

StARS Christmas Newsletter 2026



Christmas is a time of unity, hope, and standing in solidarity with those most in need. During this special season, we express our heartfelt gratitude for the compassion that brings us together, and we are pleased to share some of the steps StARS has taken in 2025 to strengthen and support refugees in meaningful ways.

Merry Christmas,
StARS Team

Warm Moments at the Winter Bazaar



During the winter bazaar, warm and joyful vibes filled the space as the community came together for a special day. The event created a welcoming atmosphere where people could meet, connect, and enjoy a rich cultural experience despite the cold season.

Visitors explored beautiful handmade crafts, unique artworks, and creative pieces that reflected the talents and stories of the vendors. Traditional music and folk dances added life to the event, and the audience truly enjoyed the rhythms and performances by a refugee band, "Gulberg" musical band, lighting up the crowd with songs from different countries, creating moments of shared happiness and celebration.

Food and drink were another highlight of the day. Guests enjoyed delicious options from diverse cuisines, including Yemeni, Syrian, Somali, Eritrean and Sudanese amongst others. The smells and flavors brought good memories from their home, making the bazaar a full sensory experience.

Beyond the fun and colors, the winter bazaar had a deep impact. All the vendors were refugees, and StARS bazaar gave them a valuable opportunity to make a living and support their families with their skills and hard work. At the same time, the event brought them closer to their homelands by reviving familiar traditions, crafts, music, and tastes that helped them reconnect with their roots and cultural identity.

The winter bazaar was more than just a market, it was a space of belonging, cultural pride, and shared memories. It reminded everyone that even in winter, community spirit can create warmth that lasts long after the day ends.





A Place Where Every Child Matters



As the year draws to a close and the spirit of Christmas fills the air, we pause to reflect on stories of compassion, resilience, and hope. One such story is the Special Needs Education Program, which officially began in August 2024 with a simple but powerful belief: every child deserves the chance to learn, grow, and feel included.



For many refugee families, learning is not just about books and classrooms. Displacement, trauma, and uncertainty often create invisible barriers for children, especially those with special learning needs. This program was created to stand beside those children and their families, offering understanding, care, and practical support when it is needed most.

“We want every child to feel included and capable,” says Yassar, the program coordinator. “No matter their challenges, they can learn and grow with the right support.”

The program supports children with learning disabilities, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, while also carefully evaluating other individual cases. Support is offered through group and individual sessions, awareness workshops and training, caregiver guidance, follow-ups on individual cases, personalized learning plans, referrals for medical assessment, and education grants when possible.

At the heart of the program are sessions designed to help children build confidence and everyday skills. Developmental and sensory sessions support coordination and perception, while learning difficulties sessions help children find new ways to approach academic challenges.

One example of the program's transformative impact is Awad's journey. Awad arrived in Egypt on 22 May 2023 after fleeing conflict in Sudan. By May 2024, he joined StARS preschool (KG0) carrying emotional scars and struggling with PTSD, depression, and malnutrition. Initially, he cried often, avoided classroom activities, and found it hard to connect with others. Hope began when he joined the Special Needs Education Program and received counseling, educational support, medical care, and nutritional assistance. Gradually, Awad became more active, socially engaged, and confident in expressing his needs and emotions. By September 2025 (KG1), he had transformed into a happier, emotionally stable, and socially connected child. Awad's story shows the powerful impact of integrated educational, psychosocial, and medical support, guiding him toward a future full of resilience and opportunity.



Since the program began, 46 students have been regularly participating in sessions. More than 105 parents have joined workshops and training, gaining knowledge and reassurance to better support their children at home. Additionally, 67 children have been referred to the program from outside CEP and preschool. The program also works closely with local organizations, including Safe Space Centers for People with Special Needs, to strengthen the circle of care around each child.

Despite not having an independent budget, the program continues to grow through strong internal collaboration. Educational and assessment tools shared by school counselors and the preschool team have made it possible to keep sessions running smoothly and ensure children receive consistent support.

“Our progress shows that even with limited resources, dedication and teamwork can make a real difference,” shares one of the teachers. “Seeing children discover new abilities and parents feel more confident and hopeful is the greatest reward.”

This Christmas, the Special Needs Education Program is more than an educational initiative—it is a space where students shine.

Where Culture Becomes Home Again

Throughout the long journey of displacement, refugees often lose so much of their countries, their homes, sometimes even their families. Yet, in the midst of all this loss, one precious thing remains: their culture. It lives in memories, songs, stories, and traditions passed from one generation to the next. Culture becomes a quiet anchor, a reminder of who they are and where they come from.

For many refugee parents, teaching their children about their culture is an act of hope. It is a way to rebuild a sense of belonging in a new land, to create familiarity where everything feels different. Through shared traditions, children learn that even far from home, they still carry it within them.

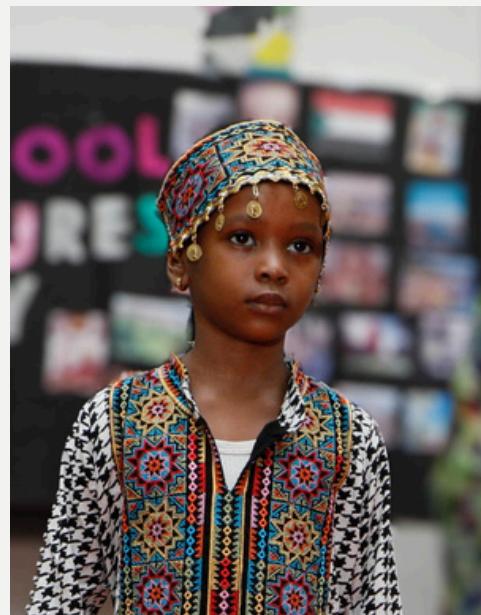
From this deep need, the pre-school Cultural Days emerge as joyful celebrations that bring preschool children and their parents together to explore, share, and celebrate different cultures, fostering a sense of belonging, understanding, and community from an early age. Each year, the students enjoy new activities designed to celebrate their roots.

These days are filled with music, traditional food, laughter, and stories. Stories of home, for the young refugee generation they are not only reconnecting with their own identities but also learning about the richness of others. They grow up understanding difference as something beautiful, to respect, and live with it in peace.

Cultural Day is more than a celebration; it is a moment where memories are honored, communities are built, and hope is kept alive through culture, a sense of home is created once again, and with it, the seeds of more peaceful and respectful communities are gently planted for the future.



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Across Borders is a UK-based charity that works to support refugees in the UK and the Middle East. It does this through a mixture of capacity-building, service provision, and sharing best practices across countries. Across Borders partners with and supports StARS.

For donations in GBP, please visit the Across Borders website:
<https://www.acrossborders.org.uk/donate>



The Season of Giving

Your donations help them grow:



\$25

Provides one month of daycare expenses

\$30

Provides one month of baby formula

\$40

Provides one session of dialysis

\$45

Provides one month of diapers

\$100

Covers one month's utilities and rent in a shared apartment for a refugee

\$150

Provides food for a family of three for a month

For donations in US dollars, please visit the Refugees Thrive International website using the following link:

www.refugeesthrive.org/donate/

Refugees Thrive International is a registered 501(c)3 which has been supporting StARS for a number of years.

Euro donations can be made via bank transfer to:



St. Andrew's Refugee Services

IBAN: AT29 2050 6077 0007 1843

BIC: SPKUAT22XXX

Sparkasse Kufstein, Oberer Stadtplatz 1, 6330 Kufstein, Austria

For donations in Egyptian pound, please send an email to:
info@stars-egypt.org

All donations will fund StARS programs.