



A joint IOCC-BLDA program aims to help hundreds of children in Gaza, like Samara, by providing educational resources and extracurricular activities.



Samara's Remarkable Return

HELPING A GIRL IN GAZA OVERCOME TRAGEDY

Before conflict broke out in Gaza, 11-year-old Samara (not her real name) enjoyed a warm family life. That changed in a heartbeat when she witnessed the death of her father as the family fled conflict in the north of Gaza.

Samara instantly withdrew from the world. She stopped speaking and refused to play or attend school, where she had been a top student.

For months, Samara remained silent. She watched other displaced children at nearby tents where IOCC, in partnership with Beit Lahia Development Association (BLDA), was running an education and play project. Every day, she would sit and watch other children learn, laugh, and play—but she wouldn't join in.

continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE:

Helping Overcome Tragedy in Gaza

Supporting Women in Ukraine

Building Children's Futures in Uganda

From the
**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR**



Dear friend,

As we take advantage of the warmer weather and longer days, we also remember that it is a heightened time for natural disasters—like hurricanes in the US and wildfires in Greece. This summer—and all year long—your support will ensure that IOCC can respond as disasters arise and continue its critical work around the world.

In this issue of *News & Needs*, we are honored to share a few examples of this work and introduce you to the people whose lives you've impacted in Gaza, Uganda, and Ukraine.

One additional note, IOCC will attend several Orthodox national and diocese conventions this summer. We look forward to the chance to meet you, to connect with our volunteers, and for everyone to learn more about the life-changing work that you make possible.

From all of us at IOCC, we wish you a very blessed summer.

Yours in Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafylou
Executive Director & CEO

PS. You'll see information about IOCC's **Monthly Giving Partners** in this issue. It's a special and easy way that you can help us be prepared to respond to emergencies this summer. We hope you'll consider joining.

“I want to be first in my class again,” she says. “One day, I want to be a teacher and help children like me.”

cover story continued

The project facilitators, however, refused to give up on Samara. With patience and compassion, they slowly drew her back into the school subjects she had once loved—math (her favorite), English, Arabic, and science. They encouraged her to join in games, art, and dancing.

Then one day, Samara stood up, walked over, and joined a mathematics competition. Today, she smiles, joins in activities with her classmates, and shares her dreams.

“I want to be first in my class again,” she says. “One day, I want to be a teacher and help children like me.” IOCC and BLDA remain committed to supporting her—and other refugee children—every step of the way.

**HOW WOULD IT
FEEL TO CHANGE A LIFE
EVERY MONTH?**

Find out at iocc.org/monthly



Sofia's Journey to Self-Sufficiency

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN UKRAINE

Sofia (not her real name) is an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), a refugee in her own country. When conflict broke out, she fled her hometown in the Zaporizhzhia Region for Uzhgorod, in the western part of Ukraine. Having left everything behind, Sofia had no means to support her family.

As many displaced women do, she faced major challenges in finding employment. One day a friend told her about an IOCC project, launched specifically to help women like Sofia gain vital business and financial skills.

Through the program, Sofia learned the essentials of business planning and digital marketing. She also

**DISASTERS HAPPEN.
PREPARE TODAY.**



Find out at iocc.org/getprepared



Sofia runs her own small bakery after receiving business training and a micro-grant through an IOCC program.

received a grant and used her new skills to open a small bakery. Today, she is taking her first steps toward financial independence and supporting her family. "This grant," Sofia said, "not only helped me get my business off the ground but also gave me a sense of hope for the future."

To date, the ongoing program has provided training for 130 women and awarded 62 business grants.

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC), is the official humanitarian relief and development agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.

IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond.

iocc.org



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Building Better Futures in Uganda

A CONTINUING PARTNERSHIP BRINGS EDUCATION TO MORE CHILDREN

Since 2009, IOCC has supported the construction and upgrading of schools in rural Uganda, in collaboration with the St. Nektarios Education Fund and the Uganda Orthodox Church. These complexes provide education to children in rural areas who would otherwise have no opportunity for schooling. They also include wells and rainwater harvesting systems to provide clean, safe water to both the schools and their surrounding communities.

In April 2024, powerful storms badly damaged the Prophet Obadiah primary school in the Butembe region, severely disrupting life for the school's 212 students and teaching staff. The school's well was also damaged, depriving students and around 1,000 local residents of their only source of potable water.

IOCC began repairs immediately by removing damaged roofing material from the school and replacing it with new corrugated, galvanized steel sheets. The roof on the bathroom block was replaced, and new ventilation pipes were installed. The hand-operated water pump and damaged well were also completely rebuilt.

Once those major projects were completed, smaller repairs got underway. Two interior doors and their frames were replaced because of termite damage,



The newly installed water pump and rainwater harvesting system provide clean, safe water for students, staff, and the surrounding community.

and six exterior metal doors in the school and bathroom block were cleaned of rust, sanded, painted and their joints reinforced. Today, students are back at the Prophet Obadiah primary school—and the partnership with the Uganda Orthodox Church continues with work at several additional schools in 2025.

Among them is the Orthodox Secondary School of St. Luke in Lwemiyaga, where projects will include building a kitchen and dining area as well as adding a rainwater harvesting system. At the Orthodox Secondary School of St. Paul in the Nakabaale village, reconstruction of the girl's dormitory and construction of a rainwater harvesting system will get underway shortly. In addition, a program focused on improving irrigation and agricultural production is also planned at the St. Mary of Egypt Monastery in Kampala, which includes an orphanage that hosts 71 children as well as a primary school with 250 students.

Through partnership and donor support, IOCC will complete these projects and continue to invest in rural communities in Uganda as they build for the future.

School is now back in session at Prophet Obadiah primary school after repairs were completed including a brand new roof.

