



'I've loved being part of making things a bit better for our families. It's been a great idea' – *Project volunteer*

'When my family and I needed your support the most, you were here for me' – *Dad attending the programme*

'It is a blessing to have people like you to help us at this difficult time. Bless you all.' *Orthodox Parish Priest*

'I had my eyes opened to what goes on in the world.' *Student volunteer*

Just some reflections on St Paul's family programme, which ran for one year from June 2021, made possible by a grant from the United Thank Offering from the Episcopal Church of the United States of America.

Recognising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local families in need, both displaced and indigenous, the project focused on helping them to flourish nutritionally, educationally and socially.

A small core of church volunteers supported the programme faithfully throughout. For three Mondays every month of the project they shopped, cooked, assembled and distributed family food parcels – weathering the various adaptations needed caused by changing pandemic regulations. Nine local student volunteers participated in the programme, too, helping families select free items from the onsite thrift shop, helping supervise children's play and informal learning activities – and also doing some painting for the new play area. Several refugees were among the family support workers who worked for the project during the year. They were able to offer practical advice and support to the families based on personal experience.

Overall 187 different families received ongoing food parcels and hot meals (a total of 829 and 755 respectively), free clothing and household items, and importantly, care, advice and support. It was a joy to see relationships between families and volunteers blossom during the programme, together with growing relationships with the municipality, local NGOs and two local Orthodox Churches.

And some of the things volunteers mentioned that they valued most? Seeing the sheer joy and amazement on an 8-year-old Syrian boy's face at his surprise birthday party... Seeing the desire of families to give thanks for, and in turn, support others in need... Seeing the parents find accommodation, get jobs and get their children into school following advice given... 'Those special needs children who came, they're in school and have extra help. We don't see them much now. But that's good – it means they don't need us any more.'

So what's next? St Paul's is continuing its ministry to any locally in need through its monthly hot meal; and through its onsite food bank arrangements to which families are welcome on the last Monday of the month.

We give thanks for the support and partnership of UTO and for all who have made this project possible.