

Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability, a registered charity founded in 1985, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those children with physical, mental and psychological disabilities in Palestine, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

“WE PEOPLE HAVE TO LIVE WITH HOPE”

*Edmund Shehadeh,
Director of the Bethlehem
Arab Society for
Rehabilitation (BASR)
- Beit Jala, July 2002.*

This statement sums up the undiminished determination of the Palestinians, not only to survive, but to move forward despite the extreme conditions under which they are forced to live. The daily routine of humiliation and intimidation, plus the random curfews and checkpoints, appear to have little purpose other than the attempted destruction of morale and destabilisation of communities at large.

From 7th to 12th July 2002 three ABCD trustees and I made a field visit to Palestine. We stayed at St. George's College in East Jerusalem and, despite the fact that the curfew on the West Bank villages was only lifted for 4 hours on Sunday 7th and 6 hours on Thursday 11th, we visited the BASR and, one day, had access to two of the daycare centres, one at Beit Sahour the other at Obedieh.

ABCD's programmes are functioning and having the desired impact **despite the conditions - six of the seven daycare centres have, for the most part, remained operational** and have been running a series of summer camps for the disabled and able bodied children in the area. The seventh, at Beit Fajjar has remained open but very few staff members or children have been able to reach it - however it acts as a library for the area and local people have continued to benefit from this. Likewise few families have been able to reach the BASR centre in Beit Jala but ABCD's Children's Services Co-Ordinator, Rima, has remained in contact with them by phone, either directly or through the staff at the daycare centres. Basic needs have been met, medicines and food have been distributed and, as much as possible, physio and OT programmes have been followed. The focus of the work has centred on trauma counselling through a variety of methods from group sessions to art therapy.

The BASR centre at Beit Jala, in addition to its regular clinics, now has a large ophthalmic surgery unit, outpatients clinic, and a unit which will concentrate on osteoporosis. We visited on the Thursday, when the curfew was lifted, and the clinic was full of patients who had managed to make the journey through various road blocks. There were many small children/babies with eye infections, maybe caused by the ever suffocating dust which is a constant feature of the landscape - when the curfew is down the tanks roll in and the dust never seems to settle. During the week of our visit there were 65 inpatients, including victims of the Intafada. We met several young boys who had lost limbs and suffered extensive burns due to explosives buried under the sand. We also met one of the three teenage girls who had suffered gun shot wounds to the head during the incursion at Jenin. All these young people appeared well on the way to recovery and were talkative and full of energy - because of the curfews their parents were unable to visit but **there was no sense of misery or sadness** - the Beit Jala staff, themselves having to live in, made up a large extended family and there was much laughter and signs of mischief, kept in order every now and then by Edmund's authoritarian father figure - he seemed to have the knack of getting the balance just right and obviously has the respect of all. These young people are there almost entirely at the

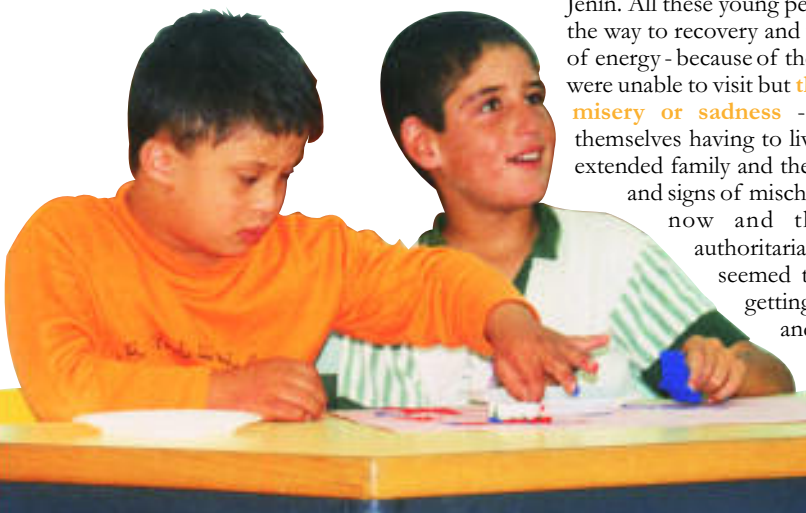


expense of the BASR as no families have any income to help with contributions to either their treatment or their keep.

The overriding feeling was one of determination to keep going, to keep looking to the future. Strength of character, humour and dignity were very much in evidence and the fact that so much work has progressed over the past months is evidence of an indomitable spirit.

ABCD will continue to provide emergency funding while needed. The intended Multidisciplinary Outreach Unit project, which was to have been launched 2 years ago, is still very much an option for the future. After long discussions with the BASR we have come back with sound ideas which now need to be addressed and formulated - however the immediate focus has to remain on continuing our support for the Emergency Crisis Intervention Programme. It is our intention to resume regular field visits and we are planning to go again in November. At no time did we feel in danger and our presence indicated a solidarity which was as important as our involvement in the projects. Please keep the situation in your thoughts and prayers.

Georgina Mortimer
August 2002



NEWS OF THE DAYCARE CENTRES...

...with particular focus on OBEDIEH and BEIT SAHOUR

ABCD NEWSLETTER & APPEAL 2002/2003

Our regular newsletter and appeal will be distributed in December, when we will bring you a fuller update of what has been happening. We plan to visit again in November to bring back first hand news.

Throughout the crisis conditions over the past year, **the seven daycare centres have acted as a lifeline** between those in the villages and the main BASR centre in Beit Jala. To enable them to stay open ABCD has continued its support by contributing £10,000 per annum to assist with staff salaries and a further £2,000 per annum towards transport costs as local public services can no longer function.



Over the past eighteen months **extensive work has been carried out to expand/upgrade the centres** at Obedieh, Beit Sahour, Za'atara, El Khader and Nahalin, funded by World Bank funds through the Italian Government. Funding is in place for Deheisha and Beit Fajjar but ground conditions have prevented the work from being started.

CHRISTMAS CARDS



ABCD'S Christmas Card will be available from the end of September - orders can be placed now by completing the form below and sending it to Georgina Mortimer, 16A Park View Road, London N3 2JB. Cheques made payable to ABCD.

Card size: 10.3cm x 14.4cm (4" x 6.5"). Greeting inside: Peace. Arab Society for Rehabilitation, Beit Jala.

Name

Address

Post Code

Please add 20p for each £ for postage & packing

Quantity	Price per pack	Total
..... packs of 10	£2.75

Postage & Packing

Total



During our visit, we visited Obedieh and Beit Sahour - the last time we saw the former it comprised of one building housing four classrooms and a kitchen, **funded by ABCD with a UK Lottery grant**. This has now been extended at least fourfold, leaving the original building for outreach clinics/fund raising ventures, as was the intention. Beit Sahour, which was updated three years ago through ABCD/British Consulate funds, has been extended to house vocational training workshops and a very large outside area is being turned into gardens and playground areas which will be used to integrate the able bodied local children with the clients of the centre. Both these new structures are beautifully designed and finished. The architecture of the Obedieh building gives a feeling of light and space -

there is nothing utilitarian about it and the interior, in creams and blues, portrays a great sense of peace and calm. It had recently been used to house a summer camp for the area and the art work around the walls conveyed the children's hopes for their future, the pictures starting off with what they were actually experiencing, ie the violence surrounding



them, but then progressing to paintings of houses, trees, almost urban landscapes. The landscaping at Beit Sahour was also in complete contrast to the surrounding turmoil - it will look like a UK park when finished. **The spirits are lifted** when going through the doors of both these projects and the sense of hope for the future is tangible.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CRISIS

Extra support for an average 8 member family on ABCD's register during current crisis conditions to cover basic food, living and medicine costs £5 per day

In most cases ABCD is meeting the full costs of technical aids, average costs are:

A leg brace	£20
A walking aid	£80
Specially adapted chair	£120
A single hearing aid	£250
A wheelchair	£450
Admission to the BASR for intensive rehabilitation	£220 per month
either because of injury or to re-establish programmes which have been disrupted by the crisis	

For further information please contact: Georgina Mortimer, 16A Park View Road, London N3 2JB T 020 8343 4246 E Bethlehem@btinternet.com

THE FACTS

Almost one quarter of Palestinian children under five are suffering from acute or chronic malnutrition and the situation in the Gaza Strip is as bad as in African countries such as Nigeria and Chad - statement issued August 2002 by US Agency for International Development (USAID) as they released figures from a recent survey into the effects of the Israeli policy of sealing off the Palestinian territories for almost two years.

ABCD's programmes illustrate the reality of the survey's findings: 4,659 individual children/their family members received assistance during year ending March 2002. This figure is a staggering fourfold increase on the previous year due to the increase in demand as, a) the number of children receiving psychological/trauma counselling has risen sharply as the benefits of this kind of aid are recognised, b) the daycare centres have been accommodating children classed as 'low achievers' and some parents of 'regular' school children, traumatised by local conditions have sought support, and c) most households have lost their income and so ABCD is meeting the costs of treatment previously self funded.

The cost of on-going projects, ie families we assist on a regular basis, has risen from an average of £10,000 per annum to £18,000 per annum.

A further £38,000 for technical aids/emergency food and medical supplies and admissions fees to the BASR has been sent since January 2002.