



ثلاثون عام من أجل صحة
نفسية ايجابية في فلسطين

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المركز الفلسطيني للإرشاد

The Palestinian Counseling Center NEWSLETTER

January - April 2014



Beit Skaria village residents take part in recreational activities during a Jericho retreat

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Palestinian Counseling Center's newsletter! We would like to update our friends and partners on projects and activities implemented over the months of January-April 2014, specifically focusing on the mobilization of communities as agents of change in society, as well as improving the quality of psychosocial services in marginalized areas to contribute to community development.

MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Since 1983, the PCC has achieved much on the level of community change, which is reflected in the relationship of trust developed over the years between the PCC and the local community. The PCC has particularly been able to achieve change in attitudes towards mental health, and the positive impact therapy and counseling have had on the level of individuals and communities.

The PCC believes strongly in the connection between the health of a community and the wellbeing of its individual members. Accordingly, the PCC works to address psycho-social health on both levels, caring for personal needs of Palestinians through direct intervention and working on a broader level to ensure that communities provide nurturing environments for residents to thrive collectively. One of the ways in which the latter is achieved is through the improvement of available psycho-social services that contribute to community mobilization, and the support of community-based movements.

The PCC, for example, is working with the support of UNICEF to enhance the capacities of four community-based organizations in Jerusalem with the aim of improving their abilities to work with children through

support groups and recreational activities. In 2013, the PCC built the capacities of 242 professionals; supported 3075 children through empowerment groups and recreational activities. The PCC also worked with a total 592 parents, who are empowered to protect their children from violence and abuse.

Recognizing areas in which need is exceptional, the PCC also conducts community interventions. Such was the case in Beit Skaria, where the PCC worked directly with residents over the course of 8 months. The village of Beit Skaria lies approximately 9 kilometers south-west of Bethlehem. It was occupied in 1967, when Israel seized the area and declared it a closed military zone. The majority of Palestinian families were forcibly driven out of the area at this time, but some managed to remain and now constitute what is left of the Beit Skaria population. The village is presently surrounded entirely by the Gush Etzion settlement block, compelling Palestinian residents to pass through the occupied area and rendering them vulnerable to settler violence each time they wish to leave their immediate surroundings. The village likewise falls under the Area C designation, with Israel maintaining full military control over it



and restricting any sort of growth or development. Accordingly, Beit Skaria is subjected to intense levels of violence and oppression on a constant basis.

Based off of a 2013 needs assessment, the PCC found that this living environment contributed to significant levels of stress, fear and anxiety amongst residents, including both children and adults. These symptoms are manifested most commonly through heightened blood pressure, compulsive tendencies, hyper-activity and strong feelings of insecurity. As a result, the PCC began implementing psycho-social activities in Beit Skaria in June 2013, with support from the NGO Development Center (NDC) and the French Development Agency (AFD). These short-term psycho-social interventions included the establishment of a safe play area for children, facilitation of support groups for children, women and youth, and awareness-raising activities.

In its final activity as part of a project in Beit Skaria, the PCC participated in an open day for the village's residents. The "Festival of the Earth" event was organized by the village council and the Women's Association of Beit Skaria, in coordination with a collection of NGOs, including the

PCC. The day included performances of traditional Palestinian dance and song, speeches from prominent community members, as well as the presentation of a development plan for the area of Beit Skaria. Publications on the village were on display and products, produced by residents with psychological disorders involved in the PCC's rehabilitation program, were sold.

Numerous positive outcomes were achieved throughout the course of the project. Women developed their communication skills and stress management techniques; children were engaged in recreational activities and became more disciplined and organized; and the Ministry of Education has stated that supplying Beit Skaria's school with a counselor is among its top priorities. In general, the residents of Beit Skaria now have the confidence to take steps towards changing the dire conditions in which they are living. However, the PCC believes that there remains a great need for more in-depth intervention with the residents of the village. Working to decrease the growing sense of isolation and vulnerability amongst the community is a task that should be taken on by all responsible parties, including the PA, donor community, implementing agencies, and councils in Beit Skaria.

Women's Empowerment program

In cooperation with Cordaid, the PCC is implementing a program entitled, "Giving women a voice: increasing the social and political participation of Palestinian women through improving their psychological wellbeing" in Jerusalem and Nablus. This project seeks to empower Palestinian women, and contribute to the end-goal of enhancing the status of women in the country through a socially inclusive approach, targeting women and men collectively. The project is grounded within the idea that people must be given the tools to take control over their environments and assert their rights accordingly. The Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC) is facilitating women's empowerment groups, peer-support groups, and awareness-raising workshops with the aim of improving women's abilities to claim ownership over their lives and actualize their roles as productive members of their communities. The PCC will also form women's leadership groups to support women's involvement on the political level, whether through participation in change on the local council level or on the national level. What about the political participation? It is also good to name



Women's Empowerment group meets in Ras al-Amud, Jerusalem

the communities where we are and plan to be. Areas in which PCC will be working include Silwan, Ras Al-Amud, Shu'fat refugee camp in Jerusalem, as well as Tal, Rojeeb, Akraba, Qasra and Surra in Nablus.



The PCC hosts an open day promoting labor registration for the chronically mentally ill

The Palestinian Counseling Center, under the auspices of the Palestinian Ministry of Labor (MOL) and with support from Diakonia, jointly held an open day at the center's offices in Azzun (Qalqilya district) calling for chronically mentally ill patients to register at the labor offices of the MOL. The event took place as part of the PCC's efforts to build the capacities and confidence levels of chronically mentally ill patients. In doing so, not only are new economic opportunities created, but patients are also able to recognize and claim their rights to be active participants in their community.

Representatives from the PCC, Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, as well as civil society organizations attended the event, with the participation of a number of psychiatric patients and their families who are beneficiaries of the PCC's rehabilitation program. Event attendees stressed the importance of establishing a national plan to employ those with special needs, particularly people with mental disabilities.

The discussion also drew the conclusion that the registration labor law – which requires that 5% of jobs be dedicated for people with special needs – be properly activated, with participants explaining that employers need to be held accountable to this provision. It is important to be aware of the link between rehabilitation of chronically mentally ill patients and access to work, which contributes to positive mental health as a sense of dignity, and provides them with a source of income

to support their families. The presence of protected workshops is crucial to ensure that the chronically mentally ill have access to work that takes into consideration their needs and abilities.

Media Campaign on child protection

The PCC carried out a media campaign as part of the child protection program, with support from Save the Children, through which 4 radio episodes were broadcast on the Ma'an network. The episodes covered the following topics: political violence against children, (emphasis on sexual violence, harassment)and child labor. Children from the program participated in the broadcast, and the show received phone calls from children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As part of the media campaign, 3 radio spots were also broadcast during the period of 15/4-30/4 2014

This media campaign is one component of PCC's larger aim to affect change at the community level, starting at an early age, by working to influence attitudes around child violence and prevent abuse and exploitation.



Children take part in radio episodes for the media campaign on child protection

Participation in ARC (Arab Resource Collective) trainings

A number of staff from the PCC participated in a series of trainings in Jordan during the months of February and March 2014, organized by the Arab Resource Collective, based in Lebanon. The PCC is an active member of this network, which works on developing educational and psychosocial resources that are needed by professionals in the Middle East, with the aim of applying new knowledge in practical programs.

Two staff members from the Nablus office participated in a training in February on gender-based violence, based

on a manual developed by ARC. Three staff members from the Jerusalem and 'Azzoun offices participated in a four-day training in March on the use of 13 social and psychological resources, developed by ARC.

At the same time, Ms. Rana Nashashibi, director of the PCC, and Mr. Shadi Jaber, program development consultant, participated in a workshop in Amman to discuss the establishment of the Arab group for mental health, with the participation of several regional partners from Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon.

YOUTH RESILIENCE

In cooperation with Save the Children, the PCC is implementing a youth resilience program in Jerusalem, which builds on the strengths of youth while at the same time trying to eliminate the factors that promote failure. By doing so, young Palestinians are empowered and more capable of creating healthy change and progress in their communities. This year, the PCC introduced a new approach, which is to integrate university volunteers as role models for youth at risk in the project. The PCC will train 30 volunteers to work with youth groups through the youth-to-youth approach, and will conduct recreational activities as well as workshops with youth. The PCC will also work with parents of youth with the aim of empowering them to address youth issues, and to improve communication between them. Again the communities? Youth's participation in realizing social



Winter youth camp in Jericho

change, and their role as leaders in their communities, is emphasized in this project, through encouraging volunteerism and promoting engagement of youth in community activism.

THE PCC AND THE RESIDENCY RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

The PCC represented the Coalition for Jerusalem in Europe during February 2014, as a member of the Advocacy department traveled to participate in a panel event at British Parliament. Speaking on behalf of the International Campaign to Protect Palestinian Residency in Jerusalem, the PCC advocacy officer addressed the ongoing issue of residency revocation for Palestinian Jerusalemites. The panel event, hosted by British NGO Friends of Al-Aqsa, included the launch of a Jerusalem-focused policy paper, to which the PCC contributed. Additional events included meetings in Brussels with solidarity groups and members of the European Union, as well as a small speaking tour with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in northern England.

Coinciding with these activities, Rana Nashashibi, Director of the PCC, met with Mr. Martin Shultz, the President of the EU parliament on February 10th, through the EU representative office in Jerusalem. During the meeting, the EU's role on pressuring Israel to end violations of Palestinian rights in Jerusalem was discussed, specifically focusing on residency rights. Ms. Nashashibi also talked about the importance for European delegations to meet with Palestinian civil society organizations in Jerusalem. The PCC is representing the Coalition for Jerusalem in the **International Campaign to Protect Palestinian Residency in Jerusalem** with support from the European Union and Oxfam-Novib. The campaign works both to bolster the resilience of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem and push for global action to be taken to hold Israel accountable for its rights violations.

on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), who continue to receive supervision and follow up from the PCC. Through support from the EU, the PCC has trained a joint professional team of 11 individuals from the Culture and Free Thought Society and the Red Crescent Society that work on a program for women's health on crisis interventions.

Clean Jerusalem Campaign

As part of a 5-member Jerusalem consortium, the PCC joined in the launch of the **Cleaner and Healthier Jerusalem Campaign** through an open day in the Old City. Held on Earth Day, the event was attended by several hundred Palestinian Jerusalemites, including children, youth, men and women. A presentation on the importance of taking care of the environment was given, as was a performance by a Silwan scout group, and numerous recreational activities also took place. The **Cleaner and Healthier Jerusalem Campaign**, supported by the European Union and Oxfam-Novib, aims to build awareness and mobilize the Palestinian community in Jerusalem to claim their rights to live in a clean and healthy environment. The campaign wishes to pressure Israel to adhere to its obligations under international law and preserve sufficient living conditions for the occupied population – including public health and hygiene. Despite making up nearly 39% of the Jerusalem population, Palestinians in the city receive less than 10% of basic municipal services. This joint effort then works to empower Jerusalemites to demand their rights and build capacities to protect their homeland.



Convened Legals
The attorney general's office has been designated as the lead agency for the campaign. The campaign will be coordinated by the PCC and supported by the EU and Oxfam-Novib.

Health Goals
The campaign aims to improve the health of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem by addressing environmental and public health issues. Key goals include: reducing air pollution, improving water quality, and increasing green spaces.

Key Messages
The campaign will focus on the following key messages: the right to a clean and healthy environment, the importance of environmental protection, and the need for international law to be upheld.

Activities
The campaign will include a variety of activities, including: public demonstrations, educational workshops, and community clean-up events.

The PCC in Gaza

Over the past few months, the PCC has intensified interventions in Gaza on the level of capacity building of mental health professionals. Through support from the World Health Organization (WHO), the PCC built the capacity of UNRWA and Ministry of Health employees