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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Early Childhood: Defining the Needs

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.
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.

A Tarazi Family Legacy

By the Numbers

- 75% of Palestinian children live in poverty
- 62% of eligible children in the West Bank & Gaza are not enrolled in preschool
- 35:1 is the ratio of preschoolers to teachers in many West Bank preschools
- 3% of Gaza preschool teachers hold an education degree or diploma
- 90% of preschools are in poor shape and/or are not designed as learning spaces

Charles Tarazi & his daughter Monica

Our Community
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.

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.

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

ANERA’s ECD programming is funded by the State of Kuwait, USAID, Dubai Cares, OFID, OCHA, UNHCR, Johnson & Johnson and individual donors.
Highlights from ANERA’s Early Childhood Development Program

West Bank & Gaza [2003 - 2013]

**2006-7**
- Delivered an in-service training course on active learning techniques for 80 Gaza preschool teachers.

**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.

**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.

**2006-7**
- 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.

- Hosted health-themed summer camps for 2,000 preschoolers in Gaza.
- In the West Bank, 300 preschoolers attended expressive arts summer camps.

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

- 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.

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

- 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.

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

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

- 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.

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

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A NERA 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:

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 in an on-going problem.
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:
Nancy Nye
nnye@anera.org or 202-266-9720
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 Linehan
ANERA President