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Early Childhood: Defining the Needs

To do any kind of relief or long-term development work, the first place you start is by gathering data. What is the community asking for? What can be done to help? What works and what hasn't? Who has already tried? How can we help? When researching ways to support families in the West Bank and Gaza, the answers to these questions can sometimes be tough to come by. In most cases, impossible to come by unless you are working within the community and asking these questions and collecting the data yourself.

It is striking how often the West Bank and Gaza are greyed-out on maps and overlooked. So much becomes distorted through the lens of politics. Even conversations about the needs of young children become highly politicized, when those young children happen to be Palestinian. The collection and dissemination of information about what is helping – what is working in Palestine – can have serious positive implications for the growing global community seeking to know more and to help Palestinian families.

ANERA is one of the few international organizations with networks for collecting data and for reporting on the conditions of life in the West Bank and Gaza. As such, we are pleased to announce that, this winter, ANERA is releasing two reports about early childhood development in the region.

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ANERA NEWS

The ANERA newsletter is published quarterly by American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a non-profit agency established in 1968 and dedicated to providing development, health, education and employment programs to Palestinian communities and impoverished families throughout the Middle East.

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COVER PHOTO: A preschooler in Gaza enjoys a book in the new reading corner ANERA installed in her school.
Rania Elhilou, photographer

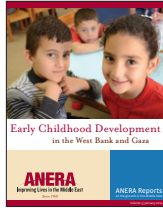
Early Childhood: Defining the Needs

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Early Childhood Development in Gaza: An Assessment

An assessment of the early childhood development (ECD) sector in Gaza with a large body of data collected through visits to dozens of preschools as well as interviews with hundreds of caregivers and preschool teachers.



Early Childhood Development in the West Bank & Gaza

From our on-the-ground series, this report gives a broader description of the challenges and progress made in the ECD sector in both Gaza and the West Bank (the timeline on pages 4-5 is from this report).

ECD in Palestine is compromised by a number of serious deficiencies in the quality of and access to programs and services, among them: low enrollment, inadequate teaching facilities, inexperienced teachers, reliance on out-dated learning methods, limited parental involvement or understanding due to external pressures and lack of resources. ANERA's new reports illustrate these areas can be improved dramatically given the right attention and care.

We hope that by releasing these documents, the increase in attention brought to this vital but neglected area of Palestinian society will translate into positive changes in people's lives. Changes such as the ones experienced by...



...**Hala Abu Taqey**, a teacher at a Gaza City preschool, who is seeing her students blossom with active learning through arts and drama.



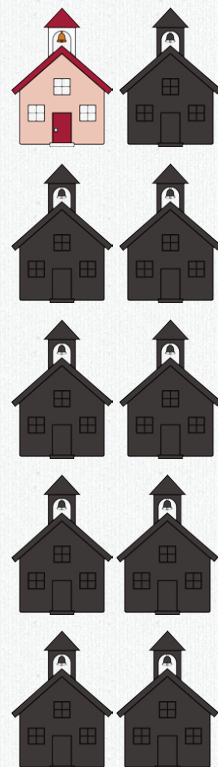
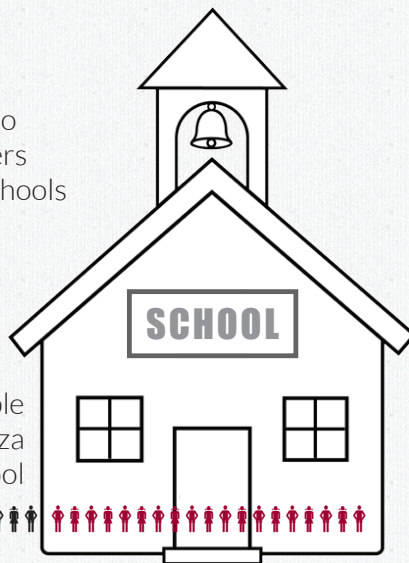
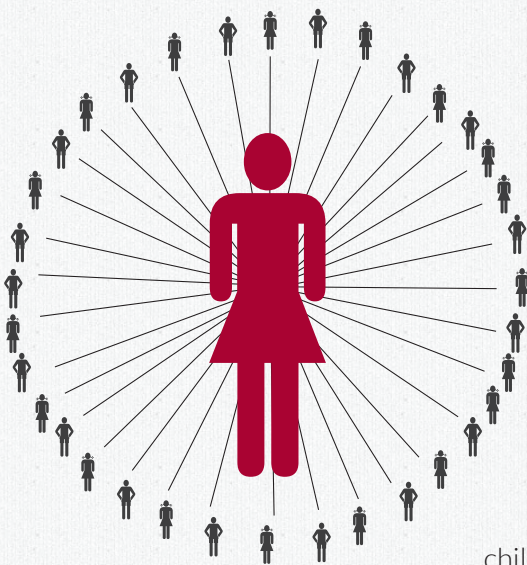
...**Iman Abdulkarim**, a teacher at a Bethlehem preschool, who says that parents report their children are happier in school than ever before.



...**Abdallah**, a preschooler in Qalandia, West Bank, who loves the new colors in his school and now safely enjoys the swingset and slide in the new playground.

Children who love to learn at an early age become lifelong learners. Nurtured children become nurturing adults. An investment in early child development is one that yields a healthier, better educated and more productive Palestinian society. It is important we bring these stories into the light and out from under the shroud of politics. Hopefully you can share these stories with others who are seeking a better understanding of life for families in Palestine, who, like everyone, only want the best for their children.

For our reports on ECD, please check anera.org/reports.



When Bahgat J. Tarazi, a long-time donor to ANERA, died a few years ago, he left instructions with his family that said part of his estate should be used to improve the education of Palestinians. Bahgat's brother Charles came to ANERA for help. He was intrigued when he heard about an extraordinary woman who was holding preschool classes in a run-down building in a village near Hebron. ANERA had been training her teachers and providing educational materials, but it just wasn't possible to make the necessary repairs on the building.

The idea was born. Using the gift from Bahgat Tarazi's estate and with additional financial support from the extended Tarazi family, a brand new preschool would be built for Palestinian children. The preschool will include fully-equipped activity rooms, a reading corner, child-sized restroom facilities, an office and a beautiful outside playground area for 50-75 children from a cluster of villages in a remote southern region of the West Bank.

The legacy of Mr. Tarazi and his entire family will open the world of education to Palestinian children for generations to come.



Charles Tarazi & his daughter Monica

Highlights from ANERA's Early Childhood Dev

2003

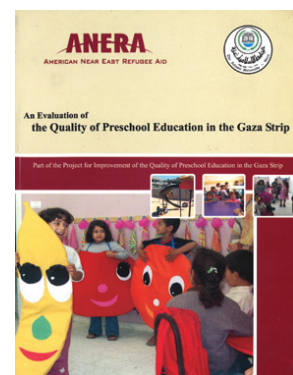


Began the eight-year Milk for Preschoolers program, delivering a vitamin-fortified carton of milk and packet biscuits every school day to thousands of children in Gaza.



2005

Published an evaluation of preschools in Gaza measuring the quality education based on curricula, teacher qualifications, materials used and parent participation.



2010

Four preschools in Nablus and Bethlehem, West Bank, began piloting the different facets of ANERA's ECD programming: school renovation, teacher training, positive parenting, artistic expression and reading aloud.



Renovated four pilot West Bank schools.

2011



Launched "Arts for Childhood," delivering music, drama and expressive arts training sessions for preschool staff at four West Bank pilot preschools.



Brought together 45 parents for "positive parenting" workshops at four West Bank preschools, where they learned simple and effective ways of ensuring their children's optimal development.

2012



Launched the Let's Read! initiative to give children access to quality books and learning materials and to increase teacher and parent awareness of the importance of reading aloud and making the experience fun and interactive.



Renovated 30 preschools in Gaza.

2013



Transformed 15 preschools in Jerusalem, Hebron and Gaza into safe and stimulating places for young children with generous support from Dubai Cares.

Began construction of a brand new preschool in Al-Majd in Hebron.

For 2 years, delivered a new pair of TOMS shoes to every child at 130 Gaza preschools.

2006-7

- Delivered an in-service training course on active learning techniques for 80 Gaza preschool teachers.

2009-10

- Renovated 42 Gaza preschools, making them safer, cleaner and more child-centered learning environments.

Screened and tested 20,000 preschoolers in Gaza for hearing impairments, providing 100+ with hearing aids.

2009

- Ministry of Education approved a multi-year initiative under ANERA's leadership to map out a national strategy for ECD. The initiative brought together teachers, parents and other ECD stakeholders to promote quality preschool education.



- Began offering an in-service ECD training certificate. 24 teachers and administrators started an intensive 35-day ECD training course on child development, child rights, learning theories, safety, room organization, arts and play.

8,000 preschoolers in Gaza got a new pair of Crocs shoes.

Awarded \$2.6 million USAID grant to expand ECD programming across Gaza.



- Hosted health-themed summer camps for 2,000 preschoolers in Gaza.

- In the West Bank, 300 preschoolers attended expressive arts summer camps.

- Conducted 704 "positive parenting" sessions, reaching 3,277 caregivers and parents, in Gaza.

Delivered 40 health education sessions for parents on parasite infection, prevention and personal hygiene in Gaza.

- Established special reading corners in 29 preschools and 15 community centers in Gaza.

5,345 Gaza preschoolers got their own bags filled with children's books.



- Trained 360 Gaza teachers and other preschool stakeholders on fundamentals of ECD, reading aloud techniques, positive-parenting strategies and facilitation skills.

- 37 preschool teachers from Jerusalem and Hebron completed 35-day in-service teacher training program.

- 9,000 preschoolers in the West Bank and Gaza got their own bags of books.

- = Infrastructure
- = Teacher Training
- = Health
- = Reading
- = Parenting
- = Arts

Some Things We're Doing This Winter

ANERA is having a busy winter both responding to urgent relief needs in Lebanon and Gaza as well as delivering development projects that will have a long-term impact. These are a **few highlights**:



new sinks in a Gaza preschool



Al Bayyara park in West Bank



testing for parasites in Gaza

In the wake of the terrible floods that hit Gaza, ANERA delivered home cleaning & personal care kits to hundreds of families. In Lebanon, we are **distributing basic winter supplies like quilts, heaters, emergency lights and warm clothes for 2,300 Palestinian families** from Syria seeking shelter in the Ein El Helweh and Mieh Mieh refugee camps.

ANERA just **completed renovations and upgrades to 8 West Bank and 4 Gaza preschools**, which include new bathrooms and water fountains, lighting, ventilation, curtains and carpets. We are also building a brand new school in the West Bank town of Al Majd (see the donor story on page 3).

The fourth **Al Bayyara park and playground opened** in the West Bank, one of a series of new parks that turns hazardous, unused areas into playgrounds and green havens where families can gather and relax in safety and comfort.

At 52 Gaza preschools, 1,126 children completed ANERA's **treatments for intestinal parasites**. We also conducted awareness sessions for parents and gave them special hygiene kits to help prevent infections.

In Beddawi refugee camp in northern Lebanon, ANERA took the shell of a clubhouse and a devastated soccer field and transformed them into a beautiful new sports arena. This ANERA project is now bringing together 24 young soccer coaches to learn **conflict resolution skills through sports training** – an especially important activity in this area where intermittent violence is an on-going problem.



new soccer arena in Lebanon



Leave a legacy.

Include ANERA in your will.

Through bequest gifts, you can demonstrate your commitment to ANERA's work and set an example for others. These gifts mean ANERA will be there tomorrow, so people throughout the Middle East may live with the dignity we all deserve.

For more information about making a gift from your estate, please contact:

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anera.org/legacy

Early Childhood: Defining the Needs

ANERA NEWS

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Dear Friend of ANERA:

As I write this, terrible flooding has hit Gaza and cold, snowy winter weather is making things miserable for thousands of refugees from Syria in Lebanon. Thanks to the generous help of supporters like you, we have been able to ramp up our relief work, supplying basic necessities to thousands of needy families.

We also continue our development work across the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon. This issue of our newly designed newsletter brings special focus to early childhood development in the West Bank and Gaza, a vitally important but neglected sector of Palestinian society. ANERA has been leading the way in improving school conditions, pedagogy and community involvement.

I want to take advantage of this opportunity to wish you and yours a peaceful, happy new year. Let's hope that 2014 also brings better times for families in the Middle East.

Bill Lowman
ANERA President

