

Day in the life of a Gazan Teen



A vulnerable family in Gaza: 18 year old Isamah (right), her mother (center) and her father (left) in their house in Malalha, a Bedouin village in the Gaza strip. Isamah's family receives a weekly basket of fresh vegetables from CARE with funding from the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO). *Photo: Abid Katib/Getty Images for CARE/ECHO.*

Isamah Sallam Waked walks with perfect posture and unmistakable dignity. She manages to keep her white headscarf spotless and wrinkle-free even though she lives in a simple house in Malalha, a Bedouin neighborhood on the outskirts of Gaza City. Nine family members share three rooms.

For 18-year-old Isamah, life became a little easier when the family began to receive a weekly fresh food basket grown by local farmers. The program sponsored by the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) and run by CARE benefits more than 6,000 vulnerable families a week. Such families have members with disabilities and live well beneath the poverty line. Isamah and other families can count on a weekly healthy selection of fresh-picked tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cauliflowers, and onions, sufficient to feed her entire family.

Before CARE began this fresh food project, life was more difficult for Isamah. She often had to search the local markets for cheap left-over vegetables cut-down prices. The vegetables CARE supplies are quite different. They're fresh and juicy. They also contain valuable vitamins and provide essential micro nutrients for health. With a regular delivery, Isamah and her family can now plan meals ahead as they know what's coming in the basket.

"Feeding my Mother takes a little extra effort," Isamah explains, while bustling around the simple kitchen to prepare lunch.

"Once a week I fetch the vegetables from down the road, and bring them home in a basket balanced on my head. We wash them, and chop some up into a salad or stew for the family. We put my Mother's portion in a blender to grind it down into a liquid. We then put it into a feeding tube because my mother can no longer swallow easily".

As Isamah strokes her mother's curly hair, she says: "My Mother is finally starting to gain a bit of weight, but I miss her voice and her laughter."

Her Mother, Hassoun Jomaa Waked, 54, suffered a stroke two years ago, and is now cared for at home. But there are other reasons why Isamah's family is vulnerable. An older sister called Sabha is 28 is also disabled and can neither walk nor talk. She too needs help to eat and bathe. And then there are four younger children who need supervision, too. Isamah's father, a skilled construction worker, has had no regular work for eight years so there is little spare cash in the family, even for the most basic needs.

Like most of their Bedouin neighbors, the Waked family ekes out a living by collecting and reselling old goods, and working piece-rate in nearby fields at harvest. Since a blockade was imposed on Gaza 19 months ago, many other Gazans have turned their hand to selling what they can find but now, competition is fierce. 'The food basket is a life line for the family,' says Isamah.

During the recent conflict, CARE's staff and partner organizations, with ECHO funding worked in extremely dangerous conditions to continue providing fresh food to the most vulnerable families in Gaza as well as reaching 11 hospitals and a Food Bank. Nearly 160,000 Gazans also received food, blankets and medical supplies from CARE with ECHO funding during the three week conflict, but the need for assistance is greater than ever.

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