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SPECIAL

## Keeping up: NGO helps reintegrate child cancer patients into school

August 06, 2013 12:25 AM

By Beckie Strum

The Daily Star

### STORY SUMMARY

Three-quarters of children in Lebanon diagnosed with cancer survive and then have to return to school



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File - Students take their exams at the Children's Cancer Center in Beirut, Wednesday, June 13, 2012. (The Daily Star/Hasan Shaaban)



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FAQRA, Lebanon: Three-quarters of children in Lebanon diagnosed with cancer survive and then have to return to school after months of going in and out of the hospital for treatment.

Mireille Nassif and her team at myschoolpulse are attempting to make that reintegration as smooth as possible. Nassif created myschoolpulse several years ago, following her intimate experience with children's cancer treatment. Nassif's son Paul Yared was diagnosed with bone cancer in winter 2008 and continued studying through the course of his treatment until his death in summer 2009.

after months of going in and out of the hospital for treatment.

For two years, myschoolpulse has educated around 160 children, and today teaches around 60 kids across four different hospitals.

Ten percent of the students helped through

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In his memory, Nassif wanted to educate children receiving cancer treatment who would not otherwise have the resources for tutors and teachers to help them keep up with their coursework.

For two years, myschoolpulse has educated around 160 children, and today teaches around 60 kids across four different hospitals. Rates of curing cancer in children in Lebanon are around 75 percent, and myschoolpulse aims to make sure illness does not force the children to repeat grades once they're healthy enough to return.

For some children, a love of learning is born from dire circumstances, Nassif said. Ten percent of the students helped through myschoolpulse have never been enrolled in school.

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"We had one student who discovered school at the hospital," she said. "The first thing they did when he got better was to sign up with school."

For many of the students already enrolled in school, myschoolpulse follows the curriculum of the school they plan to return to.

For most, that means the Lebanese school system, though the NGO accommodates other curriculums.

Permanent teachers, many of them retired educators able to cope with the sadness of childhood cancer, spend their days at the hospitals.

"The teachers are there to help all day long," Nassif said. "You never know when they will feel unwell, so they have to be ready at any moment if he's in a position to learn."

Hundreds of healthy children came out Sunday for a race honoring those peers too sick to participate.

The Pulse 5k, held in the cool mountains of Faqra, is an annual family race to raise money for myschoolpulse. This year's attendance was the biggest yet, with more than 1,600 runners, about a third of which were children under 18 years old in addition to their parents and professional runners.

The children pushing through the finish line, sweaty but smiling, underlined just how much myschoolpulse's students stand to gain if they too can push through their treatment and continue a normal life.

"There were a lot of young parents with their kids and they were pushing them to do the 5 kilometer race," Nassif said. "If you look at the list of winners, there were many 10 years old and they did it in 30 minutes – we had some very good young runners."

The Pulse 5k is a joint effort among myschoolpulse, the Beirut Marathon Association – which provides more than 100 volunteers to staff the event – Faqra Club and Bank Audi.

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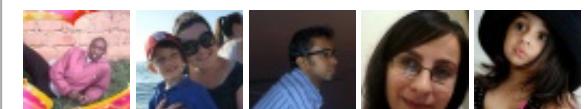
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