



Introduction

The East Jerusalem YMCA, through its Rehabilitation Program, continues to struggle for the realization of the rights of its participants; persons with physical disabilities (PWDs) and survivors of political violence. Despite the failing calls to revive the peace process, the continuous mobility constraints, spending cuts, and threats of further donor funding declines, the YMCA as one of the Palestinian prominent NGO's has been investing huge efforts to fulfill its mission in enhancing the psychosocial wellness of the most marginalized groups of the Palestinian communities.

While the humanitarian conditions continue to be perilous in Palestine, the political context at both the national and international levels remains ambiguous. At the national level steps toward reunification of Gaza and the West Bank are progressing slowly following the conditional reconciliation between the two main political parties in Palestine, although revived reconciliation offers a new hope for national improvements. At the broader level, the international community has diverged regarding the USA's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. However the Palestinian Authority and most countries have rejected it. The situation is further devastated with the occupation's plans to annex settler outposts in the West Bank and withhold the Palestinian Authority's revenue. The political turbulence and the declining patterns in donor funding have deeply affected the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians in general, the fact which continues to stagnate in the West Bank, with deeper concerns in Gaza.

Unsettled political, economic, social among other factors continue to intimidate the security situation and haunt the humanitarian conditions in Palestine. The psychosocial effects of this turbulence are immense and require continuous professional support to help the local marginalized communities of PWDs and survivors of political violence to restore their coping mechanisms and psychosocial and physical wellbeing.

The YMCA, believing in the rights of the Palestinian communities to live a better life, is determined to carry on with its mission of integrating and rehabilitating PWDs and survivors of political violence and enable them to accept the current disappointments they face but never lose hope in a brighter tomorrow. The coming pages illustrate some of the efforts exacerbated by the YMCA teams covering the West Bank Districts including East Jerusalem to maintain the psychosocial wellness of it targeted groups during the first six months of the year 2018.

Objective 1: Traumatized people and persons with disabilities as well as their families and community members have better access to psychosocial support and counseling services.

Facts:

1. 3690 individual and group counseling sessions were provided to persons with disability and traumatized.
2. 329 individual and group counseling sessions were provided to the needy immediate family members of the participants.
3. 343 direct participants were reached; 44.9% were persons with disabilities, 53.1% were survivors of the political violence, and 2% having both situations, 77.8% were youth (12-25 years old), 65.6% came from villages, refugee camps and remote areas where services are limited or non-existent, 24% were females.



Impact:

1. 94.4% of children and adults with disabilities and traumatized who received psychosocial support and counseling services have an increased ability to cope with their disability or trauma
2. 97.7% of the target groups parents and other community members are more aware of the rights and needs towards persons with disability and traumatized and have a more positive attitude toward them.

Stories to tell:

S.J. -9 years old- and his brother M.J. -6 years old- have witnessed the violence of the Israeli forces breaking into their house several times. One night, the children have seen the Israeli forces letting the dogs attack their father, tearing his shoulder apart, while he was screaming in front of them. In addition, they have experienced explosion, damage, and shouting from the Israeli forces who arrested their father after that. The children suffered from many psychological challenges following that incident; they reported constant fear, anxiety, nightmares, loss of appetite, involuntary urination, and the desire to stay alone.

The counselors worked with them using EMDR Group Protocol (butterfly hug) to heal the effects of the violent incident they witnessed, and they were able to get rid of the annoying symptoms and they were able to go back to school and their normal daily life before this traumatic event. The intervention with them was crucial to prevent the symptoms that resulted from the traumatic event from turning into a chronic illness.

The mother of M. & H.R., two boys with physical disabilities, from Hebron said:

"Your support has saved us from psychological and social difficulties, and helped me on the personal level to accept my children's disabilities, cope with their problems, work hard to improve their lives, take better care of them, stop being shy among people because of my children's situation and socialize with others and participate in social gatherings."

Objective 2: The targeted groups physical economic independency and rehabilitation is enhanced.

Facts:

1. 25 medical urgent assistive aids were provided to needy persons with disabilities.
2. 17 adaptations to add disabled access facilities in residential units and 1 university were conducted.
3. 201 participants received 469 sessions of academic and career counselling, while 121 participants received vocational assessment, of whom 70 were reached through the mobile unit.
4. 73 academic rehabilitation services were rendered to support participants.
5. 32 vocational training programs for participants above 15 years old were supported.
6. 6 self-employment projects were supported.
7. Facilitation of employment of 22 persons with disabilities.



Impact:

1. Approx. 56 persons with disabilities have enhanced their mobility and physical conditions through medications and renovation measures.
2. Approx. 254 persons of the target group are re-integrated in the educational or vocational fields.

Stories to tell:

M. Z. is an ex-detainee male who received vocational rehabilitation as part of the intervention with him. He said: "I was thinking that I was an unproductive human being. After being released from prison, I spent most of my time at home without studying or working. This has affected my psychological wellness and my family's psychological wellness too. After receiving your support, I started feeling more responsible and able to deal with the things that pressure me, especially after getting a professional certificate in the field of photography and being provided with a camera. I started doing photo-sessions, which helped me in getting a good amount of money monthly and become economically independent and able to support my family".

F.J. from Tulkarem, received academic rehabilitation through the YMCA's intervention. She was referred to receive remedial education lessons. She told us: "Now, I can better focus on my studies; I have higher motivation to continue and I learnt to organize my studying time. I get higher grades now and I have more self-confidence. I succeeded in building good relations with my fellow students and teachers, they were even surprised when I got those grades and started motivating me more. My relationship with the teachers and the students became much better, the fact which helped me reintegrate in the school environment."

The sisters N&N.J. from Hebron, had their bathroom adapted to suite their physical disability. They said: "We used to feel that we were a burden on the family, we felt embarrassed and ashamed because of our disability and especially when using the toilet. However, through the bathroom adaptation, we feel more comfortable and that we can rely on ourselves. We feel we live in dignity."



The East Jerusalem YMCA Rehabilitation Program

Update Bulletin #7
January 1st to June 30th, 2018

M.Q. from Tulkarem, was injured by the Israeli army and detained for a month in an Israeli hospital. His wound resulted in a physical disability that affected his ability to walk. A medical walker was provided for him. He said: "the device helped me in moving around the house and to be independent when it comes to my routine and personal needs. I started going out and I am now able to stand up and walk. I now feel comfortable outside and I am able to meet with others and socialize with people".

Objective 3: The capacities of qualified personnel working in the field of trauma and disabilities (social workers and counsellors) are upgraded.

Facts:

1. 5 trainings were provided to 73 participants with physical disabilities from different districts in the West Bank.
2. 2 trainings were attended by 18 staff of the YMCA.
3. 14 University students completed their internships at the YMCA.



Impact:

100% of the 18 trained social workers and counselors are using their new skills.

Objective 4: Advocacy activities in line with the rights-based approach contribute towards better rights of people with disabilities and traumatized in Palestine.

Facts:

1. 2734 persons were targeted by advocacy and awareness activities.
2. 20 coordination meetings were held with the different organizations working in the spheres of psychosocial rehabilitation, mental health, emergency interventions, and vocational rehabilitation on the local level.
3. 17 workshops, lectures and meetings were held to affect societal understanding and attitude towards persons with disability and survivors of political violence
4. 7 activities were organized with either schools or universities within the different districts of the West Bank.
5. 15 recreational / ventilation activities were organized in all West Bank districts including East Jerusalem, which targeted marginalized groups of survivors of political violence and PWDs, children and their caregivers.
6. 6 celebratory events were implemented in the different areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
7. Several meetings with key governmental agencies were held, specifically the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development, to guarantee the development and adoption of inclusive health insurance system.
8. Forming 7 friendship committees in schools to support PWDs.
9. In partnership with other organizations, the YMCA proposed a checklist, which includes disability sensitive indicators that could be mainstreamed in the inspection form to the Ministry of Labour.
10. Meetings were held at the district level with women organizations in order to sensitize them towards the need to mainstream disability into their policies and practices.



Impact:

The YMCA worked in cooperation with the Palestinian Disability Coalition and the Institute of Law at Bir Zeit University on a legal review which focused on five sectors: health, employment, education, protection, local authorities. We got the draft, did the review, and discussed the comments with the Institute, and waiting to receive the final document. Afterwards, we will be able to decide on four policy papers that we plan to develop with them.

Making a difference to live 'a better life'

In a small rural village within the district of Tulkarem lives R.AH., a nineteen year old young female, with her family of nine members in a small privately-owned house. Her father works behind the Armistice Line which requires him to leave the house for long hours. R.AH. hardly finished her secondary education, as she lived with Muscular Dystrophy that made her lose any control over her lower body. And thus she spends her day sitting in her electrical wheelchair moving around. R.AH is one of three siblings living with the same disability. Following her secondary education, she found herself left with no target, facing an anonymous future.

R.AH. faced several challenges in her life at different levels; social, psychological, as well as professional, as became evident through the assessment stage. She reported not being able to cope with her disability, nor accept it. She felt powerless, lonely, depressed, isolated from people, afraid and anxious towards her future. These emotions impacted her character and attitudes negatively as she turned into an angry introvert person, unable to socialize with her surrounding community, and incapable of setting a goal for her life.

R.AH. said: "I felt painful and sad, I found no hope in my life, I was lost and I had no clue what to do. I could not think about my future, what I would do, what I wanted to achieve. Anxiety tortured me and I found refuge in isolation. My relationship with my parents was pathetic and I had no friends."

The family was overwhelmed with hardships resulting from having three of its members living with muscular dystrophy. The parents felt sad, weak, incapable of fulfilling their children's needs, and disappointed with the absence of institutional care for their children. They worried about the psychological wellness of R.AH. as they witnessed her little by little isolating herself from everybody. Her parents said: "We are worried about R.AH. as well as the rest of our children. We are lost and we cannot see an end to our pain. We are weak, incapable and stressed out. We cannot carry on with our lives this way any longer".

Upon visiting R.AH. at her family's house, and introducing the work of the YMCA and what services could help her enhance her living, the counselor upon consultation with her and the family, set an intervention plan with well identified goals to achieve.

R.AH. was enrolled in the YMCA's Rehabilitation Program and received counseling sessions which enabled her to accept her disability and cope with it. She was given the space to ventilate the negative emotions she accumulated through the years and was taught techniques to help her manage her stress and increase her resilience. She received support to improve her social skills and communication with the community. To help her set a goal for her life especially at the professional level, R.AH. received career guidance sessions as well as a vocational assessment which examined her physical and mental abilities as well as her inclinations and the relevant job market. Based on the findings and upon consultation with the participant and the family, R.AH. received support to start a self-employment project in the field of selling clothes and accessories. The vocational rehabilitation she received helped her become economically self-dependent. By restoring her relations with the local community and developing her capacities at the vocational level, R.AH. was able to increase her self-confidence and self-esteem. Above all she learnt to accept her disability and cope with it to maintain her psychological wellness.

After receiving support from the YMCA, R.AH. said: "Today I know how to manage my stress and any negative feelings that might rise. I feel peace within myself, and I am able to focus more clearly on my future. I enjoy socializing with the rest of the villagers and I became able to build networks of friends. I can see clearly what I want to achieve in my life, and I am able to set goals for myself. I feel empowered." As for the impact on her professional life, R.AH. said: "The project affected my life as well as my family's. I am able to cater for my own needs and I am responsible for myself. I have many connections with the villagers near me. Life now has meaning to me."



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The family also reported witnessing an improvement and positive impact on R.AH. life. The family could see clearly satisfaction and content at R.AH. face and behavior. They felt much better after seeing how her life has changed and that she regained her psychological wellness and stability. The family expressed gratitude to the change in R.AH. life because by now they would be able to look into the challenges facing the rest of their children.