



HARVARD-WESTLAKE

The fatalities from February's 7.8-magnitude earthquake (45 times stronger than 1994's Northridge quake) have climbed to more than 50,000 across Turkey and Syria—a staggering number. But in the last dozen years, before the earthquake even struck, 50,000 children were killed as casualties of war in Syria alone. Today I am honored to share this interview with Philip Koosed '00 about [Save the Syrian Children](#), the charity he and his wife Tamar Koosed cofounded to give Syrian kids a fighting chance.

Cheers,
[Ed Hu](#), Head of External Relations



Why did you and your wife Tamar Koosed start **Save the Syrian Children**?

The first few years of the Syrian Civil War, my wife Tamar and I were passively engaged—make a donation here or there and just kind of *not look*. But as Assad [Syrian President Bashar al-Assad] and the Syrian regime, with the help of Russia, started targeting innocent civilians indiscriminately, it became genocidal and we could no longer look away. We've seen hospitals and schools targeted, marketplaces destroyed by barrel bombs—barrels full of explosives and nails to maximize civilian casualties—and children taking their last breath after a sarin gas attack, which causes a slow and painful death. Both Tamar and I are Jewish and the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. My grandmother survived 10 grueling months in Auschwitz until the camp was liberated, and my grandfather was in a Nazi work camp and escaped; the rest of their families were all killed. Tamar's grandparents fled their country to escape the Nazi rule with most of their families being killed as well. **So as the war in Syria became more of a genocide, we said, "We've got to do more."** My wife's company works with international development organizations, and we found that some areas were so war torn that there was just little to no aid getting in. My background is sourcing and shipping logistics, and Tamar had a lot of connections with NGOs, so we were like, "Why don't we use our skill sets to get a container of medical aid on the water and into Syria to help out in a more significant way?" **We started connecting with doctors in Aleppo, Idlib, Daraa, and other areas not controlled by the Syrian regime. And what started with one container became two, which became more, and here we are seven years later.**

How has the recent earthquake in the region affected the situation in Syria?

When a huge earthquake hits a developing country, it's going to cause mass destruction and mass death. The epicenter was in Turkey, but it's pretty close to the border and the area we serve in northwest Syria—it's like Encino to Santa Monica—and Syria is still a war zone. **The sheer scale of the suffering and death now is something that we've just never seen before in seven years of operating in the area.** There aren't enough doctors, infrastructure, or medical supplies. When we get calls from doctors saying we're running low on supplies, and therefore a child dies, it's heartbreaking. Or they're running low on anesthesia—you can imagine having to do a lifesaving surgery with someone who isn't fully sedated. It's horrific.

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Save the Syrian Children goes into areas that other nonprofits don't.

How is your organization able to do that when others can't?

Carrying aid across the border from Turkey into Syria without registering it with the Assad regime is against Syrian law, but as a small organization, we can find people to do that without the ramifications larger organizations would face. Our process is, find the best people we can on the ground, and build a team from there. It's similar to when I was 18 and graduating from Harvard-Westlake, and I started a business called Bamko making branded products. We had to figure out manufacturing around the world pretty quickly. It was like, "Okay, we need an office in India, let's find a talented leader we can work with in India and build from there." It was a very from-the-ground-up approach. The same thing goes here. The doctor team we have built is just the most incredible group of brave leaders you will ever meet. Members of my old Bamko team on the ground in China volunteer their time to source medical supplies directly from a factory there so we can get the lowest cost. It goes on and on in terms of incredible team members we have been privileged to work with. **We are all volunteer based, so 100% of the money donated goes directly to the aid, and volunteers make an immediate, huge impact.**

If you could say anything to someone reading this story, what would it be?

I'd say thank you, because most of this could not have happened without the Harvard-Westlake community. We've gotten donations from hundreds of HW alums, friends, and family members, including Evangeline Karavas P'97 '00, Ken and Roberta Lloyd P'98 '02, Eloise Appell P'00, and Frida and Joel Glucoft P'00 '04. My sister Amanda Roessler '04, a marketing specialist, helped us make videos to tell the stories we were hearing from on the ground. My older sister, Jessica Etting '98, is a writer who helped with donor content and outreach. Jessica Lloyd '98, a pediatrician, has donated overage medical supplies on multiple occasions. Josh Glucoft '04 and his wife made introductions to hospitals to figure out what overruns there were. Katrina Kaufman '00, who I went to the 10th grade semiformal with, now works at CNN and posted a link about us to her network, which led to an interview on CNN and a bunch of other connections. And we've had countless people sharing posts about our mission, which has a huge butterfly effect. **Just going to school at Harvard-Westlake was amazing, but the fact that, 20 years later, I'm still so connected to people in the Harvard-Westlake community, who have stepped up in such an incredible way, is truly indescribable.**

Visit the [Save the Syrian Children](#) site

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