

Sheffield Emergency Fund for Gaza: work with children

Suzanne Abu Khatir is a co-ordinator of children's activities for the Never Stop Dreaming and the Qayis Centre for Psychological and Community support. The centres themselves have been destroyed, but the team carry on the work. Suzanne has sent us this message.

"We cannot measure the scale of the horrors the children we work with have seen - but through our activities, we are trying to give them a safe haven for a while and to relieve their pain; such a safe haven, even if temporary, is essential for their recovery.



The psychological health of children in Gaza is devastated because of all they have witnessed. These children had already been denied freedom [under the siege] but now they are denied the right even to a safe house, education and play. This comes on top of the psychological trauma of losing loved ones, family and friends too.

As a result of the genocide and now the use of starvation as a weapon of war, we find a lot of negative behavioural traits have developed within

the children. In my view this is understandable and is a result of their feeling insecure and unsafe.

We talk to the children, we listen carefully to what they say, getting to know them and learning as much as we can about each child. We have observed signs of depression, sleep/eating disorders, aggressive behaviour, stuttering speech, bed wetting and smaller signs of anxiety, such as badly-bitten nails.

That is why it is a must that we do our best to help them recover as far as is possible in this context through our work. For example, one of our activities is painting and drawing. I have noticed that this helps the children to calm the obvious anxieties and signs of worry that they brought with them to the activity. Through art, we enable them to express themselves, release pent-up feelings and say whatever they want to say. The story-reading session proved to be a major factor in giving the children peace for a while, a feeling of security which they desperately need.

We believe that the children feel safe with us, which is a real comfort to us too. We notice a positive change in their behaviour and word about this is spreading: our numbers grow with every session.

The children have 4 sessions with us at a time and we vary the programme as much as we can. And when we draw to a close, they are asking us, all the time, to come back, but we explain that we must reach other children as well - and will return when we can.

To our supporters and campaigners – thank you. We wish you happiness and safety and send love to you all, from us and from the children in never Stop Dreaming and the Qayis Centre for Psychological and Community Support.”

***Published by Sheffield PSC and
Sheffield Palestine Cultural Exchange***



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