

THE CANAAN INSTITUTE OF NEW PEDAGOGY
& CENTRE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION



PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN IN THE GAZA STRIP



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1. Introduction

This is a report on a project in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, delivered by the Centre for Global Education (CGE), a development non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Belfast, in partnership with the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy, an NGO based in Gaza. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Developing World Fund and delivered from January to May 2014.



Presentation of NIPSA stationery to children in Khan Yunis

The project's aim was "to provide psycho-social support services to marginalised young people in the Gaza Strip with the support of the local community, schools and families". It was delivered to 300 young people aged 7 to 10 in three locations in Gaza: Bureij (central Gaza), Beit Lahia (northern Gaza), and Khan Yunis (southern Gaza). These are areas with high concentrations of refugees where communities are subject to acute poverty levels and young people attend school for half a day. The Centre's project aimed to use active learning, therapeutic education methodologies as a form of psycho-social support to young people suffering from stress and trauma caused by the ongoing conflict in Gaza and Israel's siege of the territory.

This is a narrative and visual report on the delivery of the project and its outcomes.

2. Background

The Gaza Strip is in a state of economic collapse largely resulting from an Israeli blockade imposed in 2007 which has reduced to a trickle the amount of food, aid and resources needed for day-to-day living from entering the territory. With tight Israeli restrictions on imports and exports, Gaza's economy is in freefall and its society in the grip of a humanitarian crisis. Most of Gaza's 1.7 million people are refugees largely dependent on food aid from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN's humanitarian mission in Gaza. UNRWA is finding it increasingly difficult to cope with Gaza's rising population because its operating budget has been steadily reduced. Moreover, Israel's restrictive blockade prevents UNRWA from accessing the construction materials it needs to build the new schools, houses and health facilities desperately needed by Gaza's growing population. This problem is compounded by a dwindling water supply as Gaza's underground aquifer, the main source of its drinking water, could be unusable by as soon as 2016.



Gaza City

Lack of food and clean water has resulted in 58 percent of children in Gaza suffering from anaemia with typhoid fever and diarrhoea other common causes of illness among young people. In terms of education, 90 percent of schools in Gaza operate a double shift with different school populations in the morning and afternoon which means that children attend school for half a day in over-crowded classrooms. This is the

result of inadequate school buildings with 221,000 pupils attending 243 UNRWA schools which leave teachers contending with over-crowded classrooms.

In 2012, UNRWA published a report titled *Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place?* which argued that 'without remedial action now, Gaza's problems in water and electricity, education and health will only get worse over the coming years'. This report preceded Israel's third military onslaught on Gaza in six years. On 8 July Israel launched Operation "Protective Edge", a 51 day military attack which pounded Gaza from the air, land and sea and, which, by 26 August had killed 2,131 people, of whom 1,473 were civilians, 501 were children and 257 women. On the Israeli side, 71 were killed, of whom 66 were soldiers, one a security co-ordinator, three were civilians and one was a foreign national. For any child in Gaza aged six "Protective Edge" represented the third war in their short lives following "Pillar of Cloud" in 2012 and "Cast Lead" in 2008-09. But the most recent attack has been the most devastating with the infrastructural damage including: 18,000 housing units destroyed, 45 health centres damaged (17 forced to closed) and 122 schools damaged, 26 completely destroyed.



But even more worrying is the psychological toll the war has taken on Gaza's children. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that over 370,000 children in Gaza need "immediate psycho-social first aid" as a first step toward recovery from Israel's recent onslaught. This may be a conservative estimate in a territory where nearly half the population comprises young people. The project described below is working with young people suffering the psychological effects of the conflict in Gaza and the Israeli siege.

Siege of Gaza

The Centre for Global Education decided to work in the Gaza Strip given the worsening humanitarian situation resulting from Israel's siege of the territory which was intensified in 2007 and has exacerbated poverty



A child gathering water in Jabalia Refugee Camp

levels that have particularly impacted on children. The Israeli siege has devastated the economy and reduced humanitarian aid entering the region to a trickle. Most of Gaza's 1.7m people are refugees living in

a small slither of land just 45km long and 5-12km wide. The effects of the siege include: fuel shortages that reduce the electricity supply to 12 hours a day; the lack of sewage treatment plants which render the water supply 90 percent polluted; food shortages that cause stunting and malnourishment among children and left 60 percent of people 'food insecure'; and unemployment which has soared to over 40 percent as the economy has flatlined. The UN has said that Gaza's economy which is heavily reliant on intensive trade, communication and the movement of people is 'fundamentally unviable under present circumstances'.

Education

Prior to Operation "Protective Edge", the UN estimated that Gaza needed an additional 250 schools to meet the anticipated demand for school places arising from a projected population increase to around 2.1 million people by 2020. There are already 558,000 children aged between 6 and 18 years in education, a total that will rise to 673,000 by 2020. 85 percent of schools in Gaza double shift which means that they have two school populations using the same building every day. This is a direct result of the Israeli siege which prevents the UN from importing the construction materials they need to build new schools. During "Protective Edge", many of the existing schools were used as shelters to house internally displaced people and some of the schools are still used for this purpose because much of the housing stock was destroyed. With 26 schools completely destroyed in Israel's recent operation, Gaza is in the throes of an education crisis lacking the buildings it needs to get young people into schools. Only a lifting of the siege and restrictions on imports and exports will enable Gaza to construct the school buildings it needs to house its young people.

3. About the Project

3.1 The Project Aim was:

To provide psycho-social support services to marginalised young people in the Gaza Strip with the support of the local community, schools and families.

3.2 The Project Objectives were to:

- To provide psycho-social support to 300 children aged 7 to 10 suffering acute effects of conflict-related trauma in the Gaza Strip;
- To supplement education provision to these children with special needs to enable them to reach their full potential in school;
- To deliver training to the families of the children to enable them to provide psycho-social support to the young people in the household;



Children and Facilitators in Khan Yunis. The facilitators are wearing NIPSA Global Solidarity T-shirts.

- To co-ordinate project delivery in liaison with local schools and psychotherapists to ensure a 'joined-up' approach to child welfare.
- To deliver the project in partnership with the Canaan Institute and three grassroots community centres in the Gaza Strip;
- To provide training in facilitation to a total of 9 staff in the three centres who will directly work with the children;
- To evaluate the programme and its impact on the facilitators and children.

3.3 Project Delivery

Enrolment of Children (January 2014)

The 300 children enrolled on to the project were selected by the three community centres in consultation with surrounding schools and visiting psychotherapists working with children in each school. The project enrolled children manifesting the most acute forms of trauma and anxiety who were identified by teachers and psychotherapists. A key component of the project was its joined-up approach to the children's therapy by involving their families, schools and the local community organisation. This ensured that the education activities targeted areas of the schools' curriculum in which the children needed support as well as providing psycho-social therapy to address the causes of stress. The three community organisations involved in project delivery were:

- Never Stop Dreaming Center (Khan Yunis)
- Palestinian Association for Development (Beit Lahia)
- Palestinian Women's Development Center (Bureij)

Three members of staff from each centre were recruited to work with the children for the duration of the project. A significant project outcome is the enhanced skills base of the three centres through the training delivered to their staff. All nine facilitators were trained together by the staff of the Canaan Institute in the use of therapeutic play and learning activities that were designed to address the behavioural and learning problems of the children. The facilitators



participated in an intensive ten day training course in Canaan in February 2014 in preparation for their work with the children. The training included: use of active learning methodologies

consistent with good practice in development education; using group discussion activities, play and art to enable children to express problems related to stress and trauma; referral advice in the event that children needed outside expertise from a trained psychologist; and using cultural traditions (songs, dance and music) in child activities.



Facilitators in Bureij

Training of Facilitators (February 2014)

Three members of staff from each centre were recruited to work with the children for the duration of the project. A significant project outcome is the enhanced skills base of the three centres through the training delivered to their staff. All nine facilitators were trained together by the staff of the Canaan Institute in the use of therapeutic play and learning activities that were designed to address the behavioural and learning problems of the children. The facilitators participated in an intensive ten day training course in Canaan in February 2014 in preparation for their work with the children. The training included: use of active learning methodologies consistent with good practice in development education; using group discussion activities, play and art to enable children to express problems related to stress and trauma; referral advice in the event that children needed outside expertise from a trained psychologist; and using cultural traditions (songs, dance and music) in child activities. The nine facilitators were:

Facilitator	Centre	Town
Mohamaa M Abu Saef	Never Stop Dreaming Center	Khan Yunis
Emad J. El Aggad	Never Stop Dreaming Center	Khan Yunis
Lana B. Agga	Never Stop Dreaming Center	Khan Yunis
Heba El Zaaneen	Palestinian Association for Development	Beit Lahia
Reham A. Hamouda	Palestinian Association for Development	Beit Lahia
Heba S. Zanoon	Palestinian Association for Development	Beit Lahia
Maha M. Abu Jalal	Palestinian Women's Association	Bureij
Salem A. Nabaheen	Palestinian Women's Association	Bureij
Kawthar B. El Hatab	Palestinian Women's Association	Bureij



Facilitators in Beit Lahia

Training Delivery to Children (March to May 2014)

In March 2014, the training began with 100 children involved per centre facilitated by three staff members. The facilitators worked with the children as follows:

The 100 children were divided into four groups of 25 each. Two groups worked on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday and the other two groups on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. This meant that 50 children attended workshops every day in each centre except Friday. Facilitators worked with each group over two periods in the morning from 9.00am to 11.00am and another group from 1.00 - 3.00pm in the afternoon.

The facilitators used dynamic, interactive methodologies using drama, art, stories, poetry, song, dance and games. The activities focused on strengthening knowledge, skills and confidence in the areas of literacy, numeracy and discussion. Also, every child received psycho-social support through the learning activities delivered by the facilitators and through professional support from psychotherapists. This support was provided in liaison with the families of the young people.



Art and Design produced through the project

The programme included open days which enabled each centre to showcase the work of the young people and bring the facilitators and children together from the two other centres. The skills learned by the facilitators and children through the programme will ensure its impact is sustained well beyond the end of the project.



Psychotherapy

Trained psychotherapists working in surrounding schools made two visits per month to each participating centre to:

- Provide expert advice on the training delivered to young people;
- Offer consultations with facilitators on children with specific learning needs;
- Provide advice on the role of the families in continuing the psychosocial support of children at home.

The psycho-social counselling helped to address the residual effects of conflict manifested in behavioural difficulties and learning problems among the children. The psychotherapists attended each centre for two half days per month working with the facilitators and helping to monitor the progress of the children. They helped to ensure a continual line of communication between the schools, the centres, the families and the young people.



A child's drawing showing a helicopter attack in Beit Lahia

Kholoud, a child psychologist attending the centre in Beit Lahia discussed some of the problems she finds in young people suffering stress. They include: behavioural difficulties such as being unable to work within

a group or concentrate in school; children sometimes become quiet, withdrawn and unwilling to communicate; bed-wetting is a common problem among children suffering stress; and another symptom is becoming violent, aggressive and swearing. The main causes of stress are twofold: one is the ongoing conflict in Gaza, which even between the high intensity bombardments in Gaza like Operation “Protective Edge” amounts to regular attacks on communities particularly in border areas close to Israeli forces. The second is the highly stressed domestic environment that most children live in caused by high unemployment, lack of food and clean water, and fuel shortages. The stresses of domestic life regularly bear down on children from their parents.



Kholoud, a child psychologist working on the project

The therapeutic activities delivered by the project aimed to draw children into discussion on the causes of their trauma and how these problems can be managed with support from family, teachers and community workers. In some cases children enrolled on the project were unable to settle into the activities because their symptoms were so acute. In these cases the children were referred to a trauma centre where specialists are better able to provide more effective support.

Family Workshops

A key part of the project activities involved the delivery of workshops to families of the children enrolled on the programme. The nine facilitators organised four workshops per month which meant at least one close relative of each child had an opportunity to attend one workshop per month (4 workshops x 25 relatives). The workshops focused on:

- Continuing the psychosocial support of young people at home building on the training delivered by the facilitators in each centre;
- How to manage young people in times of crisis and acute stress;
- How to use play and therapeutic learning in domestic life to alleviate stress.

The facilitators consulted with parents on a one-to-one basis to help them monitor the progress of their child and identify areas of learning in which they needed specific support. Many parents struggle to manage children subject to stress and trauma and so the assistance provided by the community centres and schools is invaluable.

Celebration Days (May 2014)

Each of the three centres organised a Celebration Day in May 2014 to mark the end of year one of the project and celebrate the students' achievements over the previous three months. The Celebration Days



Celebration Day, Bureij

were organised jointly by the facilitators and the children and family members are invited to attend. The days involve children performing song, dance, poetry, rap and role plays on topics such as good hygiene and bullying. They often perform songs and dance in traditional dress with the help of their facilitators. The Celebration Days also allow family members to see the work carried out by the children in Art, Design, Mathematics, English and Arabic reflecting the high quality activities delivered by the facilitators.



Celebration Day, Khan Yunis



Celebration Day, Beit Lahia

Monitoring and Evaluation (May to June 2014)

The final phase of the project involved the Centre for Global Education's Director, Stephen McCloskey, visiting Gaza from 18 May to 19 June to evaluate the project outcomes. The visit included:

- Attending the Celebration Day in each Centre;
- Meeting the facilitators and getting feedback on project delivery;
- Meeting the Director of the three community centres;
- Meeting the Director and staff of the Canaan Institute;
- Attending an evaluation workshop with all of the project facilitators in the Canaan Institute at the end of the project.

Feedback from Facilitators

The facilitators were interviewed individually in their centres and then attended an evaluation workshop in the Canaan Institute when the project ended. They all welcomed the intensive ten day training programme provided by Canaan at the start of the project. It was useful to work with the other facilitators before commencing delivery of training to the children. It assisted team building and strengthened project co-operation between the centres. They valued learning new



Centre for Global Education Director Stephen McCloskey with the project facilitators after an evaluation workshop

skills and techniques in facilitation and the opportunity to apply these skills under the auspices of the Canaan Institute who played a mentoring role for the facilitators throughout the project.

The challenges of working in the centres and facilitating workshops with children included the lack of physical space in the centres which are small and lacking natural light. Children lacked the space in some cases to move freely in small rooms but all three centres had a central space or stage large enough to hold the Celebration Days. There is simply a lack of equipped buildings in Gaza with the space and facilities necessary for hosting child activities. This is due to the population density of Gaza and the lack of land and construction materials needed to build new facilities.

The facilitators also commented that each working day was long and intensive as they had four x one hour sessions with children plus two hours preparation time in the mornings. But they found the work rewarding even if they had challenges with some of the children who had behavioural problems caused by trauma and stress. They emphasised the importance of liaising with the schools and working with the teachers to ensure continuity between school and community education. This was particularly important as the project was delivered in the period leading up to end-of-year examinations which are mandatory for all children attending school in Gaza. Teachers referred the facilitators to those areas of the curriculum that needed particular attention and they were addressed in the project training.

With regard to year two of the project, all parties to the project - facilitators, the staff of Canaan, the local schools and families - agreed that it was important that the same three centres participate in the project in year two. This will enable the facilitators and children to build upon the learning and progress made in year one. This recommendation will be followed-up by Canaan.

Feedback from Children

The children attending the three centres thoroughly enjoyed their participation in the project. They had opportunities to play and learn with other children from the neighbourhood. When they attended the centres they received juice and snacks, and every day they had a mix

of activities such as arts and crafts, games, singing and dancing, and learning English. It was less formal than school but they still learned a lot and had opportunities for day trips, particularly visits to the beach. The project for them was too short. They would have welcomed a longer project with more time to work with the facilitators and other children.

The facilitators and psychologists saw real progress made by the children during the project. They expressed their psychological problems through art, in group discussions and on a one-to-one basis with psychologists / facilitators. The group activities enabled the children to become less withdrawn and more engaged with the other children and their local environment. They enjoyed working on role plays and cultural activities for the Celebration Days and would welcome participation in the project in year two.

Feedback from Parents

For parents the project brought several benefits to their families. They valued the additional education their children received through the community activities. This really strengthened their learning and education is crucial to the life prospects of children in Gaza given the lack of job opportunities. The parents also valued the psychological



relief offered to their children through the project activities. They could see the difference made to the children through regular access to a child psychologist and expert facilitation. Also, the availability of a structured and safe play environment for children when they were not at school made a huge difference to parents who are always anxious about children playing in Gaza's environment which has so many hazards. And, lastly, parents commended the workshops delivered to them through the project which helped to explain the behavioural changes in children caused by the conflict and domestic pressures. They valued the guidance offered to them in how to extend psycho-social support into the household and continue the therapy offered through the community associations. The parents, like the children and facilitators, felt that the project timescale was too short but welcomed the idea that the project will be delivered in the same community associations in 2015.

Feedback from Canaan Institute

At the end of the project, the Canaan Institute convened a meeting involving all of the facilitators and their training staff to carry out a final reflection on the project and how it was delivered. The CGE Director attended this meeting and discussed the methodologies and learning approaches used in the project and if anything needed to change in year two. The facilitators seemed very satisfied with the training input from Canaan and didn't see a need to amend the content of the programme. They proposed in year two that they again meet with the local teachers to diagnose specific problems experienced by individual children and how best to treat them. They found this helpful in year one. Some of the facilitators commented on the need for more staff inputs to manage such a large group (3 facilitators working with 100 children) but regrettably the resources are not available to pay additional staff to work on the project given the competing costs related to materials, refreshments, the Celebration Days and training inputs by Canaan. They also suggested that it would be helpful to have a specialist psycho-social worker on site from the start of the project rather than making occasional visits but again this is costly and not possible. Otherwise, they valued their participation in the project and looked forward to year two.



Centre for Global Education / Canaan Institute / NIPSA Banner

Summary of Project Outcomes

In summary, the outcomes of the CGE / Canaan Institute project were:

- 300 young people received supplementary education provision in literacy and numeracy;
- The children also received psycho-social support in managing the effects of trauma and stress;
- The project facilitators learned new training and facilitation skills supporting the provision of psycho-social support to children;
- A total of 12 workshops were delivered to family members to extend psycho-social support into the household;
- All of the young people had opportunities to visit other parts of the Gaza Strip and the other Centres involved in the project;
- The Centre for Global Education carried out a comprehensive project evaluation of the project during a five week visit in May and June 2014;
- The project supported stronger links between CGE, the Canaan Institute and the three Centres involved in the project that we can build on in the future.

4. Next Steps

NIPSA has already committed funding to year two of the project. The Director of the Canaan Institute, Issa Saba and Director of CGE, Stephen McCloskey met to discuss delivery in year two and agreed that we should work with the same three centres to maximise continuity and impact on the target groups. The project will commence in January 2015 and the CGE Director will again visit Gaza in May 2015 to carry out an evaluation of the project and meet with main stakeholders.

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