

Relief & Social Services Disability Programme

Mission of the Programme

To promote, rehabilitate and equalize opportunity for persons with disabilities and increase their inclusion and full participation in the community through community-based rehabilitation approaches consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

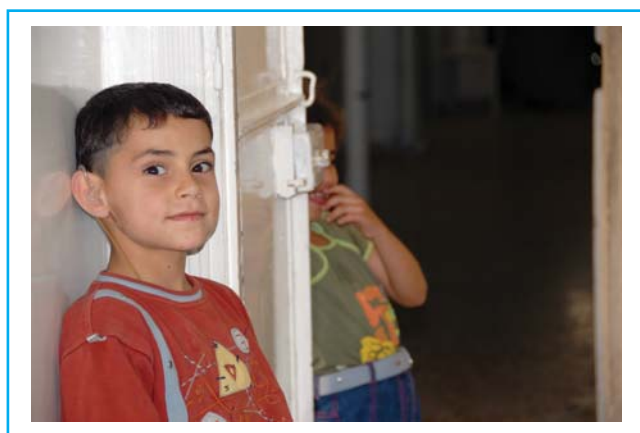
Profile

Being a Palestine refugee is difficult, but being a Palestine refugee with a physical or mental disability could be considered a double disadvantage. UNRWA's Disability Programme, however, believes that persons with disabilities can make as great a contribution to the community as anyone else, and the Programme staff are committed to increasing the self-reliance of refugees with disabilities and decreasing the barriers that obstruct them. The Disability Programme is run by 37 Community Based Rehabilitation Centres (CBRCs) that advocate for the rights of refugees with disabilities. They organize and facilitate education and outreach activities for this important but often marginalized group. The CBRC approach actively involves all members of the community, especially parents caring for children with disabilities. In addition, CBRCs provide rehabilitation services in the fields of occupational, speech and physical therapy.

Although there is no comprehensive national census (within the host countries) on the number of persons with disabilities, estimates by UNRWA put the number of Palestine refugees in the Middle East with a disability at around three and a half percent. This means that over 160,000 registered Palestine refugees suffer from some form of disability. This figure may be much higher in the West Bank and Gaza, because of the prolonged conflict in these areas.

Today, there are over 16,490 refugees with disabilities who are benefiting from the services and activities provided by the CBRCs which include:

- Rehabilitation programmes for the visually and hearing impaired, children with cerebral palsy and mental disabilities, and refugees requiring speech and physical therapies;
- Home-based rehabilitation services to help increase the life skills of refugees with disabilities and to assist their families in supporting their day-to-day activities;
- Provision of assistive devices to facilitate mobility of refugees with disabilities;
- Special education classes undertaken at the CBRCs for children with hearing and visual impairments, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism and mental disabilities;
- Placing students with disabilities in UNRWA schools to integrate them into the mainstream education system and promote positive attitude changes amongst school children towards persons with disabilities;
- Shelter modification to facilitate access and mobility, especially for refugees with physical disabilities; and



Young boy with a hearing impairment from Neirab Camp in Syria, (2008).

- Summer and winter camps for children and youth both with and without disabilities to enhance the inclusion of children with disabilities.

History

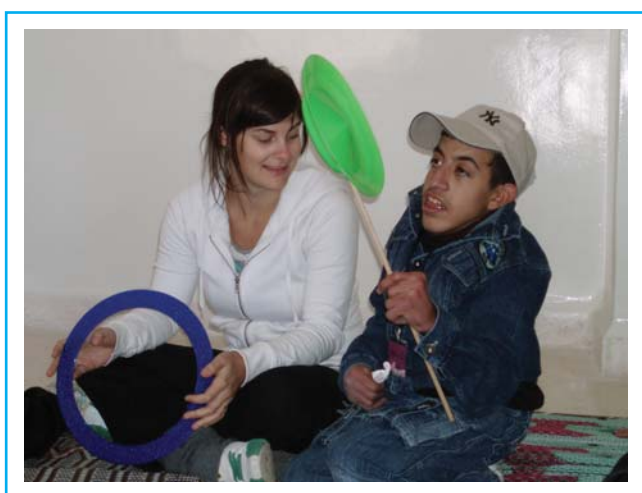
From the outset, UNRWA's services to refugees with disabilities were limited to the placement of children with disabilities in special institutions of the host countries. However, in 1962 a Rehabilitation Centre for the Visually Impaired (RCVI) was established in Gaza to offer training, educational and recreational activities for the visually impaired. In 1982, with funds raised during the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons, UNRWA launched its first pilot project to provide services to refugees with disabilities in Suf Camp in Jordan. The success of this pilot encouraged UNRWA to expand the project to other camps in Jordan, and by the end of 1989, the Disability Programme had developed a range of services across the fields of operation similar to that of Jordan.

In the 1990s UNRWA refined its policy on disability services basing it on prevention, rehabilitation and equal opportunity. UNRWA is currently drafting its new disability policy which is being developed in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The policy reaffirms the shift away from the 'medical model' to the 'social model' of disability and promotes social inclusion and a participatory approach.

Achievements

The Disability Programme has a strong history of delivering rehabilitation services to its beneficiaries. Some of the Programme's most recent achievements are:

- Establishing an emergency disability programme in the West Bank and Gaza which has assisted 3,693 refugees with disabilities since 2002;
- Delivering 6,120 assistive devices to refugees in the five fields in 2008;
- Providing special education classes at the CBRCs to 3,058 children in 2008 with hearing and visual impairments, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, and mental disabilities in the five fields;
- Modifying shelters for 47 refugees with disabilities to facilitate their access and mobility around the home in 2008;
- Mainstreaming 513 students with disabilities into UNRWA schools;
- Facilitating training courses for over 1,534 refugee community volunteers in 2008;
- In conjunction with UNICEF, helping five physiotherapy units located in Syria to establish specialist physiotherapy services for over 1,500 refugees with disabilities; and
- Establishing an Artificial Limbs and Prosthetic Devices Unit at Jenin Camp, West Bank in 2005 which has, since inception, served 2,020 refugees.



Physically challenged refugees are supported by experienced volunteers to help increase their mobility and confidence, (2007).

Recent Initiatives

***Fursan Al Erada* radio station in Gaza**

Fursan Al Erada is the first radio station for persons with disabilities in the Middle East. Established in May 2006 in Deir El Balah Rehabilitation Society (CBRC) seven out of 26 of its staff have a disability. The radio station aims to serve this segment of the population through raising awareness in the community on disability issues, and giving a voice to persons with disabilities. In addition, the radio station has developed a website which publishes news, and other disability related information, as well as streams its programmes live on-line.

Early Intervention Units

In 2008, two Early Intervention Units were established in Tyre and Saida in Lebanon with the help of a generous donation from the United States government. The units provide professional support to children with disabilities from birth to age six, as well as support for their families through specialized services. The units are operated by a team of specialists (i.e. occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists) and services are offered for a nominal charge. Since July 2008, 131 children have been identified as potential beneficiaries, out of which 45 children in Saida and 41 in Tyre are receiving rehabilitation services by the team.

Dyslexia project in West Bank

Dyslexia has been identified as one of the main learning disabilities in UNRWA schools, so in April 2007 the Disability Programme together with CBRCs in 13 camps in Nablus, Jerusalem and Hebron, hired specialized staff to work with children suffering from this condition. The programme was so successful additional funding was secured and 13 new specialists were hired for a year to increase outreach services. The project will directly benefit almost 2,000 children, and will also provide teachers and parents with the means needed to assess and assist children with Dyslexia.



Activities are regularly run in UNRWA's Community Based Organizations for children with disabilities, (2008).

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Disability Assistance in the West Bank: Areen Yaser Tabib

Areen Yaser Tabib is a 13 year-old girl born with Spina Bifida who lives with her family in a remote village near Qalqilya. Her family is in a difficult financial position because her father has an illness and is unable to work. They live in a tiny house with two small rooms, and a kitchen and toilet that are badly in need of maintenance. Areen used to spend most of her time lying in bed, and whenever she needed to use the toilet her mother would have to carry her. However, with help from Disability Programme staff, Areen is now mobile and happy. Disability staff provided Areen with home-based rehabilitation services which helped her develop her daily life skills so that she started to depend more on herself. She was also given a new bed and medical mattress specifically for people with physical disabilities such as Spina Bifida. However, the biggest change for Areen came when the family home was modified to make the kitchen, toilet and front entrance wheelchair accessible. Areen's family and friends cannot believe the change in her. Thanks to the interventions implemented by the Disability Programme, she is now moving around the home much more easily which has increased her confidence and well-being.



Areen enjoying the sunshine, after changes made by UNRWA's Disability Programme gave her the confidence and the ability to move around her home, (2008).

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