

Service Project

I I M P
Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program

Woman-to-Woman Worldwide 2010 Turkey



Woman-to-Woman Worldwide Service Project for 2011 Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP) Istanbul, Turkey

In 1991, local church parishes in Istanbul, Turkey, began coordinated efforts to serve the influx of refugees to Istanbul during the First Gulf War. Hearing the continuing call to minister to the needs of economic immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees living in Turkey, these parishes have sustained and further developed this ecumenical program over the last twenty years. The number of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Turkey is currently around 100,000.

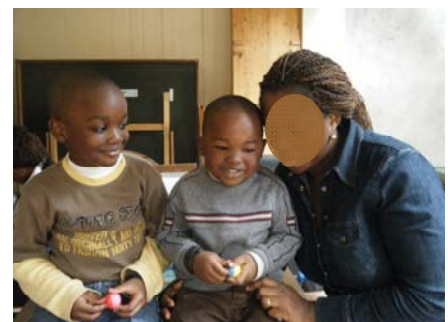
Today the Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP) focuses on the most marginalized groups of immigrants, namely women with children. IIMP is a Critical Presence in the lives of those they help. It works with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate for the rights of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program clients include people from over 50 countries, many of whom reached Turkey on foot. Some arrive legally and then lose their legal status; others were brought to Turkey against their will, smuggled in by human traffickers; still others have fled dangerous situations for themselves and their families in their home countries.

IIMP services include food, clothing, health care, counseling, education opportunities, legal aid for seeking asylum, voluntary repatriation, and emergency shelter subsidies. Programs and services are provided primarily by volunteers, some of whom are former clients of the IIMP. The work of the IIMP includes:

A **Moms and Tots** group providing weekly access to qualified health volunteers who provide information and referrals. They also provide programming for preschool children, a safe and nurturing environment, and a hot and nutritional meal.

Subsidies for rent and utilities or travel subsidies are provided for some clients. The travel subsidies allow clients to travel within Turkey for interviews with the United Nations or to move to a city assigned by Turkish authorities.



Assistance to Families includes arranging for the safe delivery of babies, especially for the most vulnerable mothers, and providing whole milk, multivitamins, and diapers to mothers and children. They also distribute food coupons and provide hot meals and help with medical costs for those who need it most. This program was directly helped by the WWW participants as they collected and delivered much needed baby vitamins to IIMP.

Clothing donations are sorted and distributed to those in need. In the winter, blankets are provided as well. The WWW participants were also able to help in this area, by donating their own clothing before returning home.

Adult Education provides language lessons, literacy classes, and helps empower clients. IIMP also helps to identify local schooling for children.

A **Voluntary Repatriation** service is provided for those who choose to return to their home country. IIMP provides guidance for the repatriation process and may assist in purchasing airfare and provides accompaniment to the airport to ensure safe passage.

The Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program is funded by donations from churches

within Turkey as well as through individual gifts and international partnerships like the partnership with Global Ministries.

The IIMP is the service project from the 2010 Woman-to-Woman Worldwide Journey to Turkey. Gifts for the Disciples Woman-to-Woman Worldwide service project for the Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program may be made to Global Ministries. Please indicate that the gift is for the WWW Turkey.

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Woman-to-Woman Worldwide is sponsored by International Disciples Women Ministries and administered through the Office of Disciples Women in partnership with the Division of Overseas Ministries.

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Please read the following notes from WWW participant, Katy Valentine's follow-up stay in Istanbul to see on a first-hand basis how the program helps people:

Since I stayed in Turkey for several days on my own, I went back to the IIMP the following Wednesday to volunteer. I was greeted with the same friendliness as with the group, and for this visit I worked more with the volunteers than with the clients. I arrived in the middle of lunch and “shopping” in the clothing bank, so there was a whirlwind of activity. Most of the volunteers were associated with Union Church. Almost all of the volunteers were women, and many had moved to Turkey due to their husband’s jobs, and then become involved in volunteering as they became involved with their church. I was quickly put to work in the sorting room for the clothing. There were huge piles of clothes that needed to be separated into men’s/women’s/children/summer/winter, so I dove into that. I sorted for about an hour on my own and then joined the other volunteers for lunch, a rice and beans dish. We chatted amiably in the kitchen and then I returned to sorting. Later I was joined by two Christian women from Iran. While there was a language barrier (but they spoke more English than I spoke Farsi), I gathered that they had at one time been assisted by IIMP and now helped out in return. Later we were joined by a remarkable young woman who was an American living in Istanbul teaching English for nine months. I asked her why she decided to move to Turkey, and she hesitated but then told me that she had dreamed about it, and just knew it was something she had to do in her life. I resonated with her, especially since I felt the same way about coming to Turkey with our group—I knew it was the Woman to Woman trip for me.



Kathie invited me to sit in on the interviews that she held with clients during the day. There was a small team of people in her office including Kathie, Gaspar (the amazing former refugee who speaks 10 languages), a doctor, and an Austrian woman who has lived in Turkey for many years. Other volunteers floated in and out

during the afternoon. I sat through several client interviews, and each client was greeted with respect and friendliness. I gathered that a large part of the work that the interviews do is to serve people’s needs to be heard and to express frustration with their situations, which often manifests—as Kathie told us—in the forms of physical ailments. Despite their hardships, I was amazed at the cheerfulness and determination of the clients. There was one African man who came in for an interview, who greeted every person in the room individually and asked us all how we were amidst laughter and shared friendship. He was concerned that he might have diabetes; Kathie kept tests on hand, so there was a simple urine test that he was given by the doctor. Fortunately, he didn’t have diabetes, but unfortunately, his body was under a lot of stress due to his circumstances. Another woman came in who was seeking UN refugee status, but she had moved away from the city where she had been “assigned”, and Kathie was working with her to understand the process of all the legal paperwork. It came to light that the woman had been unhappy in her city without community or friends, and moved back to Istanbul, which could prolong or indefinitely hold up her legal process. A large part of Kathie’s work is helping people work through the paperwork and red tape of

domestic and international processes.

The highlight of my day was meeting the Iraqi girl and her mother about whom Kathie had told us. This is the family who had become Christians while living in Iraq, which angered their family. The girl, now 17, had acid thrown on her by a family member, which resulted in severe scarring and multiple operations. She is scarred from her neck to her upper thighs, and had recently had a complicated surgery for which there was an anonymous donation to IIMP to assist with the cost. The girl was absolutely delightful—cheerful, beautiful and vivacious. She grinned and pulled up her shirt to show us the stitches from her latest surgery—a big “Z” across her stomach. She spoke Arabic and Turkish, and her mother Arabic, so the daughter provided translation to her mother. Their application to the United States was denied, so they were applying for refugee status in Australia. Since I was the native English speaker (besides Kathie) in the room, they asked me to write the application. The Austrian volunteer who spoke German, English and Turkish translated the questions to the daughter in Turkish; the daughter translated to her mother in Arabic. So, every question took about five minutes to answer! Some questions that seemed simple, like “what is the family surname” were actually quite difficult, since Iraqi customs differ from Western customs—like the wife taking a husband’s last name. We were truly a small Pentecost community for an hour while we filled out the form with many languages floating around in the room. There was a funny moment when we had to put any political parties or affiliations each family member may have, and I asked specifically which political party the four-year

old belonged to for the official record. We filled out a couple of pages and asked the family to think about what we would write for their story about why it is unsafe for them to return to Iraq—the most important part of the application. Meeting this mother and daughter put even more of a face on the clients and community served by IIMP, and I am delighted that we will be in partnership with the organization for the next year.

