



A REPORT ON A PSYCHOSOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME IN THE GAZA STRIP, PALESTINE 2020



THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN FUNDED BY
THE NIPSA GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPING WORLD FUND 2020

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Acknowledgements

The Centre for Global Education would like to thank the staff and Board of Directors of the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy, our partner in the Gaza Strip, for their exemplary and professional delivery of this project. We also thank our funder, the NIPSA Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund, without whom this project could not have been delivered.

Centre for Global Education, November 2020

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This is a report on activities delivered in the final year 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) Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund. The activities described in this final year of the project were delivered from 15 January to 30 June 2020.



The project had three aims. The first was to provide psycho-social support to 400 children aged 7-12 years suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by three wars in the Gaza Strip since 2008 and the grinding poverty created by a thirteen-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 psychosocial 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 SOS Villages - Rafah (southern Gaza).

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Gaza Project 2020 by numbers

Activities	Number of Participants
Number of child participants	400
Number of workshops delivered to children	140
Number of facilitators per centre	3
Number of family workshops	8
Number of parents who attended workshops	150
Number of psychosocial sessions with children	322
Number of home visits to children	180
Follow-up visits to partner organisations by facilitators	52

COVID-19



Home learning during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Gaza, 2020. Canaan Institute. All rights reserved.

The project started on 14 January 2020, with the training of three facilitators in each of the four community organisations where the training was delivered. The training delivery to young people and the psychosocial workshops for their parents commenced in February through to 8 March 2020. However, at this stage the project delivery had to be postponed because of the COVID-19 outbreak and the introduction of a ban on social gatherings, and closure of schools and other learning institutions.

Project activities were suspended until 18 April 2020 and the training of young people was resumed from 19 April to 30 June 2020. In order to meet the project targets and also ensure the health and safety of participants, the Centre's partner organization, the Canaan Institute, adapted delivery of the programme to training in small groups in the four community organisations and home learning. From 6 to 30 June 2020, 82 psychosocial support meetings with children were carried out in the four partner institutions in small groups while adhering to social distancing measures and using protective equipment. A further 180 home visits were carried out for 90 children and their parents during the project to provide psychosocial support services. Children were provided with a bag of stationery and activities to support the delivery of activities at home. Facilitators worked with children using education resources designed to build their self-confidence and assist them with the effects of mental health problems caused by the conflict in the Gaza Strip and its severe levels of poverty.



Home learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in Gaza, 2020. Canaan Institute. All rights reserved.

The Canaan Institute and its partners in Gaza were concerned that the physical isolation caused by the COVID-19 restrictions could negatively impact on the mental health of children. The home visits provided parents with educational activities that they could use with the children during the lockdown to maintain their learning in key areas of the curriculum including literacy and numeracy. They also provided children with drawing materials and arts and crafts to keep them mentally active during lockdown. The Canaan Institute and its partners in Gaza deserve immense credit for adapting delivery of their project so quickly to the rapidly changed circumstances of COVID-19.

Background to project



Jabalia Refugee Camp, Gaza. Stephen McCloskey, all rights reserved.

Israel's siege of Gaza

In 2012, the United Nations published an alarming [report](#) on the future of the Gaza Strip warning that by 2020, without urgently needed remedial action, the territory would no longer be a 'liveable place'. The report added: 'There will be virtually no reliable access to sources of safe drinking water, standards of healthcare and education will have continued to decline, and the vision of affordable and reliable electricity for all will have become a distant memory for most'. These dire forecasts of a creaking infrastructure unable to meet the needs of two million Gazans have been sadly realised. 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 is unavailable because of a lack of refrigeration. With over 108 million litres of untreated sewage discharged daily into the Mediterranean Sea, over 60% of the sea is contaminated and the ground water increasingly compromised with pollutants. Gaza has truly become an unliveable place and, yet, two million Gazans are forced to live in what is famously described as the world's largest open air prison.

The primary cause of this 'unliveable' environment is a highly restrictive Israeli blockade, now in its 13th year, which has reduced Gaza to the point of '[systemic collapse](#)'. Ostensibly imposed on the basis of a security protocol following the election of a Hamas government in Palestinian elections in 2006, Amnesty International believes that Palestinians in Gaza are being '[collectively punished](#)'. Indeed, 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.

Harvard scholar Sara Roy, who has meticulously researched the impact of Israel's policy-making on Gaza [argues](#) that the territory 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, she suggests, is the 'logical endpoint' of this policy; 'a Gaza that is functionally unviable'. This view is underscored by the fact that the unemployment [rate](#) in Gaza is the world's highest at 52% but that rises to nearly 70% for young people and 75% for women. Nearly [75%](#) of Gaza's population are registered refugees, of whom 900,000 receive emergency food assistance from the UN and 500,000 live 'below the abject poverty line'. Although it withdrew its settlers and troops from Gaza in 2005, Israel remains the occupying power in the territory as it controls the airspace, territorial waters and all but one of the border crossings. According to [Amnesty](#), this means Israel 'is responsible for the welfare of the inhabitants in the strip under international humanitarian law'. The blockade is therefore illegal under the terms of the fourth Geneva Convention which [imposes](#) 'general responsibility on the occupying state for the safety and welfare of civilians living in the occupied territory'.

COVID-19 in Gaza



Facilitators carry out a home visit as part of the CGE/Canaan Institute project in Gaza, 2020. Canaan Institute, all rights reserved.

There is rising concern at the spike in COVID-19 cases in Gaza given the impact of Israel's siege on the territory's health service which is under-resourced and lacks the capacity to combat the pandemic. According to a situation [report](#) from the United Nations in November 2020, Gaza has 3,827 active COVID-19 cases and 56 people have died from the virus. Local authorities have warned about chronic shortages of laboratory supplies, as well as an oxygen supply for patients at a dedicated COVID-19 hospital, the European Gaza Hospital. The medical journal *The Lancet* has [said](#) that:

“To enable the Palestinian health systems to manage the outbreak, Israel must lift its closure of the Gaza Strip to enable the proper functioning of Gaza’s health-care system and other essential services in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

The Lancet has found in Gaza ‘insufficient amount of equipment needed to treat COVID-19’ which ‘is compounded by poor public health conditions: a water and electricity crisis, rampant poverty, and a high population density’. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has additionally **warned** that:

“COVID-19 may exacerbate social isolation and exclusion, leading to increased protection risks. Domestic violence may increase as a consequence of lockdowns; the risk of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and child abuse also increase, as women and girls are further isolated and unable to access support”.

The CGE/Canaan Institute project in 2020 has delivered education and psychosocial support activities designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of children now under the additional stress of physical isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Project

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

- To enhance the knowledge and understanding among 400 young people in Gaza of key areas of the schools’ curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, and strengthen their school performance.
- To help alleviate the mental health problems of children enrolled in the programme through psychosocial care and family support.
- To create a safe and structured play environment for children in a community setting using interactive methodologies and activities.
- To enhance the capacity of the four host community organisations to deliver interactive, development education training activities.



Project Objectives:

- To provide psychosocial support to 400 children aged 7 to 12 suffering acute effects of conflict and poverty-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 at home;
- To deliver training to the parents 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 to enable them to deliver development education activities to 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: Training of Facilitators (January 2020)

Three members of staff from each of the four community centres received nine hours of training in January 2020. The training was delivered using interactive, development education methodologies and activities designed to enhance the educational performance of children and provide psychosocial support. A significant project outcome has been the enhanced skills base of the four centres through the training delivered to their staff. The training was delivered by the staff of the Canaan Institute and 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 mental health 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.
- An overview of project administration and educational responsibilities.

STAGE 2: Recruitment of Children (January 2020)

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 psychosocial 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);
- SOS Villages – Rafah (southern Gaza).



STAGE 3: Training Delivery to Children (15 January - 8 March 2020)

On 15 January 2020, 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

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 theatre 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 a child focus group at the end of the programme.



Facilitators lead a group of children in an arts and crafts activity, Gaza, 2020.

A total of 322 psychosocial sessions and 140 educational workshops were delivered to children over the four months of the project. A total of 8 workshops were delivered to the parents of the children across the four communities on psycho-social care with a total of 150 women attending.

Psychosocial Activities

The project prioritised psychosocial 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.

STAGE 4: Home Delivery of Training (19 April - 4 June 2020)

Delivery of the programme was suspended from 8 March to 18 April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent introduction of government restrictions including a ban on large gatherings and

the closure of schools and learning institutions. The lifting of restrictions enabled the project to resume from 19 April to 4 June 2020 with the use of personal protective equipment and social distancing. In order to ensure that the project met its targets in terms of the number of educational and psychosocial workshops, the Canaan Institute combined the delivery of training in smaller groups with home visits by facilitators.



Facilitators working with a young people at home on educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gaza, 2020. Canaan Institute, all rights reserved.

180 home visits were carried out for 90 children and their parents during the project to provide psychosocial and educational support services. They included providing each child with an activity bag of stationery and workbooks to continue their educational activities at home with the support of their parents. The workbooks focused on literacy, numeracy, arts and crafts. Facilitators also provided guidance to parents on the delivery of home learning as well as discussing any behavioral issues caused by mental health problems. The training focused on how to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of children during the pandemic.

STAGE 5: Family Workshops (January to March 2020)

A key part of the project activities involved the delivery of workshops to families of the children enrolled on the programme. The facilitators across the four centres organised a total of 8 psychosocial support sessions that were delivered to 150 parents.

The workshops focused on:

- Continuing the psychosocial support of young people at home that built upon the training delivered by the facilitators in each centre;
- How to recognise the 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. Gaza, 2020. Canaan Institute, all rights reserved.

The facilitators monitored the behaviour and progress of the children in responding to the psychosocial activities during the project and regularly met with parents to discuss the individual needs of each child. Following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in April, the facilitators delivered 52 follow-up educational visits (16 visits to the four partner institutions and 36 home visits).



Project Outcomes

1. Children

The commitment and participation of the children during the delivery of the programme was evident through their consistent attendance in the activities offered by the partner organisations and, later, through their active participation in regulated online activities during the COVID-19 period of restrictions.

The children developed new skills in being able to express themselves through social media activities posted and shared on each institution's Facebook page.

The children's relationships have developed significantly, which has positively impacted on their behaviours. There was also a noticeable improvement in the children's desire to understand and learn basic curriculum subjects as a result of the project's active learning methods.

The children and their parents regularly liaised with the facilitators during the COVID-19 pandemic which enabled the children to continue effective home learning.

2. Parents and the Management of Partner Institutions:

Parents attended and committed to meetings and visits to the partner institutions to support the education of their children.

There was a vibrant cooperation from all four partner organisations to support the work of the facilitators, in addition to keeping pace with all the activities of the program on an ongoing basis.



STAGE 6: Monitoring and Evaluation (June 2020)

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, providing advice on workplans and the delivery of activities.



Children working on a wall mural during the project, Gaza 2020. Canaan Institute, all rights reserved.

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.

An evaluation was carried out with a focus group of 10 children, where they discussed the activities of the project and stated that they developed their personal skills in discussion, dialogue, problem solving, planning and have strengthened their love of others. They also developed skills in developing teamwork and volunteering as well as building and establishing new friendships.

Children's Feedback on Home Visits

Children expressed their sense of delight, happiness and enthusiasm for the activities and their willingness and desire to continue carrying out activities at home to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Parents' Feedback on Home Visits

Parents welcomed home visits and stressed the children's need for these activities in light of the long period of isolation in March and April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They stressed the importance of activities for their children at home to continue their education.

Parents were supportive of their children playing a role in the prevention and safety measures introduced as a result of the pandemic. They appreciated their participation in the delivery of several fun yet productive ways and ideas to fill up their children's free time. The Implementation of the activities contributed to a reduced dependence on and use of electronic devices such as mobile phones among children.

Feedback from Facilitators on Home Visits

Home visits have achieved a range of important objectives, especially those related to providing psychological and social support to children and their parents during the pandemic.

The facilitators developed their skills to deal with parents and made it easier for the team to deal with children's problems. Their feedback was very positive about visits and their capacity to strengthen the educational skills and mental health of children.



Children displaying artwork as one of the outcomes of the 2020 programme. Canaan Institute, all rights reserved.

Recommendations to Enhance Future Projects:

- Implement community-based initiatives using activities that enable children and their parents to work together.
- Provide a large portable speaker with a microphone to carry out group activities.
- Organise an open day and a recreational trip for both parents and their children.
- To provide a school bag and stationery for each child on the programme.
- To organize a summer camp during the programme.
- To consider a raise in the facilitators' salaries



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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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