

NEWS

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ANERA

AMERICAN NEAR EAST REFUGEE AID

Preparing the Earth for Spring

By Ghadah Kaleel

Abu Salah is a farmer in Halhoul, a West Bank village near Hebron. He participates in a project undertaken by ANERA and agriculture partner ACDI/VOCA to help farmers develop their land to make it productive. Very outspoken and jovial, he was the obvious choice to represent the group of farmers in this area, and he speaks at length about his favorite subject: farming.

Abu Salah says the Land Reclamation Project is very helpful because land that was not usable previously can now be planted and provide income for families. The project hosted business workshops, and helped farmers build boundary walls, remove rocks and boulders, construct communal cisterns, and prepare land for planting.

Four dunums (about one acre) of Abu Salah's land were brought into production through this project. Encouraged, Abu Salah took the initiative to rehabilitate two more dunums himself. "If ANERA did not come with this project, I would have thought that the job

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PAUL SPIDOLA



Workers build a retaining wall in Halhoul.



“ANERA helped us to know where our land started and ended, according to the land deeds.”

—Abu Salah



GHADAH KALEEL

Yesterday & Today: 25 Years of Scholarships

Twenty-five years ago, when the ANERA Scholarship Program began, donors contributed scholarship assistance to two Jerusalem schools: Dar El Tifl (House of Children), a school and boarding home for girls, and Rawdat El-Zuhur (Garden of Flowers), an elementary school for boys and girls.

Through the years the Scholarship Program has grown. The number of donors, the size of their gifts, and the number of schools and students who benefit all have increased. This year ANERA donors are helping to cover educational costs for over 200 students in seven schools. In addition to the two Jerusalem schools, funds are also given to two institutions in Gaza, and one each in Tulkarem, West Bank; Salt, Jordan; and Beirut, Lebanon.

Anniversaries are good occasions to look back and celebrate. The picture above is of five little girls who were once kindergarten students at Dar El Tifl. We can only imagine their lives today as women who have just turned thirty! Educated women have an increased chance of enjoying healthy families, achieving success in the work place, and contributing to their society. We hope that has been the case for these five little girls who, with assistance from the ANERA Scholarship Program, are now educated young women.

We celebrate the lives of the thousands of Palestinian, Lebanese and Jordanian children who have benefited from scholarship assistance. And we pause to thank each donor who has given to the Scholarship Program during the past twenty-five years.

For more information about how you can help a child in the Scholarship Program, contact Adrian Loucks, Director, Scholarship Program, at (202) 347-2558 or adrian@anera.org.

Preparing the Earth for Spring

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was too big for me, and would not have done it,” he explained. “Before, these six dunums were not bringing in even 100 shekels (\$20 US). Hopefully we can get 3000 shekels from planting them this year.”

Abu Salah has been working his family’s land since he was a child. He plants tomatoes and grapes. “The grapes from this region are famous. We sell some, and use the rest to make molasses, raisins, and jelly. It makes us happy to see our children eating ... something we planted in the ground.” In addition to Abu Salah’s immediate family, his four brothers and their families also help with the farming and share the produce and income. “More than 50 people in my family are benefiting from this land,” he reported.

Abu Salah’s philosophy is “When a person works to fix his land, he is even more attached to it.” When asked how he contributed to the project, he answered proudly, “I hired four workers, and paid for 28 [work] days. I hired a bulldozer for 20 hours of work.” He also spoke about clearing large boulders from the land and hiring a truck to carry out four loads. He plowed eight hours on his tractor and fertilized the land. He wanted to be involved in the project, not just sit back and watch his land being developed.

Land boundaries are another topic Abu Salah mentioned. “We all knew we had land, but we never knew the exact boundaries of our land. ANERA helped us to know where our land started and ended, according to the land deeds.” Abu Salah also wants his children to feel connected to their land. He shows them the boundaries, so they know what land is theirs. His wife helps him farm the land, as do two of his children.

Just before going back to his field, Abu Salah’s farewell was, “Thank you to ANERA’s engineers and workers for bringing good to this village. You have helped all people in the village with this project.” ▀

Not Just Monkey Bars

By Ghadah Kaleel



Nadeem and his classmates enjoy their new playground at Dar El Kalima School in Bethlehem.

PHOTOS: GHADAH KALEEL

Nadeem is a talkative little boy who likes to have his picture taken and talk about his new baby sister. However, when the subject turned to where he lives, he clammed up and lowered his head, looking away. He was not willing to tell me anything about where he was from, except a whisper that he was from ‘home.’ Eman, his teacher at Dar El Kalima School in Bethlehem, saw the exchange and told me his story.

Six months ago, this three year old, along with the rest of his family, was awakened from sleep by the startling sounds of his house being bombed. As he heard his teacher talking about it, he found the courage to tell me what happened. “We were sleeping and the glass was breaking and crashing and they bombed our house.” Later, it was known that Nadeem’s house was bombed by mistake, and a neighboring house was the actual target.

Nadeem is just one of many feeling the stress of four years of violence. Parents and teachers constantly search for ways to help the children release their frustration and energy in a positive manner. At one school, Dar Al Kalima in Bethlehem, students received such an outlet when a new playground was built on the grounds of their school.

The playground was the first one donated by Playgrounds for Palestine (PFP). PFP is a U.S.-based not-for-profit organization dedicated to building playgrounds and recreation areas for Palestinian children. PFP tried to deliver this playground to Palestine for almost a year, and finally was able to get it shipped and delivered to Bethlehem due to the efforts of ANERA staff. Two delegates from PFP came to oversee its installation. PFP and ANERA have partnered since to build two more playgrounds in the Gaza Strip: one in Rafah and the other in Khan Younis. A fourth is being planned for the Hebron area.

Prior to building the Dar al Kalima playground, teachers had to arrange special trips to local parks and playgrounds. Given the checkpoints and roadblocks, it was a major logistical problem. Because children have a natural desire to play and expend their energy, these trips were taken on a fairly regular basis, but at the cost of disrupting

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MfP Reaches Out to Mothers

Creating Meals to Reduce Malnutrition

By ANERA Staff

The atmosphere is vibrant in the Al-Ehsaan Al Khaireia Preschool as health instructor Haifa Mezhat begins to lead a nutrition-training session with eighteen mothers. While the women find their seats, two teachers usher the toddlers from the playground into the next room. Khader, an animated five-year-old, is one of the first into the room and eagerly awaits the coming snack: milk and fortified wafers. His three-year-old sister, Wa'ed, however insists on staying with their mother, Hiam Shafia. It is her second time participating in the program this year.

Haifa begins the class by raising multiple issues about children's health and nutrition. Some of the topics include identifying symptoms of anemia, the importance of milk for early childhood development, and nutritious recipes that use alternative and affordable foods. Throughout the session, women ask Haifa to clarify new information and give examples on how to handle certain situations. They clearly are making the most of the session and Haifa confidently addresses all of their concerns.

The Al-Ehsaan Al Khaireia Preschool, located in Rafah, is one participant in ANERA's Milk for Preschoolers (MfP) program. The program feeds more than 13,000 children in 110 preschools in Gaza with a daily snack of locally-produced milk and high-energy wafers every school day, and offers nutrition and health training programs to teachers and mothers.

The connection between the deteriorating economic situation and health is a growing problem throughout Gaza. According to the United Nations, 1.3 million people currently do not have a reliable source of food, and another 586,000 are at risk.

In Gaza, where unemployment is estimated between 40% and 50%, many families rely on food aid for staples. Haifa believes it is important for families to learn better nutrition practices in order to make healthy use of accessible food. "Our society is economically poor which results in poor health practices. It's important to improve habits for ourselves now ... We don't have the money to

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ROBYN LONG



Hiam Shafia, participant in the nutrition training program in Gaza.

A First for the Palestinian Territories

ANERA is now distributing *fortified* milk in the Milk for Preschoolers program, a first for the Palestinian Territories. The milk, branded "Rawad," or "Pioneers," contains iron, zinc, folic acid, and vitamins A and D. This is the first locally-fortified milk ever processed in the West Bank and Gaza.

Monkey Bars

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class time and adding extra expense to budgets already stretched quite thin.

Eman has seen a positive change in her students since the playground was installed. “They are much more willing to receive and complete assignments now because they know they can go outside afterwards,” she explained. Eman also has seen a difference in Nadeem’s behavior. “He used to cry for his parents when they dropped him off in the morning. Now, he waves goodbye happily as he takes his seat.” While the school counselor helps Nadeem work through his traumatic experience, having a physical outlet of fun and games helps him to look forward to school every day. When asked if Nadeem likes school, he shouted, “Yes!” His favorite part of school is “playing and drawing, and especially the slide.” ▀

Mothers

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[buy] meat ...” she states. “It is helpful to learn recipes with alternatives to meat ... Plus, I don’t always know what is available in the market because of the [Israeli] closures. It’s a challenging situation.”

In her training program, Hiam learned a number of health tips for her children. One recommendation is to watch closely their calcium intake during the early stages of their development. “I’ve worked hard to get them drinking milk. I tell them that if they are healthy they won’t have to visit the doctor,” she says. With a family of five, the money spent on medical care is significant. “That’s why it is even more important my children are healthy,” she says. “It is difficult to purchase medicine. Being healthy helps save money.”

Hiam and other women in the course unanimously agree that the length of the training sessions should be extended. “It should be longer so that we can learn more. We benefit from learning new things ... Whenever I return from a session, my sister is always eager to hear what I learned,” Hiam explained.

Towards the end of the session, the preschool teachers distribute milk to the excited toddlers. Each one waits patiently for help opening the milk-box straws. Khader selects banana flavored milk for himself, and strawberry for his sister, then dashes back to the playground. ▀

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AMERICAN NEAR EAST REFUGEE AID

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