

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Choose the correct answers.

- Aleppo is in ...
  - ... Sudan.
  - ... South Africa.
  - ... Syria.
  - ... Sicily.
- Aleppo is a ...
  - ... tiny community.
  - ... small village.
  - ... medium-sized town.
  - ... large city.

What else do you know about Aleppo?

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions below. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

adjusted      bereaved      bombardment      haven      mentally      orphans

- the state of someone whose close friend or family member has recently died \_\_\_\_\_ (title)
- children whose parents have died \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- an attack on a place made by dropping bombs from planes or by firing large guns for a long time \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- a place where people can feel safe and happy \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- relating to the mind \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- got used to a new situation \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)

begging      lost      renovating      suffer      trauma      dormitories

- If you have \_\_\_\_\_ someone, they have died. (para 7)
- asking people for money, food or help, usually because you are very poor \_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
- be badly affected by a very difficult or bad situation \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- making an old building look new again by repairing and improving it \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
- large rooms where a lot of people sleep, for example in a school \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
- a feeling of being very upset, afraid or shocked after a bad experience \_\_\_\_\_ (para 15)

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#### Aleppo's underground orphanage offers a haven for children bereaved by war

Emma Graham-Harrison

20 August, 2016

- 1 Two floors underground, Aleppo's orphans sleep as safely as is possible in a city at war. But they are woken up regularly by bombs hitting the streets above them.
- 2 Asmar Halabi and his wife look after the children. Halabi's wife still has injuries from an airstrike on a school in 2014.
- 3 The 50 children at Halabi's orphanage have already lived through years of bombing. The orphanage moved below ground when the constant bombardment became too much for normal life to continue. The orphanage is now an underground haven.
- 4 The children are between two and 14 years old. Their parents have been killed or have become mentally ill because of the war, which has been going for nearly six years.
- 5 "They have adjusted very well to this terrible life," Halabi said. "They used to feel scared when they heard the sound of planes but, now, they want to go out of the building and look up at the sky to see the jets or helicopters when they hear them."
- 6 The orphanage opened in 2015. It has space for another 100 children and new orphans arrive regularly.
- 7 "We did a survey about the number of children who have lost one or both parents and, sadly, we found a large number," said Halabi, who has no children.
- 8 His team of 25 includes cooks, security guards and teachers. Among the most important people at the orphanage are the psychologists, who have a special area where they work with children such as eight-year-old Yasmeen.
- 9 After her mother and father were killed, Yasmeen arrived with a fear of the dark. Volunteers found her begging on the streets, Halabi said. Today, she is doing well and is the best student in her class.
- 10 "When children arrive, it is difficult because they have suffered so much but, after a few months here, they mostly improve," he said. "Our target is to protect them and educate them to succeed in the future. Most of children's parents have died in the war; perhaps 5% have one parent who is still alive but is suffering mental problems so bad they cannot care for their own children."
- 11 The money to run the orphanage comes from a charity and from individual supporters abroad.
- 12 Halabi and his team spent six months in 2015 renovating a building into several floors of cheerful dormitories and classrooms. But as the intensity of bombing raids increased and with many airstrikes hitting homes, markets, hospitals and schools, the orphanage decided it was no longer safe.
- 13 It was then that they moved mattresses underground, along with many of their activities, from classes to exercise, so the children could sleep, eat and study with the safety of a few metres of earth over their heads.
- 14 "When the jets come, we go down to the basements with the children," Halabi said. He added that they have almost stopped going outside. "We used to take the children to the gardens to have fun. Unfortunately, because of the bombing, we completely stopped going to the gardens. We want the children to be safe so I don't let them go out."
- 15 Their new home is full of colour, with swings, a handicraft area, computer sections and other games. It has a stage, where the psychologists and teachers try to help the children with some of their trauma through performance.
- 16 Halabi and his wife thought about taking the children to Turkey but decided they could not leave. Aleppo is their home. And, every day, more parents die in the war and leave behind children who need help.
- 17 "We are like a big family here," Halabi said. "There is no other orphanage in Aleppo."

Hussein Akoush contributed to this report

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. All the children who live in the orphanage have lost both their parents in the war in Syria.
2. The orphanage is in a building that Halabi and his team built at the beginning of the war six years ago.
3. Around 100 children between the ages of 2 and 14 live there.
4. The children live underground all the time.
5. They don't leave the orphanage building very often.
6. Inside the orphanage, the children have many opportunities to play safely.
7. Professionals at the orphanage help the children with their trauma.
8. The money to run the orphanage comes from a charity and donations from other cities in Syria.
9. Halabi's aim is to look after and educate the children so that they can have a better future.
10. Halabi and his wife are planning to take the children away from Syria.

#### 4 The present perfect

- a. Complete the sentence, using the verb in brackets, with the present perfect. Then, scan the article to check your answer.

They \_\_\_\_\_ (adjust) very well to this terrible life.

- b. Find seven other examples of the present perfect in the article and write the relevant sentences or parts of the sentences here. Note that two of the examples appear in the same sentence in the article.


- c. Use the present perfect to talk about things that you have recently done, built, renovated, adjusted to,

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### 5 Discussion

Plan how you would tell the story to someone who hasn't read it. Include some of the key words from task 2 and the present perfect when appropriate. Now, pretend your partner hasn't read the story – tell them about it.

### 6 Webquest

Describe how you imagine the orphanage to look. Then, look at photos of it here:

[www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/19/aleppo-underground-orphanage-haven-children-syria-war](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/19/aleppo-underground-orphanage-haven-children-syria-war)

How do the photos compare to the orphanage you imagined?

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#### KEY

#### 1 Warmer

1. c
2. d

#### 2 Key words

1. bereaved
2. orphans
3. bombardment
4. haven
5. mentally
6. adjusted
7. lost
8. begging
9. suffer
10. renovating
11. dormitories
12. trauma

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. F – **Some** of the children who live in the orphanage have lost both their parents in the war in Syria. **Others have lost one parent but the other is unable to care for them.**
2. F – The orphanage is in a building that Halabi and his team **renovated in 2015.**
3. F – Around **50** children between the ages of two and 14 live there.
4. F – The children **go underground when the jets come and there is bombing.**
5. T
6. T
7. T
8. F – The money to run the orphanage comes from a charity and donations **from people in other countries.**
9. T
10. F – Halibi and his wife are **not** planning to take the children away from Syria.

#### 4 The present perfect

- a.  
have adjusted
- b.  
They **have** already **lived** through years of bombing. Their parents **have been killed** or **have become** mentally ill.  
We did a survey about the number of children who **have lost** one or both parents.  
They **have suffered** so much.  
Most of children's parents **have died** in the war.  
They **have** almost **stopped** going outside.