



المركز الفلسطيني للإرشاد Palestinian Counseling Center

Electronic Newsletter

May / August 2013

Welcome to the second edition of the Palestinian Counseling Center's newsletter! During this quarter, we would like to share with you once again updates on the PCC's programs, activities and achievements.

Our second newsletter highlights the PCC's work on youth empowerment, in light of the circumstances that youth are undergoing in the Arab world in general, and the conditions that youth encounter in Palestine in particular. Through the stories included here, we offer some insight into the various methods the PCC uses to empower youth to become active agents in their communities.

The Arab Spring and its effects on Youth

Adolescence is a time of vast change for all youth, where impressionability is great and development of the self ever evolving. Understanding one's role in the world and fostering both practical skills as well as emotional preparedness are each integral aspects of this life stage. Safe and encouraging social surroundings are accordingly essential for teens in order to aid in their progress in becoming healthy, productive adults.

The ongoing Israeli occupation has nurtured instead an environment driven by violence and dehumanization that impacts all Palestinians – and particularly youth, who are especially vulnerable to being influenced by such an oppressive atmosphere. Exposure to abuse and exploitation at a young age can severely hinder one's capacity to maintain emotional stability and respond with newly-developed coping mechanisms. Likewise, the patriarchal nature of Palestinian society works to stifle individualism that exists as a natural product of adolescent development and replace it with conformity and religious compliance, prescribing life-roles for teens that perhaps would not have been selected without such heavy influence. This authoritarian social structure – pervasive around much of the Middle East and North Africa – often results in psychological alienation of youth, as it is within their natural inclinations to begin to question and challenge given realities. A 2009 Sharek Youth Forum survey stresses the impact of such environments, as it was found that an estimated 1/3 of Palestinian youth fear voicing their developing perspectives on set social and political conditions. Recently, the rise of the Arab Spring has witnessed an inevitable rebellion to such restraints, as young people have led the calls for social reformation and demanded freedom of expression across the region.

In Palestine, much of the PCC's work echoes these same calls. Growing up with the aforementioned repressive social components in place often leaves Palestinian youth without much room to properly develop indispensable, unique self-identities. The PCC thus



works to counter these aspects by providing safe spaces for teens to encourage such growth in a positive manner through its Youth Empowerment Program. Working with youth facing social, economic, and behavioral problems between the ages of 15-22 years, the PCC facilitates small empowerment groups in both Jerusalem and Nablus with the aim of bolstering participants' resilience levels and improving communication/self-expression methods. These groups address an array of topics, including who am I?, psychological and physical changes during adolescence, and accepting the "other" with regard to social, religious, sexual, and physical differences. Coinciding with these focused sessions are broader activities and workshops that bring together larger groups of teens in Jerusalem and Nablus to address these issues as well as others that are pertinent to their lives.

In addition to providing spaces for personal development amongst youth, the PCC also strives to address the issue on a wider level through targeting parents and working to change their approaches to this complex and critical life stage. Lectures are held in the two cities on a semi-regular basis addressing such subjects as who is the teenager?, psychological, physical, and social changes of teenagers, parent-child communication skills, and problems faced uniquely by youth. These lectures serve to enhance parent understanding of the distinctive needs of youth and healthy responses to them.

The Youth Empowerment Program, then, reinforces the PCC's philosophy of providing socially inclusive support to beneficiaries, integrating work with parents alongside activities directly with youth. Collectively, activities in this program aim to help teens in developing healthy identity concepts and greater senses of purpose – essential qualities for all young people who will continue on to shape a better and more promising future.

Summer camps for youth and children

The Palestinian Counseling Center organized a total of seven summer camps during the months of June and July 2013 for youth and children in Jerusalem, Nablus and Jenin.

Two summer camps were organized for youth as part of the Youth Empowerment/Resilience program in Jerusalem and Nablus, with the total participation of 60 youth in the 15-19 age group, to prepare them for joining the program during the upcoming academic year. The summer camps' goal was to introduce the participants to one another, as well as to introduce them to the concepts that will be covered during the program: self expression, accepting others, and changes in development.

The Child Protection and Child Labor programs also implemented 3 summer camps, with support from the French Consulate (FSD) and Save the Children, in Jerusalem, Nablus and Jenin. 180 children between the ages of 8-14 years participated in these activities. The children that were integrated into the summer camps are from marginalized areas, and are exposed to violence and danger on a daily basis. The summer camps worked on enhancing children's protection skills, building self-confidence, and strengthening their abilities to express themselves.

The PCC organized two summer camps supported by Drosos Foundation for children suffering from learning disabilities in the 6-12 age group from Jerusalem and Nablus, with the participation of 35 children. The summer camps are part of a wider program that works with children with learning disabilities and focuses on developing their skills in Arabic and Mathematics, as these are the main subjects of learning in Palestinian schools, in addition to children's life skills.

In addition to the summer camps described above, the PCC also supported four community-based organizations in Jerusalem in their own implementation of summer camps for children, including Rawdat Al-Zuhur School in Jerusalem, Al-Zuhur Center in Shu'fat Camp, Mada Center in Silwan, and Dar Al-Riaye Center in Jerusalem. These summer camps were attended by a total of 270 children that are part of a larger program that is implemented by the PCC entitled, "Improving psycho-social service provision in Jerusalem," supported by UNICEF and the European Union.

Launch of psychosocial intervention in the village of BeitSkaria

The PCC began to implement a psychosocial program for the residents of BeitSkaria, a village near Bethlehem, through funding from the French Development Agency (AFD) and the NGO Development Center (NDC). The intervention is based on an assessment that the PCC conducted on the psychosocial needs of residents living in Area C who suffer from inaccessibility to services as well as exposure to attacks by Israeli settlers living in the area. The PCC's psychosocial intervention includes the establishment of a safe play area for children in the village in addition to the facilitation of support groups for children, women and youth, and awareness-raising of the community around issues of mental health.



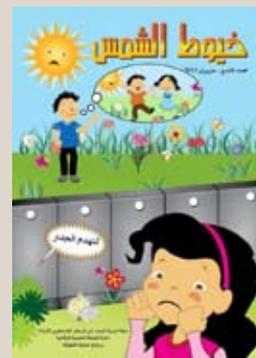
Production of a toolkit to work with children with special needs

The PCC produced a toolkit that focuses on working with children with special needs, supported by Save the Children as part of a larger program that works to address the educational needs of children with learning difficulties. The toolkit will be used as an awareness-raising tool by teachers, parents and educators to better serve children with special needs. The toolkit introduces parents and teachers to various difficulties faced by children with special needs, including visual impairments, hearing impairments, language disabilities, grapho-motor impairments, physical impairments, autism; learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD), and emotional and behavioral problems. The toolkit includes invaluable information to stakeholders, including indicators for early detection of problems by parents and educators and appropriate diagnosis tools, in addition to providing professional recommendations for intervention with children with special needs targeting parents and inclusive education teachers in schools.



Production of 9th edition of Sun Rays magazine

The Palestinian Counseling Center printed the 9th edition of the Sun Rays magazine, with support from the French Consulate (FSD). The magazine is a yearly production that is developed by the Child Protection program that targets children in the 6-12 age groups. Each edition covers a certain topic that raises children's awareness towards specific child protection issues. This edition focused on political violence, with the aim of empowering children to protect themselves from violence practiced by the Israeli occupation, particularly in Jerusalem.



Enhancing mental health for children and adolescents in Nablus

In cooperation with MDM-France, the PCC began to implement a project in the governorate of Nablus that addresses the mental health needs of children, adolescents and their families. As part of the intervention, the project will support the integration of services for children and adolescents in the Community Mental Health Center, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, through training and professional supervision; training 25 primary health centers in integrating mental health support in their services, as well as referral of beneficiaries to CMHCs; training of educators employed by the MOE to detect and refer children with behavioral problems to the CMHC; awareness-raising within the community on mental health issues, stigma, and services available to individuals living in Area C in the Nablus governorate, as well as parental guidance and advocacy on developing child-friendly mental health policies on the MOH level.

Implementation of youth programs

The PCC began to implement a program entitled, "Empower marginalized women, youth and children in facing poverty," funded by AGFUND. The project aims at improving the quality of education, protecting children from violence and empowering women with the aim of enhancing their social and economic roles and promoting gender equality.

The PCC also began to implement a project entitled, "Protection of youth and children in Jerusalem," with support from the Islamic Solidarity Fund/Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The project will work on improving the psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth in the 5-18 age group, and preventing their exposure to dangerous social and psychological problems through the employment of empowerment programs.

Kicking the Ball/Supervision Program

The Palestinian Counseling Center, in partnership with the Free University of Berlin and in collaboration with UNRWA and the Gaza Mental Health Program, launched the second phase of the joint project, "Kicking the Ball and Taking Care in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," an initiative that uses football as a gateway to teach youth essential life skills. The PCC's component focuses on training mental health professionals from across the West Bank in supervision methods, as well as integrating mental health concepts in football coaching.

The 2nd phase's implementation began in July with the graduation of 18 psychosocial specialists and counselors, each of whom obtained a diploma in the field of professional supervision from the Palestinian Counseling Center, the Ministry of Health, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation. The project's training of professional supervisors, the first of the two phases, lasted for a period of two and a half years.

The coming phase of "Kicking the Ball" will also include a training of supervisors program, run by 9 psychologists and social workers from the PCC and the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation who were diploma recipients, to oversee the training of other mental health professionals, as well as participate in a training of trainers workshops, following which they will gain diplomas in training of supervisors in 2015.

