

## Summer Camp Report, 2017



Project Name: “Children Summer Camp”

Project Location: Bethlehem Area, Palestine

Submitted to: Dioceses of Lund

Organization submitting the report: Wi'am, Palestinian Conflict Transformation Centre

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### Background:

Children are the most vulnerable stratum of the society. They are deprived of a safe space to play and educational activities. To meet this gap, Wi'am has a long tradition of offering

Summer Camps for underprivileged children to interact, learn, and enjoy the tranquility of the place.

This year marks Wi'am's 14th Summer Camp. It is a space in which fun meets creativity all summer long for children, aged 6-14 years old. This summer camp provides children with the opportunity to experience and discover new special skills. They also have the opportunity to focus on skills that were neglected during the academic year. The activities that children enjoyed allow them to get engaged in various extracurricular activities like drama, arts, music, voluntary work, environmental activities, peer-mediation training, hiking, folk dancing, sports, excursions, art projects, interactive story time, and dramatic play.

Summer camps have proved to be one of the best ways for Wi'am to continue our mission, offering children a safe haven where they can have a chance to be creative, and grow as active members of their communities and families.

The main objectives of the summer programs are:

- To provide a safe, healthy, and productive environment for children to spend their summer time, especially for those who come from unprivileged communities.
- To allow children to engage in educational and creative activities that gives them the space to adopt positive behaviors to the family and school levels.
- Organize activities develop a generation that believes that non-violence is a way to resolve peer conflicts and develop a sense of trust, respect, understanding, and empathy towards one another.

**BENEFICIARIES:**

120 Underprivileged children aged 6-14 years old from different communities and areas.

**ACTIVITIES:** On the first day, the children arrived full of energy and were eager to meet each other and the camp counselors. We started with "ice breakers," or small games to encourage children to break out of their shells and feel comfortable with one another. They danced to music, both local and international tunes, and searched the grounds for balloons full of paint- which they could throw at a canvas, creating a fun work of art.

#### A. Peer-Mediation Via Drama:

During the camp, Wi'am sought to build the skills of children in peer-mediation as a way to help them adopt a non-violent approach in resolving school and peer conflicts that might arise in their school, family or neighborhood. We work with conflict mediation using participatory drama techniques, including carefully structured role-play and forum theatre. Drama provides children opportunities to create and experiment with life-like models of conflict, even drawn from real life which is 'made safe' by being altered and made fictional.



**1** Peer mediation play



Drama is ideal for cross-curricular learning model. It is a valuable tool that helped the participants in the camp develop speaking and listening, and encouraging children to understand and express different points of views. It gave them opportunities to explore, discuss and deal with difficult issues and to express their emotions in a supportive environment. It encourages them to think and act creatively, thus developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills that can be applied in all areas of learning. Through drama, children are encouraged to take responsible roles and make choices— to participate in and guide their own learning.

#### B. Environmental Awareness Activities:

During the Summer Camp, children were trained in different aspects of composting, sorting refuse (glass, paper, plastic, organic food, etc.). At the end of each day, children were divided into groups in which each group is responsible for collecting refuse and put it in a special corner. After that, they engage in sorting the garbage according to different items that involve bottles, plastic, canisters, and food. By this, we are exposing children to healthy practices in recycling, composting and respect to the eco-system around them.



#### A. Art Work, Painting and Drawing

The days kicked off with a high-energy balloon stomping game that got the young children excited for the day to come. The campers crafted beautiful paper birds to decorate the Wi'am courtyard and created masks for the end of the camp celebration. The children loved the opportunity to express themselves creatively and make some beautiful pieces. The campers also worked together to prepare different types of cakes each week (i.e. "lazy cake") for a delicious snack.



Children have also created fictional cartoon characters out of cloth and beads that helped open new horizons for their imagination and encouraged team work. Part of the art activities was painting and decorating large swatches of cloth with shapes of flowers, birds and the dove of peace. Children focused on coloring pots that unravel the artistic imagination and self-expression. Many of them spent time on producing colorful frames that they used to insert their own pictures inside.





Art work proved to be therapeutic in which children openly conveyed their feelings and their depiction of the reality that they live under. For many children, drawing and painting helped them get rid of painful emotions and events that are difficult to verbalize. It is an effective means through which children are able to process the complexities of unspoken anxieties, aspirations, experiences, and memories.



The days started with hand painting, allowing the children to get messy and express whatever they wished on paper. After washing their hands, the campers were challenged with an apple and watermelon eating contest- the only catch? They could not use their hands. We then brought out clay and the children continued to express themselves creatively. Some made flowers, others snakes, and some made food items. All of them had fun coming up with new ideas of what to make next



#### Sports: Swimming

Each week, children enjoyed a swimming day at the Catholic Action and Golden Park pools. They spent most of the day swimming, diving, and learning new tricks in the water. Some of the campers did not know how to swim, so we held lessons to help them learn. It was perfect days for fun at the pool, surrounded by waves of laughter and great splashes of excitement.



**2Childrenenjoying the swimming day**

#### E. Traditional Palestinian Dance-DABKA:

During the summer camp, Wi'am embarked on training a group of children on the Traditional Dance, Dabka. By this, we contribute towards connecting children to their tradition and cultural heritage. At the closing ceremony of the summer camp, the Dabka group performed a pleasant performance in a very impressive way that draws the appreciation of the audience present.





### **3Children performing Dabkah, the Palestinian Traditional Dance**

The final days of the camp centered much on solidifying camper's roles in the Dabke dance. They worked for hours, learning each step and making sure they were in harmony with the other dancers. In the afternoon, they split into groups to hone their acting skills and practice Dabke, a traditional Palestinian dance.

#### **F. Icon School Visit:**

The second week started with a visit to the Bethlehem Icon School-this school is the only school of icons in the entire Middle East. The campers learned about the special process of creating icons. An icon (from Greek εἰκών eikōn "image") is a religious work of art, most commonly a painting, from the Eastern Orthodox Church, and certain Eastern Catholic churches. The most common subjects include Christ, Mary, saints and/or angels



During the visit, children find it illuminating to learn about the significance of Icons and the fact this art is more than just any old image, of course. It's an image with a religious content, meaning and use.

The rest of the week was spent creating signs to hang around the Wi'am Center, using glue and colorful paint. The largest sign wrote, "Welcome to the Wi'am Center 2017" in Arabic and English. The children also celebrated a birthday for one of the campers by making a cake and having some free time to play with each other.

#### Visit to Bethlehem Museum

Children in the summer visited Bethlehem museum that exhibits features ancient histories: from the Roman, Byzantine eras until the current period. They have a chance to see Byzantine icons that were produced by renowned Palestinian artists. They also saw the Roman Aqueduct that used to supply water to Jerusalem from the Bethlehem Solomon Pools. They also saw a series of original pictures from the 18th and 19th century about the older generations that live in the area. This unique exhibit highlights the achievement of Palestinians from all walks of life and their contributions to the respective countries they live in around the world.

#### Competition: "Treasure of Information"

Wi'am in cooperation with the Municipality organized "Treasure of Information" competition on Friday July 7, 2017. While walking on Star Street, children were given instructions to search for scattered pieces of paper that contain Q&E hidden in the corners of the Star Street. After finding the papers, the children were given the chance to answer the questions in these papers. The winning children earned a promotional prize- an annual subscription from the Pontifical Mission Library in Bethlehem to encourage children to read. After the completion of the competition, the children headed to the municipality of Bethlehem. They were welcomed by Sherine Moj who debriefed them about the work of the Municipal Council and stressed the importance of these activities that develop their city and services

#### Closing Ceremony:



**4Zoughbi Zoughbi, the director of Wi'am opening the ceremony of the summer camp**

Our final day of Summer Camp concluded with a grand closing ceremony, where the entire families of all the campers were welcomed to the Center. Beginning at 11am, the children came together and performed all they learned while at the camp. The ceremony opened with



eight children, dressed in traditional clothing, performing the Dabkhe dance. Other performances included small groups of girls dancing to their favorite songs, a young boy reciting a poem he wrote himself calling for equality, a play about morals and discipline in school, and a young girl singing two songs in English. All of the children's performances were beautiful, and there is nothing more rewarding than knowing the camps goals of creativity and encouragement of freedom were reached. We applaud these children for their courage and strength.

Children also performed two plays: firstly, they acted a short sketch dealing with bullying, its impact on them and ways of dealing with it. In that sketch, children used the skills they learned in peer-mediation to resolve the conflict efficiently. While the other play was centered about respecting the environment and the fact that we shouldn't throw garbage in the streets while at the same time be responsible citizens who clean their environment.

The camp was held for four weeks, hosting approximately 120 children from different ages and areas, who were exposed to new and exciting experiences, fun adventures, educational knowledge and life skills. We thank you for your continued encouragement, and this camp could not have happened without the support of the community, volunteers and donations. We continue to urge you to join us in celebrating the children of Palestine.

Children did a wonderful job displaying their work during the camp for their parents and other people to see which included different art work, paintings, and portraits, and different pieces of their work with beads and drawings.

At the end of the closing ceremony, the children and their parents were invited to indulge in snacks and drinks.

Please allow me to share some comments from some of the participants in the camp (translated from Arabic to English):

"I enjoyed the camp, it emboldened my personality; it helped me gain skills to deal with problems and mediate peer-conflicts that I face in my school" (Husam, 14years old boy from Bethlehem area)

"I had the chance to be creative in areas of art and music. Something which builds my demeanor and gives me more confidence in my abilities... I was an active member of the Dabka group which gave me the chance to perform the final ceremony." (Miral, 13 years old girl)

“... It has been an interactive event that helped me make new friendships and learn new knowledge, information and games that nourishes my mind.” (Amira, 9 years old)

#### Challenges/Lessons Learned:

Children need a safe environment to play, learn and interact with their peers. Children are in dire need for extra-curricular activities that can challenge their thing and give them the chance to think out of the box more creatively.

So, it highly recommended that we engage children in summer camps and even ongoing activities that give the chance to lean and be more creative in their thinking and behavior.