

THE CANAAN INSTITUTE OF NEW PEDAGOGY
& CENTRE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION



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PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN IN THE GAZA STRIP



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GAZA STRIP
2015

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 2015.

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 12 in three locations in Gaza: Bureij (central Gaza), Beit Lahia (northern Gaza), and Khan Yunis (southern Gaza).

The project was a measured and informed response to the psychosocial needs of children in these localities who have been suffering particularly acute forms of psychological trauma caused by three wars in Gaza over the last six years. The most recent war, Operation "Protective Edge", was a particularly brutal military onslaught on Gaza spanning 51 days in July and August 2014. The project aimed to provide psychosocial support to children using active learning, educational methods that enable young people to discuss their problems in groups and in one-to-one sessions with psychotherapists. The children also expressed psychological issues they were experiencing through art work and educational and cultural activities such as role play and theatre.

The project also sought sustainable outcomes through workshops with parents of children enrolled on the project to guide them on how to provide psychosocial support in the household. Parents were guided on how to deal with behavioural changes in children suffering the effects of trauma in a joined-up approach that also involved project facilitators and teachers in local schools. This was the second of a two year project which was delivered in the same three learning centres involved in the project in year one. By involving the same centres, the learning outcomes became more firmly embedded in the local communities and strengthened the support to children. The report below describes the project activities and outcomes.

Background



A mural in West Belfast during Operation "Protective Edge"

It is important to present some of the context in which this project was delivered. A child aged six in Gaza has already experienced three wars in his or her short life with Operation "Protective Edge" following "Pillar of Cloud" in 2012 and "Cast Lead" in 2008-09. The most recent Israeli military operation in Gaza has proven to be the most brutal and destructive of the three wars launched on the territory. "Protective Edge" began on 8 July and, in a 51 day military attack, Gaza was pounded from the air, land and sea. By 26 August 2014, 2,131 Palestinians were killed, 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. The infrastructural damage caused by the onslaught in Gaza included: 18,000 housing units destroyed, 45 health centres damaged (17 forced to closed) and 122 schools damaged with 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 required "immediate psycho-social first aid" in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. 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.



Jabalia Refugee Camp in northern Gaza - one of the most densely populated areas on earth

Gaza under Siege

Even before the recent conflict, the Gaza Strip was already 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 required 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.

In April 2015, Chris Gunness from UNRWA, said that 'not a single home has been rebuilt' since the end of the conflict in August 2014. Despite international pledges of aid in the aftermath of the conflict, reconstruction work in Gaza is painfully slow. A report from the Association of International Development Agencies, again in April 2015, found that just a quarter of the \$3.5 billion in aid pledged to Gaza after the war had actually been delivered. Winnie Byanyima, executive director of Oxfam, said during the launch of the report:

"There has been little rebuilding, no permanent ceasefire agreement and no plan to end the blockade. The international community is walking with eyes wide open into the next avoidable conflict, by upholding the status quo they themselves said must change."

(Al Jazeera, 12 April 2015).

This is the worrying context in which the Canaan Institute / Centre for Global Education project has been delivered with the prospect of more trauma and conflict being visited on the young people of Gaza.

The Project

Project Aim:

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

Project Objectives:

- To provide psycho-social support to 300 children aged from 7 to 12 years suffering acute effects of conflict-related trauma in the Gaza Strip;
- To supplement education provision to 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 psychosocial support in the household;

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

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

Enrolment of Children (January 2015)



Children participating in project activities in Khan Yunis

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 psychosocial 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)

Training of Facilitators (January 2015)

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 five day training course in Canaan from 4-8 January 2015 in preparation for their work with the children.



Facilitators working with children in Khan Yunis

The training included:

- Facilitation techniques (games and play, arts and crafts, using expressive mediums such as theatre and dance, group activities).
- Teaching techniques including the delivery of Arabic, Mathematics, English, Science and Health.
- Active learning concepts, aims and methodologies.
- The facilitators' role in using educational techniques to discuss and address problems caused by trauma.
- Development education theory and practice.
- Developing a teaching plan of activities and field work.



Playing with balloons in Beit Lahia

The facilitators were given work contracts by Canaan for the duration of the project and received mentoring from the staff of Canaan during the delivery of activities. This included assistance with the preparation of materials needed in the training. 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 |

Training Delivery to Children (February to May 2015)

In February 2015, the training began with 100 children involved per centre facilitated by three staff members. The children in each centre were divided into groups of 25 along age lines. Two groups of 25 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.



Young people drawing a wall mural and participating in a crafts workshop in the Never Stop Dreaming Center, Khan Yunis

The training activities used with the children aimed to strengthen their classroom performance in four core areas of the schools' curriculum:

- Arabic
- Mathematics
- English
- Health and Science.



Arts and Crafts, Khan Yunis



Musical chairs, Khan Yunis

The sessions combined formal school learning with play which included games, role play, theatre, dance, cultural expression and art. The activities were implemented using active learning methodologies and the outcomes of the children's work included: wall designs, dramas and songs, puppet and contemporary dance, stories, and art and embroidery.

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, talking and listening. The formal sector work was delivered in liaison with teachers in local schools who advised on the key areas of the curriculum that needed to be addressed in the work with children. Teachers could advise on subject areas in which children were particularly weak and needed additional support. The activities were evaluated with the children through oral feedback and written questionnaires at the end of the programme.



Literacy and numeracy work completed by children in Bureij

Family Workshops (February to May 2015)

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 in each month of project delivery (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.



Parents attending a family workshop in Bureij aimed at strengthening psychosocial support for children in the household

Celebration Days (May 2015)

Each of the three centres organised a Celebration Day in May 2015 to mark the end of the project and celebrate the students' achievements

over the previous four months. The Celebration Days were organised jointly by the facilitators and the children and family members are invited to attend. The days involved children performing song, dance, poetry, rap and role plays on topics such as good hygiene and bullying. They often performed songs and dance in traditional dress with the help of their facilitators. The Celebration Days also allowed 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.



Facilitator and children performing song and dance in the Celebration Day, Khan Yunis

The Celebration Days included:

- Exhibitions of wall murals, art, craftwork and drawings;
- Theatre performances written and performed by the children;
- Songs and Palestinian traditional dance (Dakba);
- Poetry written and performed by the children;
- Puppet shows;
- Clowns and dance shows.

The performances were attended by the children's families, neighbours, local community members and the board of directors of each community association participating in the programme.



Celebration Day, Bureij



Celebration Day, Khan Yunis

Monitoring and Evaluation (May to June 2015)

Unfortunately, owing to difficulties in visiting Gaza imposed since the war last summer, the CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, was unable to evaluate the project in person. However, the nine facilitators attended an end-of-project evaluation day organised by the staff of the Canaan Institute. This was a day of reflection on the project outcomes and

the methodologies and materials used in the project activities. The facilitators also evaluated the project with the young people to get their feedback on the activities that worked well and what they would change in future years. The evaluation process will help to improve the delivery of any future initiative delivered in Gaza by the Centre.

Initial feedback from the facilitators and young people suggests that they really enjoyed their participation in the project. For children, they benefited enormously from having access to quality facilitation in a structured learning environment. Their participation in the project will strengthen their performance in the next school year. And, for the facilitators, they learned new skills in facilitation and the use of active learning teaching methods in helping to address the effects of trauma in young people. These skills are lifelong and will benefit their organisations into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Canaan Institute was asked to make some recommendations that would strengthen future delivery of education programmes in Gaza.

They suggested:

- 1. Longer programme timeframes to help embed the activities with the children and allow more time for preparation and high quality delivery and evaluation. A longer programme would also assist monitoring and evaluation.**
- 2. It would be useful to broaden the programme into new areas of delivery where there are particularly acute forms of trauma and extreme social and economic need.**
- 3. It would be useful to have more stationery and workshop materials available to support programme delivery.**

Next Steps

The Centre for Global Education and Canaan Institute would be most grateful for any additional support that could be provided by NIPSA to extend the project into new areas of delivery in Gaza. The worsening social and economic situation in Gaza and the effects of last summer's war mean that the services provided by our activities are probably needed now more than at any time in the past. We hope that NIPSA will consider a proposal to continue supporting our work in 2016.

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