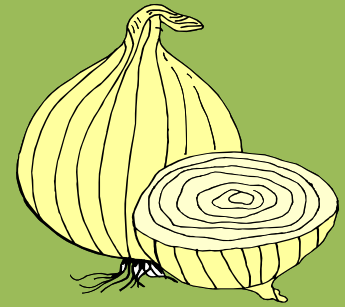


# The Palestinian Counseling Center

## NEWSLETTER

May – August 2014



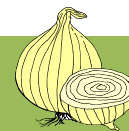
Welcome to the fifth edition of the Palestinian Counseling Center's newsletter! Through this edition, we hope to update our partners and friends on recent developments at the PCC between the months of May-August 2014, specifically focusing on PCC's emergency intervention during the difficult political circumstances that Palestinians underwent as a result of Israel's aggression on Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank throughout the summer months.

## The PCC's emergency response during the summer of 2014

Summer 2014 was filled with tremendous hardship for Palestine. What is typically a season of fasting, fast-breaking, reflection, rest and heat waves was this year filled instead with escalated violence and loss. Israel's attack on Hebron in the aftermath of the alleged kidnapping of settlers, and later the kidnapping and murder of 16-year old Mohammad Abu Khdeir from Jerusalem, wreaked havoc across the occupied territories. This was followed by the atrocious assault Israel launched on Gazans, which resulted in thousands of home raids, hundreds of arrests and 2,159 casualties. 2,131 Palestinians were killed over a 7-week period in Gaza and 28 in the West Bank.

In addition to these numbers, the intensified violence Israel has carried out over the past several months, aimed at creating a state of "shock and awe," has likewise left behind an immeasurable level of trauma.

Palestinians are already subjected to de-humanizing policies and political violence on a daily basis at the hands of the occupation, and this acceleration of brutality has only exacerbated its psycho-social impact. As the PCC's director, Rana Nashashibi, [told Ma'an News](#) in July at the start of the assault on Gaza, "Just surviving and being able to cope with everyday challenges is fatiguing people." Increased rates of sleep disturbances, bed wetting amongst children, miscarriages amongst pregnant women, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms including heart problems and high blood pressure are all linked directly with living in states of continuous stress and fear, like those that have permeated the West Bank and Gaza as of late. Ms. Nashashibi elaborates further, explaining, "People can hardly find the energy to live, let alone organize and resist. Israel's systematic policy of destruction and mass killings is definitely intended to debilitate the people and



leave them in a state of helplessness. For Israel a good Palestinian is either a dead Palestinian or a weak and helpless Palestinian who cannot fight for their rights.”

One of the PCC’s founding beliefs is in the fundamental connection between the wellbeing of the individual and the wellbeing of his/her surrounding community. The two are inherently connected and dependent on one another in order for each to flourish fully. For this reason the PCC has worked for the past 31 years not only on addressing mental health on a patient-by-patient basis, but also largely through efforts to reform the system of psychological care at the national level and advocating internationally for an end to the single biggest contributing factor to community-wide trauma: the Israeli occupation.

In order to address both the micro and macro components, the PCC worked fervently this summer to respond to the psychological needs of Palestinians as well as the underlying socio-political factors that contribute to the perpetuation of this distressing environment. The PCC exhausted its resources to tend to the mounting mental strains on Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Efforts were focused largely on occupied Jerusalem, a city that is home to the PCC’s main offices and at the heart of much of the summer’s outbreak of violence. Though lacking a physical presence in Gaza, the PCC also made every possible attempt to reach Palestinians in the Strip and make its services accessible. Therapists were available, for example, for emergency phone consultations and visited those injured patients transferred to Jerusalem and Nablus hospitals for in-person counseling treatments on a daily basis. Four PCC professionals were also able to gain access to Gaza at the end of August in order to provide direct psychological support and capacity building to professionals. Speaking to the broader workings that led to this substantial suffering, the PCC’s advocacy department additionally supplemented the organization’s clinical work with strengthened calls for an end to the occupation. The department drew particular attention to international accountability and the importance of recognizing the Palestinian right to resist colonization.

With the recently agreed-to ceasefire, the situation in the occupied territories is momentarily easing. As families attempt to recover from this latest round of terror, the PCC is working harder than ever to help bolster the mental resolve of its community. This summer has been a solemn reminder of the critical need for strengthened psycho-social care across Palestine, and the PCC is committed to its work both in creating a healthier, more resilient, Palestinian society and lobbying for an end to the occupation.

## **PCC’s Emergency Efforts**

*With Israel’s intensified operations and mounting violence in both the West Bank and Gaza this summer, the PCC stepped up its work to ensure that psychosocial needs in the community were being addressed.*

- The PCC conducted emergency interventions to those families most severely impacted by violence in Jerusalem, offering consultations and therapeutic services.
- A [solidarity event](#) between children in Jerusalem and children in Gaza was held at the home of 16-year old martyr Mohammad Abu Khdeir in Beit Hanina.
- PCC therapists were on-call 24/7 for phone sessions with those in Gaza. Four PCC professionals gained access to Gaza at the end of August in order to provide direct psychological support and capacity building for professionals working at WHO, Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, War Child, the Culture and Free Thought Society, and Women’s Affairs Technical Committee.
- Licensed counsellors also visited injured patients from the assault on Gaza in Jerusalem hospitals, providing therapy sessions to them and their family members as well as advising hospital staff on methods to enhance psychological recovery.
- The PCC issued several [statements](#) on behalf of the Coalition for Jerusalem, condemning the surge in violence and calling for international solidarity.
- The PCC produced a series of short videos on how to cope with the growing trauma. Videos are featured on the PCC’s [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages and include:
  - [How to deal with children in emergencies](#)
  - [How to deal with patients who have lost limbs](#)
  - [Guidance for educators in addressing the situation with students](#)
  - [Guidance for those visiting patients in West Bank and Gaza hospitals](#)
  - [How to deal with psychosomatic symptoms in children](#)
  - [How to deal with children who are in mourning.](#)



## PCC's non-emergency achievements during the summer months

### Media campaign on child protection

The PCC continued to implement a media campaign as part of the Child Protection program, supported by Save the Children, aimed at raising the awareness of children and stakeholders on child protection issues affecting children in Palestine and how to respond to them. The PCC produced three TV episodes on political violence, sexual violence, and child labor through Ma'an News Agency. The episodes were each broadcast twice on Palesitne TV during the month of June.

### Child Labor program

The PCC continued to implement the Child Labor program, in cooperation with Save the Children and through support from the European Union, aimed at improving services provided to children that are subject to economic exploitation. The PCC works with schools on improving their ability to detect drop out, as well as raise awareness of the dangers of child labor. The program targets schools, families and community members through awareness raising and advocacy campaigns.

During the summer period, the PCC organized two training workshops for children. The first training took place over the period of 3 days on the use of the media to address children's issues, with the participation of 30 children from Jerusalem and Nablus. The other 2-day training focused on creative writing, with the aim of developing the capacities of children to conduct media initiatives and improve their contribution in the development of print material that focus on child protection.



The PCC carried out a media campaign that included: the production of a radio show; the printing of 5000 copies of the Sun Rays Magazine; the production of several marketing materials, including school bags, notebooks, pens, pencil cases, pins, and stickers, all of which carry messages aimed at fighting the phenomenon of child labor. During this period, the PCC began to broadcast radio episodes through Radio Ajyal that focus on various child protection issues, and provide children opportunities to participate through calling into the program.

Through this project, the PCC also conducted other activities, including children's groups, weekly clubs and open days.

## Summer activities for children and youth

A total of 6 summer camps were organized by the PCC through various programs, including two by the Youth Resilience program, funded by Danida in partnership with Save the Children in Jerusalem and Bread for the World in Nablus; two by the Learning Disabilities program, funded by the Drosos Foundation in Jerusalem and Nablus; and two by the Child Labor program, funded by the European Union in partnership with Save the Children in Jerusalem and Nablus. A total of 196 children from Jerusalem and Nablus participated in the summer camps.



## Women's leadership training

The PCC carried out a 3-day leadership training for 32 women from Jerusalem and Nablus that were selected from the Women's Empowerment program, entitled, "Giving women a voice: Increasing the social and political participation of Palestinian women through improving their psychological wellbeing" supported by Cordaid. The leadership training focused on building the skills of women to lead in the provision of support to other women within their own communities. The leadership training was preceded by an intensive 6-month program of group work with marginalized women, whose participation skills, decision making skills and stress management skills were enhanced. Other activities included consultations with women, activities aimed at gaining the support, and changing the traditional attitudes of men, as well as lectures on mental health for men and women.



## Completion of the project: “Improving Community-based Psychosocial Support and Protection Services for Children and Adolescents in East Jerusalem”

With support from UNICEF and the European Union, the PCC completed a three year project aimed at enhancing the capacities of four community-based organizations in Jerusalem to improve their abilities to work with children through support groups and recreational activities. The PCC placed four coordinators at each of the centres, including: Al-Mada Center in Silwan, Rawdat Al-Zuhur School in Jerusalem, Al-Zuhur Center in Shu’fat camp, and Dar Al-Riaya Association in the Old City. A close-out workshop was carried out for the project, during which CBOs presented accomplishments, challenges, and recommendations for future work. The workshop was attended by 40 participants from partner organizations. Recommendations stressed the importance for continued capacity building of Jerusalem-based CBOs in the field of improving quality of psychological services and protection for children.



## Participation of two PCC colleagues in a three month training program in the United States.

Mr. Mubarak Awad, founder of the PCC and a continued supporter of our work, invited two of our colleagues, Mr. Mahdi Shalodi, a counselor in the Child Protection program, and Mr. Husni Aljawi, coordinator of the Youth Resilience program, to participate in a three month training program. The program is called Constant and Never Ending Improvement (CANEI), run by National Youth Advocate Program (NYAP) in cooperation with the Youth Advocate Program International (YAPI), which was also co-founded by Mr. Awad. The program works with youth at risk as well as youth delinquents, and emphasises the concept of non-violence, principles of restorative justice, personal development and identity formulation, and literacy. The intention for the participation of our colleagues in the program is to help augment their skills in implementing a similar program adapted to Palestinian culture based on their experience with CANEI. The training period started in July and ended in September, 2014.

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