

October 2016 Field Trip:

Firas Sirhan led the three-strong group, Lara Madge, Social Media and Fundraising Administrator, Bridget Cowan, trustee and experienced journalist and Carol Godsmark, newly appointed trustee for fact-finding at Nour Shams and Al Jalazone camps and at the BASR hospital in Bethlehem. Part of their combined report can be seen on the website.

Monday, 17 October: From Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport, it takes approximately an hour to reach the first camp at Al Jalazone, the Palestinian driver having to take the roads allocated to Palestinian residents. We had supper (Maghluba, a chicken dish with rice) with the Centre's director, Hassan and Muzayn, his wife and operations director at their hospitable home. We were based at the house named after Maha Nassar, a leading Palestinian feminist and activist, in nearby Jifna. Hassan, quite disabled due to CP, drove us around the camp and onto Ramallah, home of the Palestinian Authority to gain knowledge of the area.

Al Jalazone Camp Tuesday, 16 October: (Arabic: مخيم الجلزون) a Palestinian refugee camp in the Ramallah and al-Bireh Governorate, located 7 kilometres (4.3 mi) north of Ramallah and adjacent to the village of Jifna to the north, Deir Dibwan to the east, Bir Zeit to the west and the Beit El Israeli settlement to the southeast. Population 15,000, average age 24.

Al Jalazone Centre:

Up to 20 children are treated with cerebral palsy or other physical and learning difficulties with ABCD funding.

We are taken to a child's home to see how a mother of five and her youngest child, a boy, (Amro, aged seven, has CP and epilepsy, has no speech) manage the journey, some ten minutes' walk to the centre which he visits three days a week for a variety of treatments (Physio, OT, Speech Therapy). The support given to Amro and his family and the desperate need for the Rehabilitation Centre is apparent. At the centre we are told that Amro has had four years of help (but not beforehand as none was available prior to ABCD's funding). He needs botox injections to release muscles but has to go to Jordan every six months for these expensive shots. BASR might be able to help, according to Firas. Without this treatment Amro will become rigid, his back even more curved. He is placed in a standing frame for forty minutes every other day but needs one at home too. At home, he is often on a soft sofa or in his pushchair when out with his mother, neither good for his back. At the centre, Fars, the French-trained physiotherapist, shows us the other equipment including the 'Cage' (Paleotherapy cage, a net-shaped structure with pulleys, ropes, resistance springs) for all types of problems and which can accommodate several patients at a time. 'It works much faster than traditional physiotherapy,' Fars informs us. He sees 15 children a day. 'There are too many people to treat. We need more practitioners.' He reports that Amro needs better back support at home. Staff are asked what their challenges: 'Lack of equipment and therapists and too many children to treat' is the answer. The centre is totally dependent on outside funding from the UN (very limited as funds are generally diminished in recent years) and ABCD. Research and feasibility studies need to be done on how to make the centre more financially sustainable in the future.



Physiotherapist Fars and Amro with his mother during treatment

Wednesday, 19 October: From Al Jalazone to Nur Shams (Arabic: مخيم نور شمس) a Palestinian refugee camp in the Tulkarm Governorate in the northwestern West Bank, located three kilometres east of Tulkarm. Nur Shams has a population of 10,000 and was established in 1952. It is situated on a main road and seems even more shabby than Jalazone.

Nour Shams Rehabilitation Centre:

Nour Shams' specialists treat up to 12 children per month with cerebral palsy, spinal injuries and other physical and learning disabilities thanks to ABCD funding.

Physiotherapist Raia Mahmoud was keen to show us the treatment room and to watch her work with the children. We met two children with whom we can use for social media as case studies and visited them in their homes as well as at the centre. Ahmed, aged 7: Wight Disease Syndrome and Yamen, aged 3: Kabouki Syndrome

Nour Shams runs a tight ship with a team of four: Nehaya, Centre Director; Raia, Physiotherapist; Rafif, Occupational Therapist and Shatha, Speech Therapist. It was evident through the meeting we had with them all that they offer a coordinated approach to the treatments they offer and all of them are highly professional. Equipment such as games, pens and paper that ABCD had brought over in the past was in evidence and well used. There was good use of all the space they had. When asked what their challenges were, Raia commented that she would like to have more hours in order to make home visits to the children to see what could be done in the home environment and better inform the parents of best practice. Also, the therapists expressed a desire for more training and were pleased to hear of the training programme in November (see above report).

Thursday, 19 October: BASR: Firas, Lara, Bridget and Carol meet Rima Canawati, director of Programme Development who, despite her sight loss, has risen to the top of her profession and has won many international awards, and Edmund Shehadeh, founder of BASR in his office. Pictures tell the tale of the success he has created. Awards line the walls and an embroidered Palestinian map flanks a bookcase. Building work is taking place, further expansion of the remarkable hospital. Edmund and Rima take us through BASR's history and update us on changes as well as being given Edmund's philosophy on how the disabled should be treated. They are looking at employment for the disabled, although that is not word Edmund cares for. 'I don't consider anyone disabled, we are all the same. No one should be hidden away.' A BASR medical specialist Edmund has approved will visit Jalazone and Nur Shams on a monthly basis for assessments, a huge benefit for the centres. Talking with Rima, the £30,000 we fund annually for the Individual Children's Needs is being used to its full capacity with a waiting list of children.

We also meet others who ABCD funds or partners including child psychologist Souha Shehadeh who works with traumatised children, either due to disability or living in divided Palestinian-Israeli areas and Drama Therapist Zeinab Shakareh whose methods she uses for learning how to integrate disruptive or unwilling children to participate in group activities, working closely with teachers too. Bridget and Lara are now connected to her via WhatsApp for pictures of the children's activities. Rima takes us to see developments by the Low Vision department, physiotherapy, the children's wards and their sensory room for autistic children and others.

We visit the **Physiotherapy and Occupational ABCD Community's** Mayy, the PT therapist who works alongside Mohammed, the OT specialist for two visits in the community. Surprisingly, they are the sole practitioners for 350 clients in the community, a situation which needs funding to reach out to many more children. **We meet** Sara and mother Gerda at their home at Ummsalomona near one of the many quarries in the built-up area near an Israeli settlement. Sara is dressed in a purple tracksuit and little brown boots. She is 2 years old, a premature baby with cerebral palsy and is assessed by Mayy and Mohammed. A further drive away we meet Hiba and her parents at nearby Beit Ajar. The six-year-old CP girl is tiny, and dressed in green embroidered top and black leggings. She is a new case and more treatment is worked on as Hiba has difficulty with balance and uses a walker. Her mother, Werda, is offered home sessions. Mayy reports that Hiba is more confident and is keen to discover and explore her surroundings since starting treatment.



Hiba in her walker at home with carer aunt

ABCD-funded **Sheepfold Centre in Bethlehem** is also visited. Run by Mary Rewers, she shows us around the immaculate premises which takes children and young adults up to 21 years of age. Mary is assisted by two others. The centre offers specialist needs software; visual sound; a vibrating mat for wheelchair children for muscle stimulation; speech therapy via toys (press and record) and other methods including an ideal outside space. Nada, with cerebral palsy and a long-term ABCD beneficiary, comes on Fridays to draw on computer-assisted software to create designs for cards for sale.

Conclusion

A very successful trip, not least for making Lara, Bridget and Carol more aware of how difficult life is for ABCD children and getting to know the people as well as the projects that ABCD funds. It served too to report findings to trustees to enable them to decide on tactics and target funding. The projects that started two years ago in Jalazone and Nour Shams are hugely beneficial to the children, their families and the communities in which they live. It is now necessary to fine-tune those projects to ensure they are giving maximum benefit and every opportunity is utilised. Continual assessment and communication is the key. It is also vital to start to look at how the camps can become more self-sufficient to ensure longevity of the centres. ABCD needs ensure that all of our partners work together to their mutual benefit, making ABCD's funding go further and to ensure they feel supported, partly by improved communication. Our thanks go to all who showed us around the camps and BASR and other communities we visited.