

Bekaa Valley, Lebanon
17 February 2016

Clowns without Borders

Taalabaya settlement



Report

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Our last day of the CWB Lebanese tour saw us return to the Bekaa Valley. The temperature has risen dramatically and much of the snow has melted. The heat in the valley is very intense which hugely affects the living conditions in the makeshift camps.

We arrived at Taalabaya settlement, home to 40 Syrian families, and were met by Ziad Diab, the camp leader, and a gang of very excited children who huddled around the van. Daniel and Donal entertained the children whilst myself and Helen went off to look at the space where we would perform. We were offered to perform on either very uneven stoney ground or a flat piece of ground in full sun. Neither seemed suitable so we looked around and found a different place; it was semi-shadey, flat to perform on and more comfortable for the children to sit and we could secure our rope across the playing area to stop the children pushing forward onto the stage. (During the show the children are invited to participate in the performance and as their excitement increases, their eagerness to take part surges everyone onto the performance space.)

As it happens our decision to perform in this particular area was not the best one we've had on this tour! The rope did nothing as we couldn't tie it high enough, the children wouldn't sit as they were keen to see all the action and so our performance area became smaller and smaller all of which affected the performance. The children still enjoyed it but luckily we were doing a 2nd show so they all got to see it again. We decided to move location for the 2nd show and we found a small raised area that was part of a disused building and acted as a

stage, so we set up there. We lay down rugs for the children to sit on and more arrived onto the camp from the surrounding camps which are dotted all along the Bekaa valley.

There were about 100 at the first show; 80 Syrian children and 20 adults and about 250 at the 2nd show mostly children with about 25 adults. The 2nd show went really well as we felt the children could see more comfortably and we had the space to perform our tricks and routines with high energy. The children loved all the interaction and responded with an impromptu chorus of the happy birthday song in English that they spontaneously sang to us during the show. It's wonderful when the audience become the show.

After we had finished packing up and playing with the children Ziad said that initially the camp had wanted gifts (meaning provisions and practical items) but after having seen the show and felt the reaction from the children and indeed the adults, he said the show was the best gift we could have given.

We left the camp with the children running along side the van waving and shouting goodbye with huge grins on their faces; A wonderful end to a great tour.

Our tour in the Lebanon to Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps has been a profound and poignant experience; we have met the most extraordinary people living in desperate situations whose generosity has been astounding. It was an honour to share laughter, love and happiness with them. Special thanks to Al Jana, Culture Ireland and all those who raised funds to make this tour possible.

Big love, the clowns 😊