

News & Stories: 2009-10

An evening for healing November 3, 2009

[Bert de Vries](#), a Calvin College professor of [history](#), the founder of the college's [archeology program](#) and the excavator of [Umm el-Jimal](#), has been to Jordan many, many times. A year ago, when deVries was in Amman, Jordan, he made a point of visiting several Iraqi refugee families. "Many of them are poor and at the end of their rope," he said. On a subsequent visit, de Vries met Cole Miller, the founder of [No More Victims](#), an organization that gives medical treatment to Iraqi children and fosters ties between their families and the United States.

When de Vries returned to the states, he convened a meeting of people he thought would be interested in founding an organization dedicated to Middle Eastern children injured by American military actions. At the meeting were Calvin faculty, local activists and members of local Calvin student organizations. "On the spot, we organized ourselves as a No More Victims-type of organization," de Vries said.

A child of conflict

That group, [Healing Children of Conflict](#), will hold its first fund raising event from 6:30 through 9 p.m. on Thursday, November 5, 2009 at the 29th St. Hall in Kentwood. The featured recipient of the money raised at the event is Salee Allawe, a 14-year-old Iraqi girl who lost both of her legs when an errant U.S. missile struck her as she was playing outside.

"She is coming back to the U.S. to have her (artificial) legs refitted," de Vries said. "She outgrew the ones No More Victims had provided in 2007."

Healing Children of Conflict is sharing Allawe's expenses with No More Victims. The Iraqi teenager is the kind of person de Vries hopes the nascent organization will help. Currently the group will be working with wounded children in Gaza as well as in Iraq, and the logistical challenge of getting a child out of either of these countries is significant.

"And then there's the medical side," de Vries said. "The healthcare infrastructure in both Iraq and Gaza has been severely damaged by the war ...Part of the reason for bringing children here is we are bringing children who cannot be helped there."

Members from many communities

Healing Children of Conflict draws its membership from many sources: The Arab American Association of West Michigan, the [Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy](#), [Open Hand Studios](#), the Calvin



history department and the student-run Middle East Club. “What I like about it is it’s a very interesting cross section of the community,” de Vries said.

The Thursday fundraiser will feature a video about Allawe, music from the [Ara Topouzian Ensemble](#), a Middle Eastern meal catered by the Pita House and a silent auction. “It’s going to be a fun evening,” he said.

~by [Myrna Anderson](#), *communications and marketing*