

The first effort of Save Lebanon to receive both widespread national enthusiasm from the Arab American community and extensive press coverage was the Children's Project, a program to provide specialized medical treatment in the United States for wounded Lebanese and Palestinian children.

On February 14, 1983 -- Valentine's Day -- the first group of 13 wounded children arrived at New York's Kennedy Airport. Throughout the following year and a half, the Children's Project brought 51 children and teenagers to this country and provided them with new limbs, plastic surgery, major corrective and reconstructive surgery and rehabilitative therapy. Arab Americans in dozens of communities opened their homes to these young victims of war, physicians donated services and hospitals waived costs.

Some of the treatment even made medical history, such as an operation in Syracuse, New York, which straightened the spine of Ali Ghosn, a young man crippled during the civil war, and an operation in Boston, Massachusetts for Ahmed Tourmous, which restored the teenager's vision after he was blinded by shrapnel during the Israeli invasion.

Save Lebanon's fundraising efforts also made Arab American history. In May 1983, Save Lebanon organized a benefit concert at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center entitled "For the Sake of the Children."

The concert featured classical music by the United Nations Symphony Orchestra and the Paul Hill Chorale, narration by TV and radio personality Casey Kasem, and a guest appearance by Danny Thomas. The event was attended by more than 2,400 people and raised over \$70,000 for the Children's Project.

An unintended by-product of the Children's Project emerged in the extensive and sympathetic treatment of Arabs in the U.S. news media. An American public, inundated for decades by negative stereotypes of Arabs, suddenly read stories in local newspapers and watched local TV news programs depicting Arab children -- human, innocent and suffering -- being treated in hospitals in their communities while Arab American families cared for the children in their homes. Overnight, Arabs became not simply "the Middle East problem" but children and neighbors down the street.

Today, most of the 51 children have completed their treatments and have returned to their homes in Lebanon. Seven of the children, however, remain in the United States and Canada because of the complicated nature of their treatment, and Save Lebanon continues to provide for their needs.

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