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Kitchen Gardener Helps DotW at Katsikas Refugee Camp

Directly opposite the Doctors of the World clinic at the 789-person Katsikas refugee camp is an unusual sight. Across the white-stoned floor of the centre sits a row of tents, each of which has a variety of flowers and food plants growing in front of them.

The furthest-left – and the one which was planted first, belongs to Ramadan Salan.

He smiles: 'I know, my name is a month during which you cannot eat in the daytime, and yet, I am growing this...'



Ramadan's garden contains some flowers, and a mosaic made of black and white stone laid out to read 'Welcome' in English, but is most remarkable for the variety of foods growing in it: aubergine; peppers, lettuce, courgette, green beans.

'It might seem strange,' he admits. 'But the food here is not good, and I thought it would be a good thing, instead, to grow my own food. It is a nice feeling, when you are somewhere like this, to know you have made things come to life, and that what you are growing can be used for healthy meals.'

Ramadan and his family – his wife and youngest daughter – fled Damascus, Syria, in 2014.

'Life just became too hard,' he said. 'We had a nice house. My wife and I had good jobs – I worked in a bank for 27 years – but we could not stay. The roads were ruined, it was harder and harder to get to work, and then the bombs started to get much worse.'

He and his family fled to Turkey, then into Greece. And he has heard that he left just in time.

'My house is rubble, now,' he said. 'It was bombed only a few days after we left. I do not feel lucky, but I do know it is by God's will that I am alive.'

He has been at Katsikas for four months, and hopes to be allowed to reach Germany, where his son, daughter and two granddaughters now live: 'Like everyone, all of our money ran out,' he explains. 'And we cannot do anything but wait. It is why I decided to make a garden, a nice place for my family, for the people who wait at the clinic, and everyone else. It is nice to have some green, and some food.'



As he talks, he sits in a wooden piece of garden furniture he constructed himself, from where he can watch the clinic and the camp's gates – a vantage-point which helped him to come to DotW's aid when its staff worked to set up their clinic (from which DotW provides primary health care, sexual and reproductive health and psychological health services) here.

'He deserves a medal,' one said. 'Every time we needed anything, he and his family were there. They made such a difference.'

'It is nothing,' he responds. My garden is a place everyone is welcome, and a place from which I can see things. Doctors of the World, too, has set up a place where everyone is welcome, and a waiting space where people can sit and talk even when they are worried about their health. It is my pleasure to do

what I can to help that, and,' he shrugs and smiles. 'I may need them someday. Everyone gets sick, sometimes.'

