repercussions for Nawal: she couldn’t hear or speak. The treatment to recover her hearing was far more than they could ever imagine affording – with doctors estimating the cost at over $7,000.

This is where we came in. We fitted Nawal with a hearing device and also paid for a speech therapist, since she had never talked due to her hearing problems at such a young age. She is now going to speech therapy.

“The happiest day of my life was when I heard Nawal say ‘Mom’”
- Nawal’s Mom, it was the first time she had heard her daughter’s sweet voice.

Our impact

The success of INARA’s program relies on identifying children with reducible or reversible disabilities. We then provide them with the best available surgical expertise to ensure they are able to break the cycle of disability and dependency that the war injury has trapped them and their families in. This means that we create a multiplier effect for the children we support. Our impact can be felt in the following areas:

1. Education

War injured children often find themselves excluded from education. The child is either physically unable to attend and participate in school due to the disability or is socially excluded as a result of the injury (such as severe facial deformities). This can change once the child receives treatment.

“I wasn’t going to school, but after the surgery I became more courageous and went again.”
- Jamila

Jamila lost her left eye years ago from a shrapnel injury from a nearby airstrike in Syria, but recently her right eye has become so infected that doctors warned that she could lose her eyesight completely without urgent surgery. She was in so much pain that she had to drop out of school.

Jamila was referred to INARA by UNHCR. We provided the young girl with the surgery she so desperately needed to save her eyesight.
2. Financial stability

The burden of looking after an injured child is multiplied when this injury occurs in the context of war and the family is displaced in the process. It is believed that on average a disabled child will require seven family members to be caregivers by the time the child reaches adulthood. This will have grave economic consequences for the family members who find themselves as full-time caregivers rather than bread-winners.

“Now, after the surgery, I feel so happy.”
- Lea

When Lea was 12 her family fled the violence surrounding them in Syria, and lost everything they had. In Lebanon, impoverished and living as refugees, Lea helped her mother to sew items so that the family could make more money. She accidentally stabbed herself in the eye, forcing doctors in Lebanon to remove it. For six years Lea suffered from debilitating headaches. She avoided mirrors, hating what she saw, and became reclusive.

Her family could not afford the treatment she needed in Lebanon, but went to doctors hoping that they would find one able to offer up their services for free. A doctor at the hospital where many of our children are treated met with the family and informed them about INARA, referring the case to us.

Our team of doctors explained that the cause of her painful headaches was her eye socket shrinking.

We fitted her with her glass eye and also performed a small surgery on her eyelid in March 2018. “Before the surgery I wasn’t able to look in the mirror or at people,” Lea explained to us recently. “Now, I can smile and look at people. It’s a beautiful feeling to look in the mirror and see yourself like other people see you.”

Lea, who is now 19 years old, works as a hairdresser and is able to help support her family with the day-to-day costs of living.
3. Ending the trauma for parents

INARA helps to put an end to the pain and misery parents feel. It helps to put an end to the constant worrying, day and night, about their injured child; and to the feelings of helplessness and guilt in the face of their child’s suffering. With our support, that emotional burden begins to alleviate. Parents know that their child is in safe hands and will continue to receive treatment. Most of our cases require multiple surgeries over the years.

Rafik was badly burnt in an airstrike in Syria when he was just 27 days old. His mother spent most of her time fearing for his future, until she met INARA. The scarring from the burns made the simple act of opening his eyes excruciating. After his first surgery, Rafik was able to open his eyes without pain. "I can see a noticeable change in his face after his first surgery," his mother told us. She is hopeful that, following further treatment planned for when he is around five, that his life will get back on track.

“I wish that Rafik will be a doctor in the future so that he can help everyone in need.”

- Rafik’s Mom
4. Making children smile again

By providing treatment we can change a child’s narrative from being defined by violence and their injury, to one of kindness and compassion. We help restore their futures, their potential, their hope, and transform them from being reliant on others to being active contributors to society.

Nisreen was badly burnt in an airstrike in Syria. The burns affected her confidence so much that she refused to go to school, and wouldn’t even go outside to play with her siblings. All she did all day was sit inside and draw princesses with giant smiles on their faces.

After her first INARA surgery things really changed for Nisreen. At first, she began to play outside with her siblings again. After that, she told her parents that she wanted to go to school again. She’s now been back at school for almost two years, and her teachers are very impressed with her artistic talents.
To learn more about our work and see how you can get involved please contact our Fundraising and Development Coordinator Gemma Shaw.

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