

NEWS GAZA

Residents rally to help former student flee a war zone

Community

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THE Hamilton community is rallying to bring a former student trapped in war-torn Gaza back to Australia.

Eman Tabaza, who boarded at Hamilton's Monivae College during 2014-16, has spent the past few months

homeless, surviving on bread made from hay and alone after her family and friends were killed. She had previously suffered serious leg injuries from a bomb blast in 2020 that required 12 months rehabilitation before she could walk.

Former Penshurst woman Samantha Loria, who started the campaign, never thought she would be helping a friend flee a war zone.

Miss Loira is Miss Tabaza's "lifeline" during the conflict.

Miss Tabaza first came to Australia from her home in northern Gaza to receive a life-saving surgery that removed a tumour from behind her nose in 2004, thanks to a children's charity.

She also had to undergo several complex surgeries to reconstruct her face and spine.

It was during her recovery from these medical procedures she attended Monivae College from 2014 to 2016.

Miss Loria met Miss Tabaza when they were at the Monivae boarding house in 2015.

"I remember her just wanting to laugh and joke around and just be a normal teenager," Miss Loria said.

"She obviously came over [to Australia] earlier in her life to get the surgeries and all of that stuff."

Miss Loria said Miss Tabaza adjusted well to the Australian lifestyle.

"One of the main things that I remember is her always just playing Taylor Swift and wanting to dance around to that, and basically just hanging out," Miss Loria said.

"She always just wanted to chat about what a teenager could do in Australia."

Miss Loria said Miss Tabaza enjoyed going to the movies, social gatherings

and working at Hamilton's Target store.

Miss Loria kept in contact with her friend when she returned to Gaza in 2017 after graduating from Monivae.

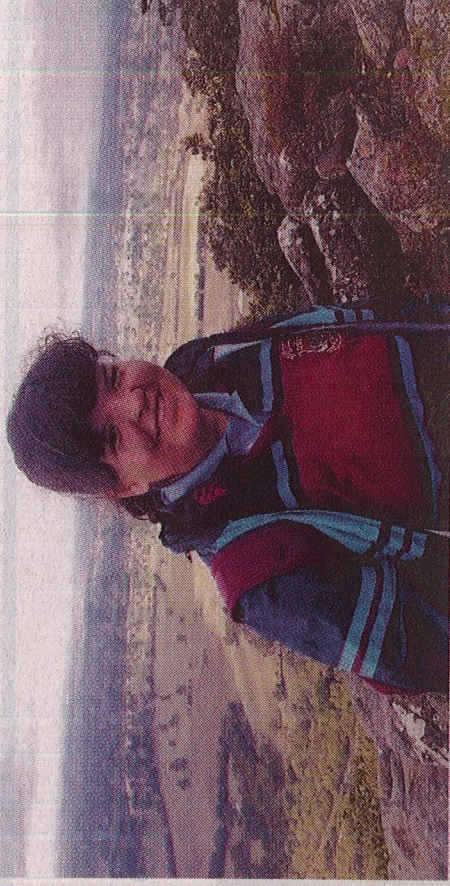
Miss Loria said Miss Tabaza was trying to make the best of her situation in Gaza despite the ongoing conflict in the region before October 7, 2023.

"She would message me just to let me know of her situation," she said. "The worst part about it was she would always be like, 'I wish I never left Australia'... purely because of the circumstances and how terrifying it was for her to live there."

Miss Loria said Miss Tabaza had been displaced since October 2023 when Israel started its operation in Gaza.

She has been sheltering in tents, sheds and demolished houses, and eating bread made from hay to survive.

Miss Loria said Miss Tabaza was now alone in Gaza after her family and friends she was travelling with were killed. Miss Loria started the GoFundMe to raise money



Eman Tabaza on a Monivae Outdoor Education camp near the Grampians in 2015. Picture supplied

to help Miss Tabaza escape the conflict.

Miss Loria said the support she had received from the Hamilton community had been overwhelming.

"People have been very forthcoming and, willing to donate, willing to share and just like generally being interested in Eman's situation and wanting to hear updates," she said. "That has been amazing to see especially for her. She said to me, 'I didn't think like this many people would care about me or would remember who I was'. It literally has been a lifeline for her throughout this because it's just giving her hope."

Monivae head of library Maryanne Gustus knew Miss Tabaza during her time at the school. She said despite the challenges Miss Tabaza faced coming to an entirely different culture and learning a new language, she always persevered.

"She was quite a determined person," Mrs Gustus said. "She always had the ability to be very grateful and thankful for that opportunity that she was given by coming here. And I think the fact that she's surviving over there...she's got a strength of character that just keeps her going."

Mrs Gustus said the community had been working

together to raise the funds to bring Miss Tabaza back to Hamilton.

"She's lived here, she's been to school here, she's been part of our community," Mrs Gustus said.

She said despite the complex nature of the conflict, people should keep in mind the human cost.

"It's not a simple thing, but of course, in any war, the victims are the innocent citizens," Mrs Gustus said.

"These people are suffering so badly and I know there are Israelis suffering as well."

Donations can be made at gofundme.com/f/urgent-help-eman-tabaza-escape-gaza