



## An Inspiring Story of Success in Syria

### *Helping Sanaa Realize Her Dream of University*

At just eight years of age, Sanaa (not her real name), her parents, and her sister were forced to flee their family home in Syria due to intense fighting. Over the years, they were displaced several more times when conflict broke out again.

Sanaa's father, an agricultural engineer, took the only job he could find, working as a street vendor to support his family. Her mother, who had been denied the opportunity to attend university, feared that Sanaa would never realize her own dream of a university education.

But then, opportunity arose from despair. Since the conflict in Syria began, IOCC has worked with our local Orthodox partner, the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD) of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, to address emergency needs, along with education and psychosocial support for displaced Syrians and Iraqi refugees.

One day, Sanaa learned about an educational support program through IOCC—and was immediately interested. The program targets vulnerable students seeking their 9th and 12th grade national certificates, while also providing opportunities in transitional grades, including 11th.

When Sanaa enrolled in the 11th grade, her teachers quickly realized that she had exceptional learning skills and was driven to excel. They worked diligently with her for two years so that she could take the national entrance exam for university.



*IOCC's educational support program in Syria helps vulnerable students like Sanaa achieve their dreams.*

Sanaa took the exam. She not only succeeded but also earned the highest result in her home governorate—enabling her to choose any college she wanted.

To recognize Sanaa's outstanding achievement, staff from IOCC/DERD met with her parents. Sanaa's father, his face streaked with tears, said: "I am so grateful for the support you extended to my daughter. You made us feel that we have done something for our children, amid our loss. I wish the same for her sister as well."

Sanaa plans to write and illustrate children's books in English to convey stories to inspire kids in her country to persevere in the face of hardships and tragedies. She said, "My hopes for the future are high, and at times like these, I can confidently say that you have not merely helped a displaced girl to achieve her goal, you are motivating a generation of desperate children to hold on and fight hard for their futures. Many thanks. ..."

FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

In each *News & Needs* issue, I look forward to the opportunity to thank you for your continuing support – and to introduce you to the people that we serve.

In this issue, I am honored to share the inspiring story of a teenage Syrian girl, the difficult journey of a Ukrainian social worker and her son, and an update on IOCC's response after major flooding in Greece. None of this work or these results would be possible without you.

Your generosity enables IOCC to maintain ongoing programs and to respond quickly to numerous crises – which can be particularly important during the summer. There have already been serious tornado outbreaks, and the forecast is calling for an unusually active hurricane season. IOCC is preparing to respond to natural disasters as needed – and to remain on the ground to support cleanup and rebuilding.

I would also like to call your attention to the Monthly Giving Partners ad in this issue. The steady support of our donors who provide monthly gifts is critical to IOCC's crisis response efforts, especially during the summer months. Please take a moment to learn more about the program at [iocc.org/monthly](http://iocc.org/monthly).

We wish you a safe, enjoyable, and blessed summer.

Yours in Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director & CEO

## Kateryna's Ukrainian Journey

### *Fleeing a War Zone and Finding a New Home*

Kateryna was a 48-year-old woman working with kindergarten students and living happily with her nine-year-old son, Dmytro, in northeast Ukraine – until everything changed on February 24, 2022, when the conflict began.

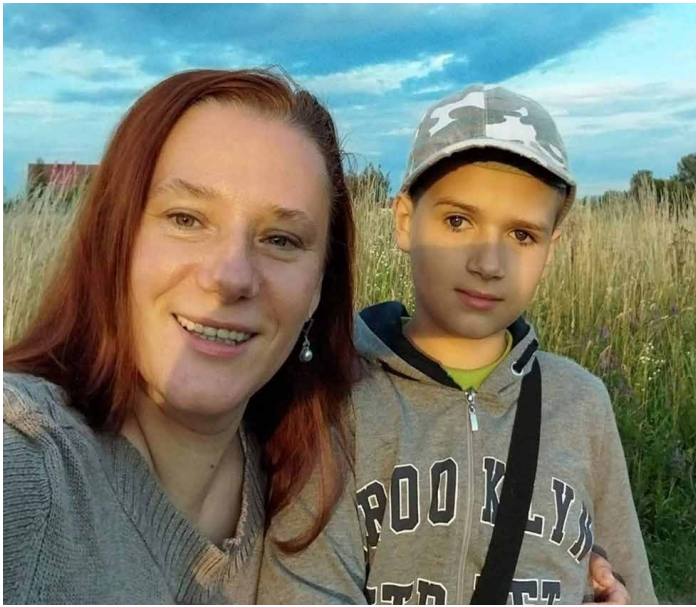
At first, Kateryna and Dmytro (not their real names) lived in their basement, without light, heat, or water. But soon, Dmytro became ill and began having panic attacks because of the constant explosions. With no transportation service available, Kateryna, her mother, and Dmytro packed into a friend's car with four other people and fled.

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International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC), is the official humanitarian agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development projects worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church.



*After being forced to flee their home, Kateryna and her son are grateful to have found safety and support at St. Olga's Shelter.*

What was normally an eight-hour drive to western Ukraine stretched into five agonizing days. At night, they stayed in homes or restaurants, sleeping on floors or mattresses. They eventually settled in a school building in a nearby village.

The school accommodated them through the summer, but when classes started, they had to move on. What little money Kateryna had was now gone, and she could not afford rent. Then she heard about a new shelter being built at St. Olga's Church, supported by IOCC.

Once the shelter opened, life began to improve. Dmytro resumed his schooling and started working with a psychologist. The director of St. Olga's Shelter found a job for Kateryna – working with displaced children, helping others overcome the trauma that she and Dmytro know all too well.

Kateryna summed up her journey, saying: "Everything is fine now. I am very grateful for the Shelter and the opportunity to help other people!"

## EDUCATION PROJECTS IN SYRIA

### *By the Numbers*

Since 2012, the Syrian conflict has taken a devastating toll on education, leaving an entire generation of children without access to schooling. IOCC is working with vulnerable populations to provide education and professional skills development through tuition assistance, tutoring, and remedial classes to help improve their future livelihood opportunities.

#### CURRENT PROJECTS INCLUDE:

**410**  enrolled in vocational classes

These include intensive vocational/life skills courses like graphic design, financial software, cell phone maintenance, hairdressing, and English language.

**464**  received tuition support

This includes tuition assistance to enroll in schools across Syria, allowing students to continue their formal education.

**157**  received tutoring and remedial classes

This includes tutoring and remedial classes for students in 9th and 12th grade to prepare for national and university entrance exams.



*Deliveries of potable water were part of IOCC's early response following destructive flooding across central Greece in fall 2023. (Photo: Apostoli)*

## Vital Relief after a Devastating Flood

### *Providing Clean Water and Hot Meals in Volos, Greece*

When Storm Daniel struck Volos, Greece, in September 2023, IOCC and partner Apostoli, the humanitarian arm of the Church of Greece, responded immediately.

The most pressing need was clean water. IOCC and Apostoli, coordinating with local municipalities and the Orthodox Church in Magnesia and Karditsa, found that water and sewage systems had been damaged or completely destroyed, leaving hundreds of thousands without potable water. Worse, many residents were surrounded by water polluted with sewage and the bodies of dead animals.

The emergency response began immediately, concentrating on the hardest-hit areas. Before long, enough water was coming in to meet the daily needs of about 1,000 people for a week.

The other critical need was food. IOCC and Apostoli provided hot meals and other food items for about four weeks to some 250 flood-affected

villages, focusing on areas that had not received government assistance. Over 35 days, the project supplied 8,120 lunches.

Hot food was a welcome sight for residents laboring to salvage their belongings, drag damaged furniture and heavy appliances out of their homes, and scrape away thick layers of mud left by the storm.

With the immediate crisis now over, relief efforts have turned to rebuilding and repairing local schools, helping life in Volos gradually to return to normal.



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