



المعهد الفلسطيني للطفولة
Palestinian child institute
جامعة النجاح الوطنية
An-Najah National University



Date: 2.12.2023

Psychological Support and Purposeful Entertainment Activity in Ras al-Auja Area (Jordan Valley)

**Within the project, The First Thousand Days of a Child's Life, Matter
With the support of the Arab Network for Early Childhood and the Palestinian
Network for Early Childhood**

Targeted Area: Ras al-Auja area (Jordan Valley)

Ras Al-Auja area forms a group of Bedouin families residing in the area adjacent to the Al-Auja Spring, which is considered one of the largest water sources in the Jordan Valley.

The area is inhabited by Palestinian families whom are around 900 people belonging to six main large families (Al-Kaabna, Al-Tarifat, Al-Ghawanmeh, Abu Kharabeesh, Dar Jalal, and Dar Ishaq). People living in this area make a living by working in the field of agriculture and raising sheep, then selling the products in local markets.

The area is considered one of the most marginalized areas in Palestine, it lacks all services. The Palestinian population is located hundreds of meters away from the largest water source, despite that, they cannot obtain water because the Israeli authorities prevent them.

In this area, there is only one school, teaching students up to the ninth grade only, and a kindergarten, both of which are threatened of demolition by Israel.

According to health issues, people living in this area receive care through the Red Crescent outreach clinic once a month.

Mobility outside the area, whether for studying or health care, is fraught with risks of attacks either by settlers or the Israeli army. Moreover, lack of transportation causes the cost of this mobility very high as a result.

People living in this area are also exposed to harassment on a daily basis, such as confiscating their sheep and preventing them from grazing in the region, in addition to the presence of settlers who control the grazing areas in the region within a new policy of the occupation to support pastoral settlements, through which one settler can control tens or hundreds of dunams for the purpose of grazing, with the support of his country with water, electricity and protection. Recently, settlers hung blood-stained children's dolls in the Kaabna area as a threat for them and a prompt to leave the area.

Intervention:

In continuation of the implementation of the activities related to the campaign (The First Thousand Days of a Child's Life Matter), a team from the Palestinian Child Institute implemented a guided recreational activity for children in Ras Al-Auja area in Jordan Valley.



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This area was specifically chosen because it is subjected to harassment and deprivation of the most basic necessities of life.

This activity also comes to support people living there, the people that despite all the hard circumstances, they still stand like an icon of pride in the resilience of our Palestinian people encountering displacement and all practices of the occupation.

Decision to implement the activity was related to the situation in the targeted area, as the settlers are almost always moving in and around the area, in addition to the obstacles to mobility among the Palestinian areas due to the military checkpoints spread around cities and villages.



Based on careful coordination with the people of the region and the activity coordinator from Al-Ghor region, the PCI team set off on Saturday 12/02/2023 from An-Najah National University by bus, carrying a smile, hope, and the positive spirit that the team wanted to deliver to Ras Al-Auja community.

Despite the danger of the way related to current circumstances and the harassment on the roads among cities due to the ongoing war of genocide against our Palestinian people in the besieged Gaza Strip, which oppresses children, the elderly, and women, there was insistence from the team to carry out the activity and reach that area.



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On our way, we stopped at the occupation checkpoint, then they request our personal IDs, and after verification and examination, we continued our journey to reach the children who had been impatiently waiting for us since the early hours of the morning.

When the team arrived at the agreed-upon gathering place, they began dividing the children into groups according to age. The team members and volunteers distributed themselves into the groups to begin the activities as planned.

After completing the final activity, which was coloring the Palestinian flag to enhance and strengthen the idea of belonging and resilience, gifts were distributed to all the participating children, and the greatest achievement was in bringing joy and smiles to their faces.

Number of children who attended the activity: 70 children in the age group from 4 to 14 years old, in addition to some mothers.

The activity target: target from the activity was to deepen the feeling and importance of the child's right to learn, play, and entertain, feel safe in his homeland, and to increase their resilience, in order to break the feeling of helplessness that is generated as a result of the successive psychological trauma resulting from the settlers' attacks against them.

Through their telling during the activity, children confirmed the harassment and terrorism that Ras al-Auja community is exposed to, through talking about what they always witness, they said that they continuously see deprivation of water, and punishment practiced by the occupation if they try to reach the water well, such as cruel beatings and breaking of limbs, or imprisoning them. PCI also could notice that because children reflected all the violent they are exposed to, while they were playing, through some kind of violent play.

Progress of the Activity:

1. Children were divided into two groups.
Most of the activities were aimed at spreading the spirit of fun and happiness plus listening to them. All ages were combined together to encourage adults and children to play.
2. Groups were also divided into males and females out of respect for the privacy of the area. Males participated in all activities in addition to playing football and engaging in social activities.
3. As an introduction activity, PCI started with children by performing motor activities with music.

The motor activities aim to help the children calm down and relieve their tension.

This stimulates the child's motor skills, motor coordination and achieving calmness.



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Adults were involved to help us deal with the children. Not all 14-year-old girls participated in this activity because they were ashamed of the mothers who were present, but The nature of the area did not help us separate them from each other, especially since it was an open area.



4. **Parachute activity:** this activity aimed to create an entertaining atmosphere in addition to breaking barriers and also working within a team and participating. The harmony and adhere to the playing rules plus positive communication were noticed among all the girls, which made the parachute activity enjoyable and fruitful. All the girls, as well as the mothers, participated in this activity, which reflected that there is a clear need among mothers for support, relief and empowerment.



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5. **Drawing:** The activity of drawing on papers with the colors of the Palestinian flag with their own hands encourages the ability to participate with others, whether sharing the activity itself or sharing feelings, in addition to instilling cultural values in the Palestinian child and enhancing the sense of belonging.

Both adults and children participated in the activity, and mothers were happy. During this event, it was noticed that there was a need for 14-year-old children to play and release themselves psychologically through expressive activities such as drawing.

Mothers also drew, which made it more clear that they also had a need to express through art. During this activity, there were also children who began to talk about their struggle to obtain water. A child told us that his cousin, who was 14 years old, when he was trying to reach the well to get water, he was beaten by 15 settlers just because he wanted to drink.



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6. **Singing, performing Dabkeh, and music:** this activity is considered an entertaining activity in addition to motivating the child's motor skills and motor coordination in terms of dancing in spaces and within a specific rhythm. This activity also stimulates the ability to participate with others, whether participating in the activity itself, or sharing feelings. In addition to all of that, the activity implants cultural values deep down in the Palestinian child and enhance the sense of belonging.
7. **Football:** The boys participated in a football game on the area's stone-filled ground, spontaneously and without clear game rules or teams. The form of the activity took an honest picture of the children's need to release great energy, and it was clear in the dynamics of the play, how the children were divided into teams that reflected their family affiliation, as mentioned above, and of course, because of the hard conditions in which they lived, communication, play, and control of the ball were an indicator of the power and strength of the groups and individuals among them.



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8. At the end of the day, when trying to distribute gifts to the children, male children showed some violence, as they were unable to agree on playing and distributing balls between each other. They were violent to the point of beating, and they were unable to think about what others needed. This showed that they had a real emotional difficulty, which was related to trauma that they always need to protect as well as defend themselves violently in order to seek protection. This is a deep feeling of insecurity and is also related to trauma.



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Notes and lessons learned:

- The experience was wonderful, it helped us get to know more about that region and its residents, such as, their living conditions, their suffering, and the lack of clear childhood features of that region because childhood was stolen from those kids. All of the above forms an incentive for us to place that region and its children on the list of priorities for activities, events, and campaigns targeting Children in the upcoming future.
- This type of activities is very helpful because of the fact that people who work and intervene with children, are specialists. They are able to use play and drawing in a purposeful and systematic way to relieve psychological pressures. This is very important and must be always implemented in deprived communities.
- Despite the importance of intervening with children, this activity demonstrated that mothers also need serious interventions.
- Conducting the activity through volunteers helps reduce cost and supports carrying out future activities in the same way.
- If adequate financial support can be provided, The Palestinian Child Institute will intervene in this area on a periodic basis due to the severity of the need.



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