

# JORDAN HATTAR: A VOICE FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

MARVI ALI '21  
INTERVIEW

In late April of last year, Jordan Hattar, a young man and humanitarian dedicated to a life of service, visited St. Andrew's during chapel to share his experience working to better the lives of Syrian refugees. During his visit, I was fortunate enough to sit down with Mr. Hattar to learn more about his work and delve a bit deeper into his background.

I began this interview by asking Mr. Hattar about his inspiration and what led him to begin his life of activism. He told me, "I think it started with learning about the world, and that really started for me in eighth grade when I learned about Hurricane Katrina hitting the Gulf Coast. I'll never forget watching New Orleans go 80% underwater." I then asked Mr. Hattar what urged him to take an interest in the refugee crisis. He responded, "... It was really my Arabic teacher. I vividly remember going to extra-credit events, just so I could get a good grade. Something changed after learning her story, learning: this is real. What drove me to want to do something is learning how precious life is - that I could've been born in Syria, that it's just chance where we're born. Some people in the world say you can make anything out of your life, but what about the four-year-old boy that dies in an airstrike? He'll never be able to."

Even from a young age, Mr. Hattar was learning about the world around him and seeing the difficulties that people faced. This is something that we can all connect to and see in our own lives, as well. We are a generation that has grown up amidst the 2008 Mumbai bombings, the 9/11 attacks, the Sandy Hook shooting, the Boston Marathon bombing, a growing war against terror, and our endeavors to keep peace and order in our ever chaotic world.

As we get older, we are able to understand more and more clearly what Mr. Hattar is trying to say here: this is real. What we read about every morning and see as breaking news on the television is happening to real people around the world. When I asked Mr. Hattar how he took the step from

understanding what is going on in the world to setting up his nonprofit, Help4Refugees, he told me, "My dad told me early on in life, 'If you want to get something done, sometimes you have to do it yourself.' I took that as, 'Okay, well, if I don't like what's happening in the world, maybe I can share these stories.' I would watch NBC nightly news, with my dad, and they would just show the fighting. I thought, 'There's got to be more to war than just conflict. There's got to be real stories.' I didn't know the personal stories until I got there, to the refugee camp."



Throughout our conversation, Mr. Hattar stressed the importance of stories and of hearing the voices of the people who we are trying to support. He explained that by learning through stories and discussion, we are learning that these are humans - not simply numbers on the news or people on a map.

I moved on to ask Mr. Hattar what else has affected or influenced his work as a humanitarian and an activist. I asked if he felt his young age had made a difference in his work. "I think it's the reason why I speak in schools," he said. "I mean, I'm just a few years older than you guys, and I think we are the future of this world. I don't like how the current world looks with people of older generations. As a younger person, sometimes people don't take you seriously, or you're treated differently. But I face that. It reminds me -- I'll never forget what those charities, those organizations told me when I was eighteen -- they said I didn't have the right skills, that I was too young to volunteer. And that really made me frustrated, because I knew what mattered most is that I cared. When I'm looking for people to work with on the refugee crisis, I don't take the person who's most experienced and has graduated from Harvard. Sometimes that's the case, but

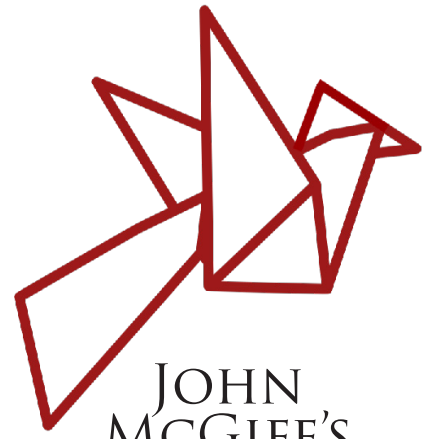
it's really the most passionate person."

We can see the drive and determination Mr. Hattar has toward his work. He has been treated differently due to the perception that young people don't have the "right skills," the responsibility, or the maturity to volunteer and make a difference in the world. However, Mr. Hattar attempts to break this stereotype and misconception that we are not powerful. In fact, he reminds us that we are the future generations. If we want to see some sort of change in this world that we live in, we need to be prepared to step up and do something.

I asked Mr. Hattar one last question: How do you think the St. Andrew's community can make a difference helping Syrian refugees? He answered by saying, "The first step to help is to meet the people. Not only does that help us decide what's needed, it also changes how we think about Syrians. Part of the problem is how the world views someone who has left their home. They view it as a weakness, in general. I am aware of this, and that's why I think it's important to learn the language, to invest in the people, to make personal relationships, and to listen to what they say they need - not what we think they need. Whenever I go around the world, international schools and boarding schools want to fundraise for blankets and they have no idea what the actual environment is like in the refugee camp. For me, I want people to learn the Syrian refugee stories. It's a huge problem: thinking that we have things figured out and others who are in need don't. This is my last school talk of the school year, and it's been one of my absolute favorites. It's a reflection of who you guys are."

Mr. Hattar leaves us with a message of compassion. Once again, he stresses the importance of a personal connection and changing the way we think about and perceive those in need. He teaches us to take a step back from the stereotypical idea of "help" and to think about what these people need rather than what we think they need. ✍️

## THE CARDINAL



### JOHN MCGIFF'S FAVOURITES

- Favourite lightbulb colour:**  
White
- Favourite SAS meal:**  
Mediterranean spread
- Favourite artist:**  
His sister, Liza Burns
- Favourite movie:**  
*Funny Bones*
- Favourite holiday:**  
Thanksgiving
- Favourite ice cream:**  
French vanilla
- Favourite mail-ordered catalogue:**  
Orvis
- Favourite eatery:**  
Marlena's
- Favourite language:**  
Italian
- Favourite type of hat:**  
Tweed cap
- Favourite board game:**  
Mouse Trap
- Favourite leaf:**  
Sycamore
- Favourite body of water:**  
The pond behind his house that has no name