Relief & Social Services
Children and Youth Programme

Mission of the Programme

To enhance the well-being of children and youth, and to promote their participation in positive activities consistent with their level of development while taking into consideration conventions on their rights, primarily the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Profile

The UNRWA Children and Youth Programme offers a range of activities and services to young Palestine refugees that are designed to encourage positive attitudes and healthy socialization of young people, along with building their confidence, self-esteem and communication skills. The Programme focuses on children between the ages of six and fourteen and youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, but it also extends its services to other community members, including non-refugees. Many of the activities are focused on encouraging young refugees to become involved in community improvement initiatives such as camp cleaning campaigns, elderly assistance or community dispute resolution. Other activities teach life and leadership skills through personal development activities that promote their overall well-being, and help them to reach their full potential. The aim is to build their sense of belonging, purpose and direction, and to help them to understand the need to work with others and engage in community service.

The Children and Youth Programme adopts community participation, life skills and leadership development and creating a culture of peace as key strategies in addressing the needs of children and youth. Through the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) a number of services and social activities are provided by the Programme, and they include:

- Apprenticeship programmes to enable refugees to obtain marketable job skills;
- Educational games and development programmes for young people with learning difficulties;
- Support groups for young people to discuss life problems;
- Seminars on areas such as vocational training, employment and health issues;
- Awareness raising sessions on human rights, child rights and local laws;
- Project management assistance for groups of young people running their own community initiatives;
- Sports days and recreational events coordinated in conjunction with local NGOs and sports clubs;
- Summer camps which involve recreational and cultural activities over a few days;
- Access to computer labs and internet facilities;
- Life skills training for youth such as time management, conflict resolution and communication skills;
- Programmes specifically for young women to help them become more involved in community activities; and
- Supporting children’s educational activities at CBOs which provide educational and recreational activities to refugees both with and without a disability.

Young boys at UNRWA’s Neirab Camp in Syria, (2008).
History

UNRWA’s youth programmes date back to the fifties when, in 1959, the Agency received support from the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and a Youth Leadership Training Programme was started. By 1964, there were 39 Youth Activities Centres in UNRWA’s five fields of operation which provided education, sports and community self-help projects including summer camps. UNRWA continued to be actively involved in promoting and supporting youth participation in constructive activities during the 1980s and 1990s, and now cooperates with a number of local community centres in the region to support various youth orientated events.

Achievements

UNRWA’s Children and Youth Programme continues to make progress in achieving its primary goal of promoting the well-being and participation of young refugees. Some of its recent achievements include:

- Facilitating the participation of 49,250 children in sports, recreational and summer camp activities in 2008;

- Training 22 community facilitators as part of UNRWA/UNICEF’s Better Parenting Initiative, which has led to 1,100 parents receiving education seminars on how to improve their parenting skills in Jordan in 2008;

- Establishing The Friendly Centre for Teenagers project in Jenin in 2007 which has led to 1,100 youth from the West Bank participating in life skills activities;

- Training 172 adolescents in Train the Trainer life skills in 2008 as part of the Adolescents Project established in Syria and Jordan;

- Facilitating peer-led life skills training for 3,700 youth aged 14-17 in 2008; and

- Training 234 community members from CBOs, NGOs and youth clubs in Lebanon on different issues such as handicraft, youth parliament, drawing, management and sports injuries workshops in 2008.
Recent Initiatives

Life skills peer to peer training
This UNICEF/UNRWA joint initiative introduced in 2006 targets youth between the ages of 12 and 18, and now covers 12 camps in Jordan (as of the end of 2008). The objective of this initiative is to build the capacity of youth and children, especially in the areas of their rights, and to teach them how to protect themselves from violence and abuse. Through this project, a group of young people was selected and received Train the Trainer training so they could go on to conduct training on these issues with their peers. They also established a resource room and developed the Hawaiat (my identity) website which acts as a support system and a forum for exchange of ideas between young people in Jordan.

Friendly Spaces Project
The Beach and Beit Hanoun Women’s Programme Centres and Jabalia and Rafah Community Based Centres benefited from the Friendly Spaces Project funded by UNICEF and implemented by the MAAN Development Centre in 2007. Over 800 adolescents participated in active learning in Arabic, mathematics, athletics, drama and music. The overall goal of the project was to improve students’ academic achievement and to decrease behavioral problems in an active learning framework.

Children’s Club Initiative
In 2007 in cooperation with the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution, the Rafah Women’s Programme Centre in Gaza implemented the Children’s Club Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to instill life skills in children through team work, dialogue, and the development of their communication skills. The initiative includes a number of activities, such as publishing a magazine about violence against children, conducting radio interviews on violence against children and involving children in voluntary work campaigns.
Positive Youth Experiences: 
Summer camp for orphans and children with disabilities in Syria

There were lots of smiling faces at the summer camp of Kafer Sita in Northern Syria during 2008. The focus of the camp was on capacity building of young refugees and instilling in them greater confidence and creative skills. The activities on offer included photography, film making, drawing, Arabic calligraphy, dancing, life skills and training in effective communication. A key strategy of the RSS staff was to encourage a group of young people from the refugee camps around Syria to lead the activities and training at the workshops. They participated in the planning, implementation and coordination of the activities which helped build their confidence and encourage them to pass on skills to their peers.

A highlight of the camp was the production of a short film by the participants, Zeit wa Zaater (named after a form of traditional Palestinian food). The script which was written, performed and directed by the participants, revolved around children trying to return to their homeland.