

# Making Ends Meet Each Month

## How Syrian and Lebanese families navigate difficult financial circumstances

As the Syrian crisis drags on, the realities many families—both Syrian and Lebanese—are facing do not always neatly fit into an inspirational story. Families are struggling, many more than before, as breadwinners search endlessly for any kind of paying work even as rent and food costs are rising dramatically.

A typical family of 7 (two parents, five children) is often paying up to \$300 a month just for a one-room shack. Shoddily-built stairs, walls, and roofs provide little protection from the elements during Beirut’s hot summers and freezing winters. Faulty wiring, salty water, and open flame cooking sends children and

adults to Tahaddi’s community health center each month with a number of preventable injuries. In this month’s newsletter, we wanted to highlight this issue through the stories of two Tahaddi families: one from the Lebanese Dom ethnic minority, and one of a displaced Syrian family.



### The Khalid Family

The six-member Khalid family were originally sharecroppers in their rural village back in Syria. The mother told us of their lives before the crisis, “We weren’t rich, we didn’t make a lot of money, but we were happy.” The family now lives in Lebanon, joining the father who had left Syria two years before his wife and children to find work after their fields were bombed by overhead airplanes. Although they found a more stable situation in Lebanon, their problems did not end at the border. The father takes any menial work that he can find, but with so many Syrian men com-

peting for the same low-paying jobs, what money he does make cannot cover all the family’s expenses.

The family is able to scrape by each month thanks largely to Tahaddi’s support, ranging from monthly food vouchers to free education for three of their boys to free healthcare. Additionally Tahaddi covers their weekly transportation to an external physical therapist for their youngest son who is unable to walk without assistance. Despite this support, the family still carries over a debt each month, as do many families in the community.

#### Khalid Family Monthly Budget

Item	Expenses
Rent	\$200
Food	\$180
Utilities	\$63
Medication	\$110
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$553</b>
Monthly Salary	\$350
Tahaddi Contributions	\$140

**Average Monthly Debt Carried by Family:**  
\$63



# The Hassan Family

The Hassan family, Lebanese citizens, likewise experience many economic and social difficulties. Born in origin, an ethnic minority in Lebanon often marginalized, the Hassan family mainly makes around \$300 a month through a low and unstable source of income: grooming horses. The eldest son, after graduating from Tahaddi Education Center's (TEC) five-year non-formal education program, was registered in a one-year vocational training program in hairdressing. This adolescent is the first in his family to have reached this level of education. He is now helping the family by contributing an extra \$100 a month by cutting hair. His younger sister is at the TEC, and his younger brother, after one year in Tahaddi's pre-school education, is attending a Lebanese

public school—the first in the entire family to do so. The family house is made of two poorly constructed rooms with no furniture beyond an old television and the mattresses upon which they sleep. They eat from food purchased at a mini market through credit, the father has to pay back their debt whenever he gets his salary. After everything is paid, only \$25 per family member remains for the month. Exacerbated by the father's unstable monthly income, the Hassan family continues to face a daily struggle to make ends meet. However, the father still holds hope for his family's future: "One day my son will open his own salon to support us."

### Hassan Family Monthly Budget

Item	Expenses
Rent	\$0
Debt From Previous Month	\$100
Food	\$100
Utilities	\$50
School Bus fees	\$23
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$273</b>
<b>Monthly Income</b>	<b>\$400</b>
<b>Total remaining for family of five: \$127</b>	

Tahaddi Education Center is back in full swing! While the next newsletter will have more information on the students and the "Back to School" period, you can check out photos from the previous few weeks on our Facebook page [here!](#)

So far this year's non-formal education program has 198 students, including 6 children with disabilities integrated into the classes, as well as 103 children enrolled in public schools taking part in Tahaddi's homework support programs.



# Zahra's Story

As Zahra was sitting in her parent's home in the rural outskirts of Aleppo, she suddenly felt a red-hot, fiery and razor sharp object blasting towards her. It burned her eyes so badly that even now, four years later, she shudders in pain at the memory.

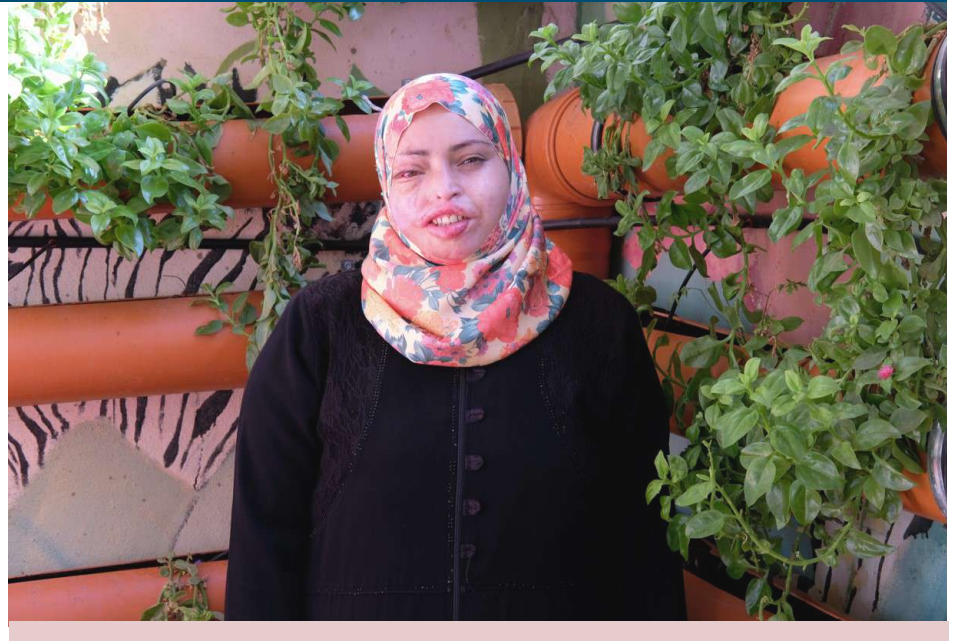
The aerial bomb blast burnt her entire right side, leaving her with severe burns and extensive disfiguration of her face and body. Her nylon "abayeh" dress was seared into her skin, and she has vivid memories of medical workers cutting the cloth out of her skin with sharp tools.

Her eyelid was burnt shut, but thankfully her sight was unaffected. She also lost her ear but not her hearing. Her mouth was badly disfigured leaving her unable to eat without a straw or speak clearly. Zahra was also pregnant at the time but miraculously the baby survived unharmed. As a result of her burns, her husband left her, taking all three of their children.

As a result of her injuries, she has undergone nearly 20 operations and countless painful treatments. She spent months in the hospital in Northern Syria. However, as the fighting intensified, many doctors fled.

For a time, Zahra's family had to smuggle her through embattled territory. However, this became increasingly dangerous and they finally decided to make the journey to Lebanon where Zahra received further months-long treatment.

Zahra came to the Tahaddi Health



Center specifically seeking care for her facial scars, and her chin which remained fused to her chest leaving her unable to fully lift her head. She also had limited mobility in her arm due to the way the skin on her arm had fused to her chest.

Sitting in the social workers office on this first visit, Zahra removed the scarf hiding the scars on her face. "This is the first time I have removed the scarf covering my face in public since the blast. I don't feel ashamed here and it's nice to feel the wind on my face again."

Shortly after that first visit, the Tahaddi social worker helped to arrange for further reconstructive surgery for Zahra with a plastic surgeon who agreed to charge only the hospital costs and forgo his own fees.

"The face and chest are the most important thing for a woman" explained Zahra. She underwent a five-hour operation this summer which resulted in significant improvement not only in terms of her appearance and mobility, but her overall sense of wellbeing.

She is now able to move her head and arm. She comes often to the Tahaddi clinic smiling, joking and rarely co-

vers her face any more. She often shares that when she was burnt in the bomb blast, she stopped wearing colors. Instead, she wore only black. But, now she feels hope again and is back to wearing bright headscarves.

In Zahra's own words: "After all I have seen and experienced, I now feel older in age than my mother although I am only 23 years old. My dream is to be self-reliant and to learn how to read and write. My experiences have taught me that I don't want to be dependent on anyone again. I want to become a hair dresser."

This fall she will enroll in the adult literacy classes at the Tahaddi Education Center to begin the next chapter of her life. While the pain of living apart from her children remains, she has not given up hope of seeing them again.



Senior Social Worker Rana Ghosn who worked on Zahra's case