



FIRST PERSON Stepping Out from Behind a Mask

Attending a girl-friendly school gives pupil a new lease and outlook on life



Photo: CARE Egypt/Aysha Mostafa

Through multigrade schools USAID has introduced in Egypt, Ne'ma is receiving both an education and medical treatment for a facial scar that plagued her childhood.

“After going through the operation, I’m over the moon because I no longer will be scared of anybody. I am more confident and happy,” said Ne'ma, a pupil in Egypt.

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Ne'ma lives in the poor village of Menyet El Heit with her parents and her five siblings. “When I was a little kid learning to make my first steps, a pot of boiling water fell over my face and scarred it badly. My parents didn’t care to have me treated as plastic surgery cost a fortune. Since then, I covered my face with a big scarf to keep people from teasing me. It really hurt when someone commented. It felt like I went through the same accident again with every glance. I never played with friends or went out of my home. I never went to school,” she said.

When USAID helped establish multigrade classes for girls ages 10 to 14, the facilitators talked to her parents several times about Ne'ma attending, but she refused to go despite her love of learning. “After a long round of persuasion, I went to the class, feeling terrified of the looks of my colleagues. I struggled to get the courage to step into the class. It was a simple and beautiful place that helped soothe my fears,” she said.

The school’s facilitators and classmates kindly welcomed her, and she learned how to read, write and express herself clearly. Ne'ma said, “I was able to give a hand to my father in calculating his profits. I also learned to make clothes and various kinds of food that I sold to my classmates and neighbors to make money.”

Then, after huge efforts from the school’s facilitators, the governor agreed to allow public health insurance to apply to the multigrade class as it is in other public schools in Egypt. This gave Ne'ma the opportunity to undergo an operation to treat her scar.

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