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A Report on a Psycho-Social and Educational Support Programme, Gaza Strip, Palestine 2018



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2018

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Introduction

This is a report on activities delivered in year one of a three-year project (2018-2020) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, jointly managed by the Centre for Global Education (CGE), a development non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Belfast, and the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy, a Palestinian NGO based in Gaza City. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Developing World Fund and delivered from 15 May to 15 October 2018.



The project had three aims. The first was to provide psycho-social support to 400 children aged 7-14 years suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by three wars in the Gaza Strip since 2008 and the grinding poverty created by an eleven-year Israeli siege.

The second aim was to supplement the children's education by providing community-based learning focused on core areas of the

school curriculum such as literacy and numeracy. The third aim was to deliver workshops to the children's parents with a view to extending psycho-social care into the household. The project was delivered in four locations in Gaza: Culture Revival Society - Gaza City; Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope - Maghazi refugee camp (central Gaza); Rural Family Development Association - Al-Mughragha Village (southern Gaza); and the Rachel Corrie Children and Youth Cultural Center - Rafah (southern Gaza).

These locations ensured a good geographical spread of project participants from southern to central Gaza and in Gaza city. The Centre for Global Education was delighted to have the participation of the Rachel Corrie Center in Rafah as one of the four locations for delivery of the project. This centre is named after the American activist, Rachel Corrie, who was killed by the Israeli Defence Forces in 2003 while peacefully trying to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home in Rafah. She was just 23 years old and remains a great inspiration to Palestinian activists across the world.

In addition to the activities delivered to children, the project provided workshops to the parents of children enrolled on the project to guide them on how to best provide psycho-social support in the household. A total of 20 family workshops was held in the four community centres delivered to 332 parents. The workshops advised parents on how to recognise and deal with behavioural changes in children suffering the effects of trauma. This represented a joined-up approach to psycho-social care that involved local schools, community centres and families.

In the recruitment of children onto the programme, each community centre liaised with the local school and discussed how the activities could best meet the educational and psycho-social needs of young people. The project take-up can be summarised as follows:

Project by numbers

Activities	Number of Participants
Number of child participants	400
Number of workshops delivered to children	512
Number of facilitators per centre	3
Number of family workshops	20
Number of parents who attended workshops	332
Number of day trips for children	4

Background to Project

The Great March of Return



Since 30 March 2018, tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have joined the 'Great March of Return' which began on the anniversary of 'Land Day' when six Palestinians were killed in 1976 while protesting the confiscation of large tracts of their land. The Great March of Return was initially planned as a series of six weekly protests culminating with the anniversary of the *Nakba* (Catastrophe) in May when 750,000 Palestinians were dispossessed of their land and livelihoods in 1948. However, the protests have continued into 2019 and approaching their first anniversary. More than 240 Palestinians have been killed and over 23,000 others wounded since the protests began; two Israeli soldiers have been killed over the same period. 60 protestors were killed and 2,700 wounded on one day - 14 May 2018 - when the Israeli army fired live ammunition, tear gas and firebombs at unarmed civilians. Among those injured and killed were 488 women, 1,129 children, 228 medics and 124 journalists. By the end of December 2018, 34 children had been killed by the Israeli army during protests along the border fence and a total of 23,603 civilians had been injured. Amnesty International reported that three medics and two journalists were also killed in the same period.



Israel's siege of Gaza

The wider context in which this project has been delivered is one of extreme poverty and conflict. 2018 marked the eleventh anniversary of Israel's illegal siege of the Gaza Strip and many leading human rights organisations have published reports alerting the world to a deepening humanitarian crisis in the territory. Perhaps the starkest warning has come from the International Committee of the Red Cross in [suggesting](#) that 'a systemic collapse of an already battered infrastructure and economy is impending'. What distinguishes this crisis from the disasters and emergencies that normally push civilian populations to the edge of catastrophe is that it is not the result of a hurricane, flood, tsunami, drought or famine but the calculated policy of the Israeli government. As Harvard scholar Sara Roy, who has meticulously researched the impact of Israel's policy-making on Gaza for thirty years [suggests](#), 'Gaza is in a state of humanitarian shock, due primarily to Israel's blockade, supported by the US, the EU and Egypt and now entering its 11th year'. Roy [argues](#) that Gaza has been subjected to 'de-development' meaning that it has been 'dispossessed of its capacity for rational and sustainable economic growth and development, coupled with a growing inability to effect social change'. So, what we are witnessing in Gaza today is the 'logical endpoint' of this policy; 'a Gaza that is functionally unviable'.

Gaza's two million people have been pushed beyond endurance, with Israel's siege having choked off the economy and created the highest **unemployment rate** in the world. An eleven year old child in Gaza has witnessed three wars and experienced unrelenting poverty in a territory where more than half the population are **refugees** dependent on humanitarian assistance. According to **Save the Children**, 90% of Gaza's drinking water is unfit for human consumption, electricity is available for just 2-4 hours per day, water-borne diseases are spiking, health and emergency services are breaking down and fresh food unavailable because of a lack of refrigeration. With **60%** of Gaza's under-25's unemployed, it is unsurprising to find so many young people on the front line in the protests for change; bereft of hope, income, the opportunity to travel and feeling isolated from the wider world.

This economic crisis has worsened since the Trump administration in the United States decided to cut its **\$300m** (£228m) contribution to the operating budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. The US contribution represented one third of UNRWA's annual budget of \$1.2 billion. This cut has already forced UNRWA to axe 250 jobs in the West Bank and Gaza and, represents an 'existential threat' to the future of the agency which is operating with a deficit of \$256 million. It has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation for the majority of Gaza's people.

Three wars since 2008

The social problems created by Israel's blockade of Gaza and the cut to UNRWA's budget have been compounded by three wars since 2008: operations 'Cast Lead' (2008-09), 'Pillar of Cloud' (2012) and 'Protective Edge' (2014). Operation 'Protective Edge' resulted in the highest number of Palestinian civilian casualties than in any year since 1967. **551** children were killed from a total of 1,462 civilian deaths and 'nearly 68 percent of the children killed by Israeli forces were 12 years old or younger'. According to Unicef, **370,000** children were left in need of 'psycho-social aid' and Euro Med Monitor for Human Rights has **found** that:



"1 in 4 children needs psychosocial support because of trauma and losses experienced during violence, including physical injury, fear of bombing sounds and deaths of family members or friends".



In the midst of the conflict in August 2014, Unicef's field officer, Pernilla Ironside, said:

“There isn't a single family in Gaza who hasn't experienced personally death, injury, the loss of their home, extensive damage, displacement”.

The Israeli casualties in the same conflict totalled 67 soldiers and six civilians.

The infrastructural damage in Gaza caused by 'Protective Edge' included 18,000 housing units partially or completely destroyed and 73 medical facilities and several ambulances damaged. The United Nations reported that 7 schools were completely destroyed and 252 schools damaged by the conflict which has exacerbated a crisis in education in Gaza. In 2012, the United Nations published a report titled *Gaza in 2020: a liveable place?* which argued that 250 additional schools were needed to address the present shortfall and accommodate a rising population predicted to increase to 2.1 million from the present 1.8 million by 2020. With the

number of school buildings depleted further by 'Protective Edge', the education system is under unprecedented strain. 90 percent of schools in Gaza had to double shift - house two separate school populations in the same building every day - before the 2014 war so schools will now be under even greater pressure to accommodate rising pupil numbers. The problems created by the creaking infrastructure of the education system are compounded by the psychological effects of war and poverty. In commenting on the multiple effects of war on Gaza's population, Pernilla Ironside [said](#):

“The impact has truly been vast, both at a very physical level, in terms of casualties, injuries, the infrastructure that's been damaged, but also importantly, emotionally and psychologically in terms of the destabilizing impact that not knowing, not truly feeling like there is anywhere safe to go in Gaza”.

This is particularly the case with children on whom the psychological effects of conflict manifest themselves in many ways including fear, tension, aggression, becoming withdrawn and silent, difficulties in concentrating in school, and increasing isolation from family and friends. These psychological problems are also related to the 'pressure cooker' environment of households under severe economic pressure as a result of Israel's siege.

The combination of three wars since 2008 and an eleven-year economic siege has created a highly stressful and physically dangerous environment for children in particular who are on the frontline of conflict and vulnerable to the effects of extreme poverty. They are also physically isolated because of the restrictions on travel in and out of Gaza caused by Israel's siege and Egypt's closure of the southern border with Gaza at Rafah. One young person described this as being part of a 'blindfolded generation' denied contact with the outside world and unable to take-up opportunities for work, study and travel beyond Gaza's borders. All of these factors contributed to the Centre for Global Education's decision to work with the Canaan Institute in delivering a project specifically for young children inside Gaza to both enhance their education opportunities and to provide psycho-social support to help address the effects of trauma and poverty.

The Project

The Centre for Global Education / Canaan Institute project had three main aims:

- To provide psycho-social support services to marginalised young people in four locations in the Gaza Strip with the support of the local community, schools and families.
- To supplement the formal education of young people through community-based learning focused on core areas of the school curriculum.
- To deliver workshops to the parents of the young people registered on the programme to enable them to extend psycho-social care into the household.



Project Objectives:

- To provide psychosocial support to 400 children aged 7 to 14 suffering acute effects of conflict-related trauma in the Gaza Strip;
- To supplement education provision to children with special learning needs to enable them to reach their full potential in school and to provide education services to children who have had to leave school early to work the land;
- To deliver training to the families of the children to enable them to provide psychosocial support to the young people at home;

- 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 four grassroots community centres in the Gaza Strip;
- To provide training in facilitation to a total of 12 facilitators (3 per centre) in the four centres who will directly work with the children;
- To evaluate the programme and its impact on the facilitators and children.

Project Activities

The project had six stages of delivery that are described below:

STAGE 1: Enrolment of Children (May 2018)

The 400 children enrolled on to the project were selected by the four 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. This ensured that the education activities targeted areas of the school curriculum in which the children needed support as well as providing psycho-social therapy to address the causes of stress. The four community organisations involved in project delivery were:

- Culture Revival Society - Gaza City;
- Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope - Maghazi refugee camp (central Gaza);
- Rural Family Development Association - Al-Mughragha Village (southern Gaza);
- and the Rachel Corrie Children and Youth Cultural Center - Rafah (southern Gaza).

STAGE 2: Training of Facilitators (June 2018)

Three members of staff from each of the four centres were recruited to work with the children for the duration of the project. A significant project outcome has been the enhanced skills base of the four centres through the training delivered to their staff. All twelve 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 needs of the children. The facilitators participated in an intensive three-day training course in Canaan in June 2018 in preparation for their work with the children.



Project facilitators' meeting in June 2018

The training included:

- Facilitation techniques used to lead children in games and play, arts and crafts, and expressive mediums such as theatre, dance and rap.
- Training in the use of teaching activities designed to support learning in Arabic, English, Health and Science, and Mathematics which are key areas of the school curriculum.
- Active learning concepts, aims and methodologies consistent with good practice in development education.
- Facilitation methods used to support discussion on problems caused by trauma.
- Developing a teaching plan of activities and field work.
- Advice on liaison with schools during the project.
- Techniques to support the effective monitoring and evaluation of activities.

The training agenda was as follows:

Time	Day one	Day two	Day three
09:00am - 10:30am	Introduction to training; Project review of year one.	Active learning methodologies based on good practice in development education.	<i>Tailoring activities to the educational needs of children focused on key areas of the school curriculum.</i>
10:30am- 11:00am	BREAK		
11:00am - 1:00pm	Overview of student needs in terms of education and psychosocial support.	Psychosocial and educational support activities - an overview of activities and methodologies.	Field planning - guidance on how to plan and evaluate activities for the duration of the project.



Two project facilitators leading an activity with children observed by Issa Saba (centre), Director of the Canaan Institute.

Facilitators' feedback on training

- The training succeeded in sharing new skills, methodologies and information with trainees.
- Particular benefits of the training included games, structured play exercises and how to deliver workshops to parents.
- The trainees learned new facilitation skills in how to manage active learning activities that maximise the participation of young people.
- The facilitators gained a lot of experience on how to provide psychosocial support using activities and discussion exercises.
- The trainees liked the flexibility of the activities in that they could be used with different age groups and were easy to implement.
- The training venue, hospitality and materials were excellent.
- The training provided lifelong skills that could be used in other areas of their work in the community and with young people.

A new innovation in this year of the project was the introduction of a training diploma for the facilitators which extends over eighteen months and supports their professional development in social, cultural and educational fields. This training was additional to the intensive three day course delivered in June and provides the facilitators with certification in development education and facilitation.

STAGE 3: Training Delivery to Children (June to September 2018)

In June 2018, the training began with 100 children enrolled in each 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 8.00am to 2.00pm in the afternoon.

The education 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



Children participating in a group cultural activity

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 including drama, art, stories, poetry, rap and *Dabka* (traditional Palestinian song and dance). 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.

Psychosocial Activities

The project prioritised psycho-social activities that enabled the children to share the difficult and troubling feelings and emotions caused by the constant threat of conflict in Gaza and the daily grind of poverty. This is often exacerbated by a difficult domestic life where one or both parents may be out of work and struggling to make ends meet. This can cause a 'pressure cooker' environment that creates anxiety, stress and tension for children and can manifest itself in the children's behaviour which can range from aggression and fear to becoming withdrawn and silent.

The psychosocial activities supported by the programme included:

- Games and structured play activities;
- Free expression activities and a psychological 'dump' exercise;
- Drawings and art work;
- Popular cultural tradition activities;
- Puppet theatre.



Children in Gaza often live in a “pressure cooker” environment created by constant exposure to conflict and poverty. This can manifest itself in changes to their behaviour. They can become aggressive, withdrawn, exhibit fear and tension, or struggle to concentrate in school. The project’s psycho-social activities support children with these psychological problems.



Children on a day trip to a fun park.

The children were also taken on day trips to a fun park to take them out of their normal living environment to a green space and swimming pool where they could relax and play. These trips enhanced the psycho-social therapy of children and were a high point of the project.

Stage 4: Family Workshops (June to September 2018)

A key part of the project activities involved the delivery of workshops to families of the children enrolled on the programme. The facilitators in each centre organised five workshops during the project (20 in total) and they were delivered to a total of 332 parents.

The workshops focused on:

- Continuing the psycho-social support of young people at home that built upon the training delivered by the facilitators in each centre;
- How to recognise symptoms of trauma;
- How to manage young people in times of crisis and 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 aimed at strengthening psychosocial support for children in the household.

The facilitators monitored the behaviour and progress of the children in responding to the psycho-social activities during the project and regularly met with parents to discuss the individual needs of each child.



A facilitator delivers a family workshop on psycho-social support to children.

STAGE 5: Celebration Days (October 2018)



An exhibition of artwork during a Celebration Day in the Rachel Corrie Center in Rafah, Gaza.

Each of the four centres organised a Celebration Day in October 2018 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 were invited to attend. The days involved children performing song, dance, poetry, rap and role plays. 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, Health & Science, English and Arabic reflecting the high quality activities delivered by the facilitators.

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.



Drawings and artwork on display during the Celebration Day in Bud Flower Association for Affection and Hope, Maghazi Refugee Camp, Gaza.

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



Children and parents gather for a Celebration Day at the conclusion of the programme.

STAGE 6: Monitoring and Evaluation (May to October 2018)

Throughout the delivery of the project, the staff of Canaan organised a series of educational and administrative follow-up visits to the four partner organizations to assess delivery of the programme and reflect on its outcomes with the twelve facilitators. These visits dealt with monitoring and evaluation, administrative issues such as how to securely store data records on parents and children, and providing advice on workplans and on the delivery of activities.



Facilitators and young people in a psychosocial support workshop - Bud flower Association for Affection and Hope - Maghazi refugee camp, Gaza.

The twelve facilitators also 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. A major strength of the programme is the provision of lifelong learning skills to facilitators which will strengthen their professional development, particularly with the introduction of a new training diploma by the Canaan Institute.



A young person performing rap at an end of project Celebration Day.

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The Centre equips individuals and organisations to understand the cultural, economic, social and political influences on our lives that result from our growing interdependence with other countries and societies. It also provides learners with the skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary to facilitate action that will contribute to poverty eradication both locally and globally.

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