

# A journey of hope

---

 [cyprus-mail.com/2015/10/27/a-journey-of-hope/](http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/10/27/a-journey-of-hope/)

Alix Norman

10/27/2015

By Alix Norman

The boy was three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, and the photo resonated around the world, shocking and moving millions. Here in Cyprus, the effect was even more pronounced: this had taken place practically on our doorstep, barely 500km from our shores. But while the world postured – condemning and criticising a system that allowed such a tragedy – one group of island mums decided to take matters into their own hands, doing something concrete to aid the plight of young refugees. And thus was born the Teddy Bear Walk...

Organised by Bearfoot – an initiative that motivates youngsters to make a difference to the lives of those not as fortunate as themselves – the Teddy Bear Walk is a charitable undertaking providing both comfort and funding to refugee children. “It’s children helping children,” says **Limassol** mum-of-three, Sarah Pishia. “It’s about our kids understanding that they can make a difference to the lives of their peers; about sowing the seeds of charitable intention from an early age.”

One of the organisers, Sarah was the instigator of the efforts, and in just over a month has gone from “having the germ of an idea” to “genuinely not being able to believe how much we’ve achieved!” A sponsored walk, donation of teddy bears and a party at the St Raphael are just some of the fund-raising activities scheduled for November 15, along with a raffle and a plethora of kids’ entertainment. All in aid of the Save the Children’s Child Refugee Crisis Appeal.

“It started,” says Sarah, “with the photograph. I saw it on Facebook and was immediately moved; I’ve got three boys myself, so on a personal level it really brought home to me that this was a real child who had his whole life ahead of him. And there’s nothing to say that, at some point, this couldn’t be me, my family, my boys.”

It’s a sentiment echoed by many – not just in Cyprus but all over the world. But it was Sarah who decided something should be done. “I’ve always had a can-do attitude,” she says. “If you want to change something you need to take action. There’s no point sitting around feeling sorry. I firmly believe that as an individual you can do a lot,” she continues, “but as a group you can do a great deal more...”

Sending out a message on Facebook to anyone who might be interested in helping young refugees, Sarah was overwhelmed by the response. “A phenomenal number of people wanted to get involved; everyone was so positive,” she enthuses, explaining how a group of mums immediately rallied to the call, meeting up to brainstorm. “It was very much a team effort. We had loads of suggestions: an entertainment event, a sponsored walk; someone suggested we should collect teddy bears to give to refugee children.” In the end, the group – now known as Bearfoot – amalgamated all the ideas into one big event involving their own kids. “Hence the strapline Children Helping Children,” Sarah clarifies.

While all of the volunteers are mums with young children, each also brought with them specialist expertise. And it was this, Sarah suggests, that really made a difference. Corporate relations, events management, social media marketing, education, academic, PR, graphic design... All the professional knowledge was there to make the Teddy Bear Walk a really special event, and with Sarah’s background in charity organisation, everything was set to mobilise the masses.

“Our first priority was to identify our charity,” she says. “We wanted a registered charity with a good reputation to give our sponsors the confidence that their money would be spent in the right way and in the most needed areas. And Save the Children were running the Child Refugee Crisis Appeal, which specifically tied in with the reasoning behind our initiative and the goal of children helping children.”

Staffed entirely by volunteers, 100 per cent of monies raised will go to the appeal. “We’re working on the basis that everything for the event will be sponsored or donated,” Sarah continues, adding that the group have plans for both the short and long term, and hope to see similar events abroad. “The idea is to have children and their

teddybears mirroring the walk all over the world, representing a journey of hope to counter the refugees' journey of fear."

The sponsored walk is the main focus of the event, with children (and their teddy bears, of course!) completing a one-kilometre route along the **Limassol** seafront from PlusSea to the St Raphael. "But," Sarah stresses, "it's very important that the children recognise this as a giving event, so at the culmination of the walk, we'll be gathering all the teddy bears to send to young refugees in both Greece and Cyprus. Teddy bears are a symbol of comfort, of love, something in which a child who has lost everything can take refuge."

Continuing the theme, local artist Kelly Norman has donated a number of teddy bear paintings, which will be placed along the route – "creating a sort of treasure hunt". With a live radio broadcast from PlusSea, a raffle, and a free-of-charge party at the St Raphael – featuring lots of child-friendly entertainment from local organisations such as the **Limassol Theatre Arts School**, Rainborama, Wonder Dough, Bricks 4 Kidz and Little Einsteins – the Teddy Bear Walk is all set to highlight the benefits of philanthropy to the next generation.

"We want our children to understand that they're lucky, and that they can share what they have to help others," Sarah reiterates.

"We've had pledges from a massive network of acquaintances, friends and companies who instantly wanted to get involved: sponsoring the event, selling raffle tickets, donating prizes, passing information on to **schools** and children's groups... It's simply incredible," Sarah concludes, adding that the group are well on their way to raising their target of €25,000. "And, at the end of the day, it's proof that – working together – we really can do anything!"

### **The Teddy Bear Walk**

In aid of the Save the Children Child Refugee Crisis Appeal will take place on November 15, starting from PlusSea Lifestyle Bar on **Limassol** seafront at 11am. For further information, sponsorship forms or pledges, visit the Facebook page 'Bearfoot – Teddy Bear Walk', email [bearfootchildren@gmail.com](mailto:bearfootchildren@gmail.com), or call Sarah directly on 96 528569. There is also a Just Giving link for those who wish to donate directly.

© [Cyprus Mail Ltd.](#) 2015. All rights reserved.

A Cyprus Mail Company Ltd. Site