



Child Resilience in East-Jerusalem (occupied Palestinian territory)

With funding from Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MA'AN Development Center (MA'AN) and Save the Children are piloting a school based psychosocial support programme in seven schools in East Jerusalem. The programme focuses on a new approach aimed at improving children's psychosocial wellbeing in a prolonged conflict situation. The overall objective of this programme is to enhance the access of Palestinian children to quality and protective educational opportunities through specifically targeting East Jerusalem children and their families. The programme uses a nonclinical psychosocial and protection methodology that focuses on children's positive coping skills and resilience. We interviewed two of the participating children and asked them how they evolved during the programme.



Mohammad (12) "My opinion is important here"

Learning how to deal with anger: Mohammad's story

"Here, my opinion matters. I've learned a lot of things that I didn't know before. The way I behave towards my friends and family has changed."

Mohammed (12) lives in Sheikh Jarrah and attends the boys' school in Wadi Joz. "I used to be very violent and aggressive. I was tense and I often got into fights with my friends. In the programme we learn how to build good friendships and how to communicate. We make drawings and learn about our rights." The aim of the programme is to support the schools to create a protective learning environment.

The counsellors use different techniques such as games, films and stories to touch sensitive subjects. Suha, Mohammad's counsellor, is very enthusiastic about Mohammad's participation. "At first we really needed to convince him to come along and participate. But after the first session he was very excited and he encouraged other children to come to the sessions." Mohammad was really moved by the story of a boy that witnessed another boy being held at gunpoint in the street by a soldier. The boy in the story gets very scared and he doesn't want to go to school anymore. He empathizes with the boy in the story because sadly it's a reality in Palestine. "I see soldiers every day, and I often get harassed. It makes me angry because they take away our land. I am scared of them because I fear they want to kill me. I want to resist and fight for Palestine."

Dreaming of a better future: Zolfa's story

"I didn't use to share much with my mother, but during the programme she went to a few meetings with the mentors and this changed her behaviour towards me. Now we share more and she understands me better". Zolfa (15) is the number one student of her class. She participated in the child resilience programme because it focused on stress relief. "I loved the activities, they taught us how to communicate and we have all grown so close to each other, the group is very tight now." She got the chance to talk about violence, sexual abuse, friendship and her rights. Zolfa lives in Shu'fat refugee camp in Jerusalem. "I like living in the camp. I like living in crowded places; what I don't like, is the rubbish." Because of the discriminatory treatment of East-Jerusalem by the Israeli Authorities garbage is rarely being collected leading to piles of rubbish in the streets.

During the sessions they watched a film about sexual abuse, which she later showed to her siblings. The movie starred a girl that got abused and talked to her mother about it, who reacted in a calm and understanding way. "Instead of blaming the girl the mother tried to address the problem. My sisters liked the movie, but my brothers thought it was the girls' own fault because she went to the market by herself." Zolfa dreams to be a chemist, but also a psychiatrist. Most of all, she dreams of a free Palestine: "I wish I could be free and go wherever I want without having to cross checkpoints all the time."

Children in East-Jerusalem live under the constant pressure of the occupation and suffer from restricted access to services, home demolitions and forced displacement. By enhancing the coping skills of children we bring immediate and lasting relief to children's lives.