

# Middle-Eastern glimmer of hope: Rekindling joy for children facing war traumas

By Sara J. Faqir

AMMAN — In the midst of the turmoil that surrounds refugees, particularly the innocent children caught in the crossfire of adversity, one individual has emerged as a beacon of hope and joy, as Jamie steps in to save the day and bring smiles to their faces. This is where the magic happens.

Through his charity, “Magic for Smiles”, Jamie brings his magical talents to the forefront, aiming to spread joy and alleviate the burdens of vulnerable and traumatised children, particularly refugees.

Established in March 2019, “Magic for Smiles” operates in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and the UK, although its roots trace back further. Jamie’s journey into humanitarian magic began years earlier, with three dedicated years of pro bono work in Lebanon, honing his craft and understanding the profound impact magic can have on the well-being of refugees.

With nearly three decades of experience as a professional humanitarian across various countries, Jamie’s decision to establish “Magic for Smiles” was a natural progression, blending his passion for magic which started since childhood with his steadfast commitment to humanitarianism.

When it comes to certain misconceptions he faces in regard to performing magic, “I think the bigger problem is the novelty of magic as a psychosocial tool. Even after all these years, it’s still a novelty to promote it.”

He firmly believes in the power of magic, not just as a form of entertainment but also as a tool for providing psychosocial benefits to children facing trauma and hardship.

When it comes to the various benefits of magic, there are three main aspects: Emotional, social and cognitive. The emotional side revolves around entertainment. On the social front, magic facilitates interaction, trust-building, and the forging of friendships. Take, for instance, a simple trick like the needle through a balloon. It requires trust in the balloon not to pop, fostering a sense of connection, Jamie explained.

Onto the cognitive realm, magic stimulates imagination, an-



Photo courtesy of Magic for Smiles

alytical thinking and concentration. By observing a magic show and engaging in participatory activities, one can witness firsthand how these cognitive skills are sharpened. In essence, magic offers a unique opportunity to reap a multitude of social, emotional and cognitive benefits, he said.

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When reflecting on a memory that resonates deeply, Jamie fondly recalls his time in southern Turkey, immediately following the devastating earthquake where he performed for Syrian

refugees, “The context was poignant, coming just after an earthquake had struck the region, leaving many still living in tents. Despite the challenging circumstances, we decided to bring some joy by organising a show,” he noted.

“The setting was simple, a carpet laid out on the ground, with a makeshift container serving as our stage. While our setup was basic, it was a luxury for the children who had never experienced any form of entertainment before. Witnessing the sheer happiness and radiant smiles on the faces of those children struck a chord deep within me.”

Jamie said he aims to make a significant impact, utilising magic as a form of trauma relief. It is about improving the lives of children in various ways. The magic shows aim to have an impact with a focus on repeat performances, which is found to be most effective.

However, Jamie acknowledges that the frequency of these repeat shows has dwindled, largely due to funding constraints. The disruption caused by events like COVID-19, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, has

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strained partnerships and funding sources. Many of “Magic for Smiles” initiatives rely heavily on donor funding, which can be unpredictable and may vanish suddenly. This instability not only affects their ability to plan repeat shows but also impacts staffing and their ability to cultivate long-term relationships.

It is a challenging reality they navigate as they strive to continue their mission of bringing joy and hope to those who need it most.

As for Jamie’s vision for “Magic for Smiles”, he states, “Well, my vision is to overcome hurdles such as the novelty of magic and funding constraints. They should not really be perennial problems,

which they are. I think my vision is to integrate magic into the humanitarian system.”

As Jamie continues to spread his magic and warmth to those in need, his latest performance in Jordan was a testament to his unwavering commitment to bring joy to even the most challenging circumstances.

Entertaining cancer evacuees from Gaza, Jamie’s show offered a brief respite from their struggles, igniting smiles and hope in their hearts. As he prepares for another visit to Jordan this July, Jamie remains dedicated to his mission of using magic as a force for good, proving that even in the darkest of times, a touch of enchantment can illuminate the path to brighter days ahead.