

# Learn, Create, Grow

## Anera's 2019 Annual Dinner

### President & CEO Sean Carroll's Remarks



*Anera President & CEO Sean Carroll speaking to dinner guests. Visit [anera.org/learncreategrow](https://anera.org/learncreategrow) for more photos from the 2019 annual dinner.*

Good evening, I'm Sean Carroll, Anera president & CEO. Thank you all so much for being here. And not just tonight. For being with Anera always. You make our work possible. And because you are so committed to our mission and our results, you make the tough times bearable. And these sure are tough times! Last year, you'll remember, we thought things couldn't get worse. And then, they did!

So, I thank you for your attention for just a few minutes tonight to talk about why and how we are holding on, and building back, with a particular focus on education.

First, I want to recognize and thank our Honorary Hosts. Thank you all for your support, and many of you for being here tonight – I know Secretary and Lilibet Hagel are here, Ambassador and Patricia Veliotis, and Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib – thank you!

A big thanks also to our sponsors: Leaders – Aramco, the Foundation for Middle East Peace, the Olayan Group, and Robert and Susan Trice; and Benefactors – Judy Brand and the Hamad-Daoud-Siam Families. We thank you and all our sponsors for your ongoing support and your presence by our side.

And, our honorees: Ambassador “Skip” Gnehm and the Tarazi Family. I hope you know how much I and everyone in the Anera family loves you and applauds your extraordinary support and service. More on them later.

And finally a very big thank you to our expert and committed staff in Washington and ten offices in [Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan](#); our international advisory council; and our board of directors. Thank you David Nygaard for being about as perfect a chairman as one could hope for over these past three years.

Last year was our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and our dinner netted over \$500,000. You might want to know how we spent that...

*We bought a yacht!*



*Former Palestine Country Director Paul Butler and Anera CFO Donna Diane sit in a wooden playground boat at the Nawa for Culture and Arts Association in Deir Al Balah, Gaza. In 2017, Anera constructed part of the Nawa complex.*

No, “JK!” as our kids would say. Here’s the real deal – a quick representation of how we use your support for programs in...

[Agriculture, economic empowerment and economic growth, education, community infrastructure of all kinds, solid waste management, water and sanitation, and medical relief.](#)



And, despite a large dip in our funding because of the current administration's cuts to aid to Palestinian communities, **still more than 92% of our funds – your support – goes directly to programming.**

Each one of these program areas is broad, multifaceted and important to our work – none more so than education, our theme for this evening.

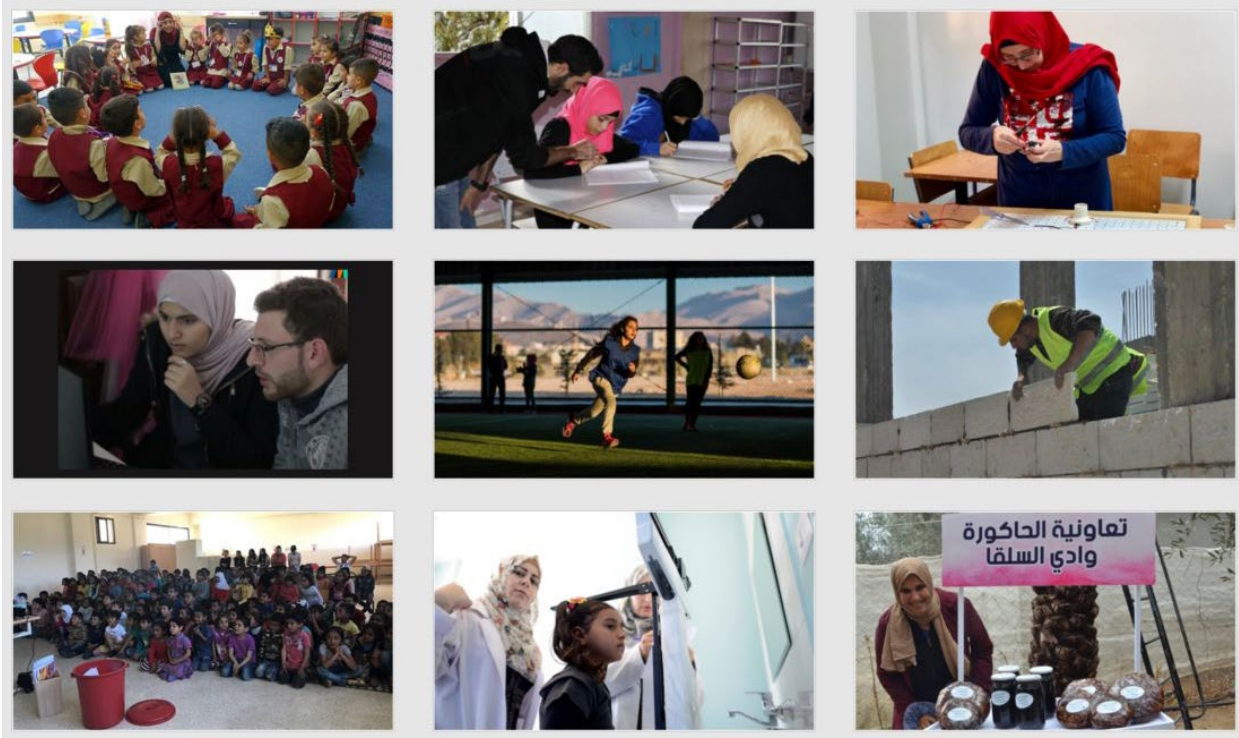
Since the beginning of Anera's work, and everywhere we work, education is key. Palestinians have told me "education is our religion." Palestinians, particularly those who have lost home and land, and Syrian refugees forced into migration, put faith in education to help them survive, and, given the chance, to thrive.

[Education](#) is central to our work, because it is central to human development. Anera's education work is broad because education starts early and should never end – a person never stops learning. Now, especially, in a day and age when even our settled lives sometimes seem unnervingly unsettled. Just imagine – and some of you don't have to imagine because you lived it – imagine what it's like to try to keep learning when you've been forced to leave behind your home, your land and your school. Education is now more fractured or modular, and comes in various shapes, sizes and durations. All ages are learning all sorts of skills at different times in their lives. So, Anera provides learning that fits the need, the moment and context now, but is also transportable, transferable, for another time and land later.

Anera's education work includes:

**Holistic early childhood development; non-formal, basic education; vocational training; career acceleration; teaching job and life-skills and computer coding; sports for development; construction and refurbishing of schools at every level; community mobilization, health education – including nursing scholarships; and capacity building for farmers, cooperatives and NGOs.**





Let me tell you three quick stories about our work in these areas – Anera's three largest education programs at the moment:

Our flagship education work in Palestine is our [early childhood development](#) program, which we are scaling to meet unmet demand on the ground, and the UN Sustainable Development Goal of quality education for all.

**Since 2010, and with support from USAID, Dubai Cares, Islamic Relief USA and hundreds of individual donors, Anera has rehabilitated or built 208 kindergartens – 10% of Palestine's preschools – serving 32,000 students every year.** We also trained nearly 1,000 teachers and worked with 15,000 parents to help them provide critical parental support to their early learners. Our Education Committee and staff led a task force to develop and hand-over a national, inclusive, ethical, tolerant ECD curriculum to the Palestinian Authority. And, by building schools, with Palestinian communities, on Palestinian land, we are building facts on the ground; and, most important, better lives, from the ground-up, from early childhood on up.

Our education program manager Sulieman Mleahat took me to meet the Minister of Education about the time he was announcing universal kindergarten for all Palestinians. The minister said, "You know, for every \$1 invested in a child's early development, society gets \$7 back on that investment." After the meeting I said to Sulieman, "Wow, he's a big advocate," and Suli told me that Anera helped him get there. Anera brought him the research, and showed him what a comprehensive ECD policy and program would look like.

The Ministry signed an MOU with us that says Anera is a "go-to organization on early childhood development" and "THE go-to for building preschools." And, to provide access to every child in Palestine, there is a need for at least another 900 schools. In Jordan, the government also just

decreed universal preschool; and Lebanon may not be far behind. So, we have the opportunity, the demand, the duty even, to scale up our preschool programming, to give children throughout the region the right start to a better life.



*Al Auja preschool in Jericho, Palestine.*

What does this work look like in practice? I'll give you just one of many examples. In the Al Auja preschool Anera rehabilitated in [Jericho](#), teachers are seeing a big change in the way their children are learning. Most of the children had never been exposed to engaging, age-appropriate toys and games before Anera's involvement. Itaf, a 19-year veteran teacher at the school, reported that the children would chaotically mix the puzzle pieces with letter games or numbers, not knowing how to play with them. Drawing on her Anera training, she and fellow teachers used these toys and games as tools to engage their students with structure and purpose. Halfway through the school year, the kids were focused on building and creating, and were stimulated on all levels: their muscles, their thought, and their imagination. They were calmer, more communicative, less likely to act out, and more able to learn.

In [Lebanon](#), as we know, the largest per capita recipient of refugees in the world, we work with young [Syrian](#) and [Palestinian refugees](#) and vulnerable Lebanese, in [non-formal, learning in basic math, literacy, Arabic and English](#); and in [vocational training](#). These are two different programs, but



integrated, so that we can customize learning, helping those who've been out of school get back on a formal learning track, or combine the basic learning with learning a vocation to get work. We also emphasize the social and emotional well-being of teens who have experienced trauma or have no respite from tough refugee camp life.

And what does this work really mean in practice? Ahmad dropped out of a camp school in Beddawi after his teacher hit him and broke his fingers because he was misbehaving. When I asked him why he's in Anera's Youth Literacy and Numeracy course he said: "Because in my old school, no-one cared if I showed up or not. With this course, if I don't come, you call and make me come," he and his classmates laughed and nodded in agreement. They are there because someone cares enough to urge them to come, and give them a chance.



*Ahmad, a student in one of Anera's non-formal education courses.*

Nivine is 23, from Tripoli, in northern Lebanon. Until recently, she struggled to find work and make ends meet. After taking Anera's vocational course on plumbing hosted by a local partner, the Zmerly Company, she plans to start her own business. She's bucking the odds, working in a traditionally male field, but she believes she'll succeed in her business because women in her community will feel more comfortable with another woman coming into their homes to fix their plumbing.



*Nivine, a vocational education student taking one of Anera's courses on plumbing.*

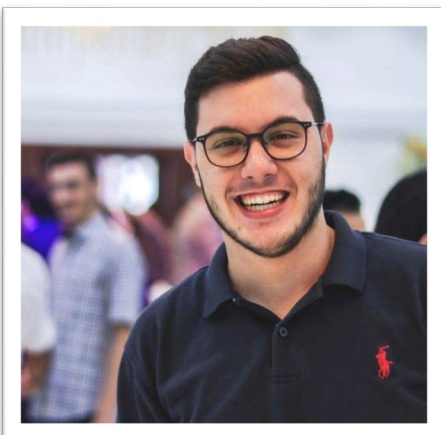
A final example. We are very excited about a new opportunity for career acceleration, developing Palestinian leaders in software engineering and management in the tech industry. Let me tell you the stories of Hanan, Siraj, and Ahmad, and the [32 Palestinians now enrolled in our coding course, hosted by ReBootKamp, in Amman.](#)



Hanan is from al-Karak in Jordan's south. She finished first in her class in telecommunications engineering. And couldn't get a job. For two years. So, she took the RBK coding course, and now runs the Anera cohort of Palestinians.



Siraj is a Syrian refugee, who was in Hanan's class. Syrians are prohibited from working in most fields in Jordan. But tech companies need trained engineers with the right language and job-skills. So, he got informal work, then a temporary contract, and now a full, formal contract with a Dublin-based start-up on the verge of break-through success.



I met Ahmad, who's from Gaza, with Hanan and Siraj, at the #NoLostGeneration tech summit in Amman this summer. I asked him if he came to Amman for the conference. He said no. He came for an internship but it fell through. "Then what are you doing here?" "I'm waiting for Anera's course to start." "But, we're still reviewing applications," I said, "you haven't been selected yet." "I know," he said, "but I'm hopeful and I'll wait." He was selected, and he's doing quite well. He's one of many from Gaza, and also one of the few men in our cohort. 75% of the applicants were women, and 80% of the selected students are women.

These programs respond exactly to the top recommendations in well-researched reports from the RAND Corporation, the UN and the World Bank, on how best to respond to the forced migration crisis. And we've been doing most of these programs since before the reports came out.

So, I encourage you all to get to know these programs, through the great work our education and communications teams do. Look at our [website](#), [social media](#), [annual reports](#) and, the best way, through field visits with our country teams. And let us know, please, which programs you like, what gets you excited and hopeful, what you'd like to see more of, and how you would like to get involved.

Now, I would like to take a moment to recognize the people in this room who play a big role in making Anera's education work so successful. Sulieman Mleahat and Nariman Othman from Palestine, would you please stand up and be recognized? Dima Zayat and Leen Ataya from Lebanon, would you please stand up and be recognized? Would all members of the Anera education committee, past and present, please stand up and be recognized? And all of our donors to education work as well, please stand up. Let's give them a huge round of applause.

In closing, I ask you to consider how you would like to be part of this work, or, put a better way, **how can we help you to do the work you want to see done in the Middle East?**

Tonight, four leaders of our education work, all of whom have built kindergartens with us, have stepped up to invite you to join them in supporting this great work. They have pledged \$50,000 in matching grants, if we can raise that amount tonight.

All you have to do is visit [anera.org/annualdinner](https://anera.org/annualdinner) to make a contribution. Let us pledge to continue our work together, helping hope find a way in the Middle East. Thank you for your support. Thank you for flying with Anera!