

Project Brings Children Hurt in Lebanon to U.S. for Treatment

When 10-year-old Fayzeh Amin was struck by shrapnel in the fall of 1982, doctors feared she would become yet another child crippled for life by the violence in Lebanon.

Her knee had been shattered by the flying metal, and the sophisticated operations needed to repair the damage were not available in the hard-pressed hospitals of her homeland.

But Fayzeh Amin will soon walk normally. The "Save Lebanon" project of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has brought her and 40 other wounded children to the United States for treatment of physical and psychological wounds.

The committee, the largest grass-roots organization of Arab-Americans, began the project in 1982 to aid children hurt in Israel's invasion of Lebanon and in years of civil war there. Nine more children are scheduled to arrive at New York City's Kennedy International Airport Thursday.

'Only Look at the Victims'

James Zogby, executive director of the Arab-American committee, said the aims of "Save Lebanon" are humanitarian, not political.

"We only look at the victims," he said, "and not at who fired the shots." Wounded children of all ethnic and religious backgrounds are eligible for the program, he said.

Much of the cost of treating and transporting the children is being underwritten by corporate and individual donors. Alia Jordanian Airlines, for instance, provided reduced rates to the six groups of children and adult escorts that have arrived since last February. Eighteen hospitals, including the Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, have provided free services. A number of doctors have performed operations without charge.

The committee has raised \$210,000 through fund-raising events and individual contributions to cover additional costs associated with the children's stay in the United States.

Dozens of Arab-Americans have

opened their homes to the children. Fayzeh Amin, for example, is living with the Musa family of Silver Springs, Md., while she waits for her third knee operation. She has been in this country for a year.

Mounir Mohammed, 12, who was shot three times in the September 1982 massacre at the Sabra refugee camp, has lived with several families in Richmond, Va., since he arrived last October.

Boy Received Free Treatment

Mounir, a Palestinian, was not eligible for subsidized medical care in Lebanon because he is not a citizen of that country. He received free treatment at the Children's Hospital in Richmond for nerve and bone damage.

Mounir has seen much suffering in his short life. His father and brother died in a massacre in 1976. At the Sabra massacre, he witnessed the deaths of his mother, three sisters and two brothers. He survived by pretending to be dead after he was shot.

Mounir has only a brother and sister alive from what had been his family of 11 people, said Ibrahim Uwaydah, 40, who has provided a temporary home for the boy and his brother, Nabil, in Richmond.

Mounir recalled the details of the Sabra massacre in a matter-of-fact tone. "I was afraid; I was scared to death," he said. "They asked who's not dead. If someone got up, they shot him so I didn't get up."

Americans have warmly welcomed the children. Mr. Uwaydah said Mounir had traveled from family to family because so many wanted the privilege of sheltering him. Selma Musa, who recently brought Fayzeh into her home, said, "It's just like having another daughter in the house."

The journey to the United States of a wounded child usually begins when an independent social welfare group in Lebanon forwards a name to Dr. Amal Shamma, head of pediatrics at Beirut's Barbir Hospital. She recommends to the committee which child will be sent



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Fayzeh Amin, recuperating from corrective surgery for wounds she received in Lebanon in 1982, talking with James Zogby of "Save Lebanon," a program that has brought 41 children to the U.S. for treatment.

to the United States.

"Every child I chose was picked because there was some very specific treatment in America," she said in an interview while visiting this country.

"Many came for eye treatment we do not have the equipment for in Lebanon," she said. "Some came for rehabilitation. In Lebanon you can get a new limb or a brace or a wheelchair, but that's the extent of it. There they don't pay attention to psychological or social rehabilitation."

"I had to refuse people over 18 years old," Dr. Shamma continued. "Our workers in Washington found it easier to place children than adults in hospitals. I had to refuse those who wanted

treatment that is not available anywhere in the world. A lot of people thought that if they came to America arms would grow back or eyes would see again."

U.S. Supports Project

The State Department supported the "Save Lebanon" children's project from its inception and helped speed the processing of visas. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith which initially denounced the project as a propaganda effort, now supports its humanitarian value, said Nathan Perlmutter, the league's national director.

Organizers of the project believe it has achieved some dramatic suc-

cesses. Fayzeh no longer sleeps with a transistor under her head and a pillow over it to shut out the sounds of shells falling. Mounir can now talk about the day he saw his family die.

"It is not we who are healing the children, it is they who are healing us," said Danny Thomas at a fund-raising concert at Washington's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts last May.

Mr. Zogby said the project had helped Arab-Americans act as a unified ethnic group. "Until now it seems it was difficult for us to organize as a whole," he said. "The kids have enabled us to do that; they have given us that pride."