

just
childhood

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Annual Report 2020



About Us

With *Bait al-Shams*, *Just.Childhood* is offering the children of Shatila Refugee Camp a safe space for learning and simply being a child on a continuous, reliable basis and prepare them for school. We are introducing an alternative, reformatory educational approach based on internationally developed Child Protection regulations.

For us it is important to teach children from an early age that they don't need to limit themselves. The kindergartens aim at providing a vital creative outlet, which often cannot be provided by parents, and is traditionally abandoned in favor of more academic subjects by chronically underfunded schools.

In our understanding of a humanistic approach to pedagogy, learning is interdisciplinary, integrating practical, artistic and conceptual elements. Our approach in both of our projects is based on Waldorf Early Childhood Education and emphasizes on the role of imagination in learning and developing thinking that includes a creative as well as an analytic component. We would like to provide the children the basis on which to develop into free, morally responsible and integrated individuals, and to help every child fulfill his or her unique destiny.





The Board

Wiebke Eden-Fleig

Political Scientist and initiator and founder of *Just.Childhood*. Has been working for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Lebanon as a Program Manager and as a journalist for the German weekly DIE ZEIT, as well as for the Middle East Quarterly Magazine zenith.

Samir Farah

Sociologist and Journalist who worked for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Lebanon for 40 years, 28 of those as their country representative in Beirut. He was rewarded the German Federal Cross of Merit in 2003 and the National Order of Cedars in 1988 in honor of his great social and political earnings.

Badia Baydoun

Holds a BA in Communications Arts and Sciences and a MA in Political Science. She worked as a news editor, news anchorwoman and field reporter at Tele Liban. Also she had her own radio program at Radio Libanon and worked as a news editor and news presenter for the National News Agency and for Radio Liban. Worked in all three jobs for more than 20 years. Badia Baydoun started to work as Program Manager at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Beirut in 2001.

Mofida Al Hakim

Mofida Al Hakim is a social worker with 8 years experience as a social investigator in the National Poverty Targeting Program at the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs. She holds a PhD in social sciences from the Lebanese University and her areas of interest are human rights, immigration, unemployment and trade unions. Mofida is a newly elected board member since 2018.

Elie Karam

IT expert and manager in a multinational company. He is holding a degree in Finance.



The Staff

Wiebke Eden-Fleig

Director

Hilda Al Shoura

Project Coordinator

Khaled Kassem

Financial Consultant

Khadijeh Taha

Senior Educator

Samah Rmieh

Kindergarten Educator

Layal al Hajj Ali

Kindergarten Educator

Inas Alajouz

Kindergarten Educator

Fadia Mohammad

Kindergarten Educator

Niveen Saber

Kindergarten Educator

Zeinab Moussa

Kindergarten Educator

Shadia Mohammad

Helper



Background

Already the fourth generation of Palestinian refugees lives in a hostile environment, is denied basic human rights, and has no effective means of representation or education. Worldwide the number of protracted refugee groups is increasing; nevertheless, responses to refugee situations are still driven by the assumption that they are short-term.

Originally hosting hundreds of refugees, Shatila has grown since 1949 to more than 12,000 registered Palestinian refugees. With the influx of Syrian refugees into Palestinian camps there are currently more than 22,000 people living in Shatila. It is one of the 12 official long-term camps for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, situated in a poor area of Beirut that was badly damaged during the civil war. It is probably best known of all the Palestinian camps because of the 1982 massacre in which thousands of people were killed.

The entire camp comprises one square kilometer and thus has an exceptionally high population density. After almost 71 years thousands of Palestinian refugees still live in temporary shelters in overcrowded, unsanitary camps where unemployment and poverty levels are high. The Lebanese restrictions on land for Palestinians have led to severe overcrowding in the camps. There is a lack of privacy and natural light. It is not surprising that all these factors lead to violence in many aspects of life (even in schools), drug abuse, as well as severe psychological problems.

Education is one of the most important pillars of development. But Palestinian children are only under certain circumstances allowed to visit Lebanese public schools and most families cannot afford private education. The schools run by the UN require the visit of a kindergarten, without offering any in Shatila. This again leads to very early school dropouts, because children are not able to follow the UN curriculum.

A qualitative study of the American University of Beirut in 2011 has analysed the UNRWA school dropouts in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon. By looking toward developing an intervention plan to address the rate of early school dropout in Palestinian refugee camps, the study concluded that dropping out could be prevented

through a focused action plan. Among other measures the study recommends to provide a high quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten.

Local Developments

The situation in Lebanon has been deteriorating for as far as we can remember. However, it is safe to say that 2020 is certainly the worst year the country has witnessed in the last decade. For instance, the financial crisis which started in 2019 reached its peak in 2020; the banks continued to practice masked capital control and enforcing more restrictions on cash withdrawal and movement of funds in foreign currency. This led to a sharper devaluation of the Lebanese currency and allowing further exploitation by the parallel market. As a result of this crisis, a lot of people in Lebanon lost their jobs and many others experienced a decrease in their purchasing power because of the extremely inflated Lebanese currency.

Amidst all this chaos, Lebanon took a heavy blow on August 4, 2020. The country witnessed the third largest explosion in the world, which destroyed almost half of Beirut city, killed hundreds of people, and displaced many families.

Like all other countries, Lebanon was also dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. At first, the country was able to contain the virus, however, the government lost track of cases and the numbers started to exceed expectations and medical capacities. This situation in the Palestinian camps was no different and the lack of social awareness and responsibility made the situation even worse.

To ensure safety and maintain social distancing, jobs and schools switched to online classes. As *Just.Childhood* we tried to adapt as much as we could to this new concept – bearing in mind that online classes in general are not really suitable for kindergartens that are based on social interaction and play-based learning. We established our own platform on “Padlet” to easily share the daily videos with children and parents. The pre-school educators also produced a booklet for the preschool children to help them

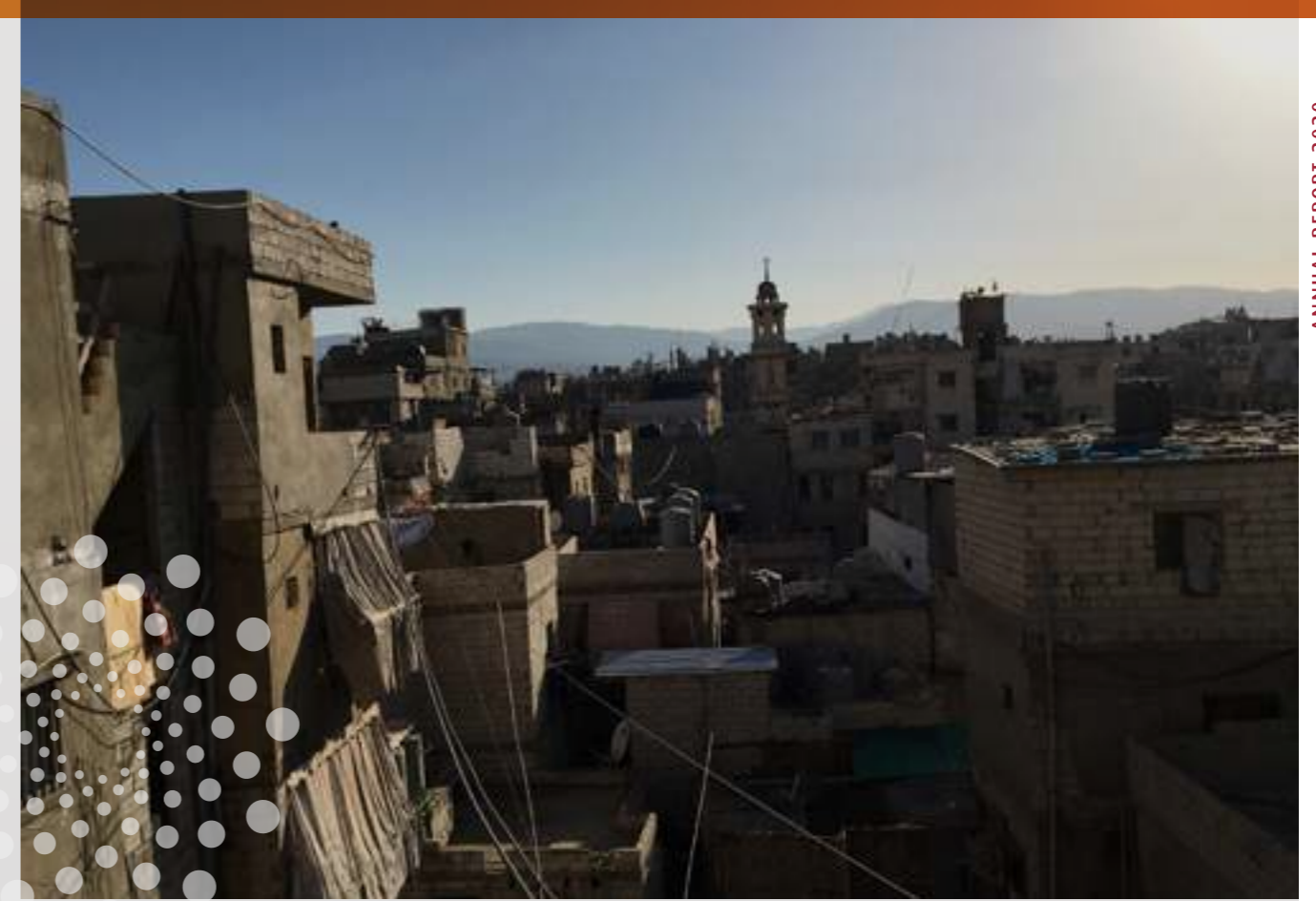




keep track preparing for school while watching the videos. Moreover, educational kits for the children were prepared with all the materials they will need to perform the daily kindergarten activities at home. Even though we tried to provide the children and their parents with everything they needed (according to our capacities), online education remained a challenge. The camp lacks the basic infrastructure, with basically no power supply 90% of the time and extremely bad internet speed. Therefore, it was very hard for parents and children to keep up with online education. Moreover, people in the camp are short on electronic devices, which created even more pressure especially for those who had more than one child attending online classes. The situation was more drastic for younger children between three and four years old. Attending online classes just did not make sense to them at this young age.

Covid-19 Pandemic increased the financial burdens of people in Lebanon. Many were forced to stay at home without any support from the Lebanese government; and most of those who relied on the day to day work eventually starved. Inside the camps the situation was identical, people lost their daily earnings and had no official party to directly support them

Unfortunately, the steadiness of some of our projects was affected by these extremely bad circumstances. To ensure the continuity of Shatila project, we were forced to cancel some of our programs like the Family Center and Afternoon Program. The situation was no different in our other project in Wavel camp in Baalbek. Due to a serious lack of funding, it became impossible to sustain the project as it was. Therefore, a mutual decision was made with our partner NGO "INAASH" to downsize the project until we can secure the needed funding. However, this decision was opposed by the local community who wanted to force us and INAASH organization to operate with full staff and capacities. The hassle began when some former staff members tried to use their connection and affiliations with the camp committee to revoke our decision. Soon enough, the general safety of everyone was in jeopardy. Threats did not dial down within several months. Alas, we had to take the decision of withdrawal from the project to ensure the safety of the staff. In addition to the safety



aspect, we as organization we believe that projects like ours can only be sustainable and fruitful with the full cooperation of the surrounding community.

In addition to the harsh situation due to Covid-19, unfortunately, the existence of drug mafias and almost daily armed clashes made the whole camp in a state of unease. In 2019, we encountered a very similar situation; a drug mafia settled in the building next to us, threatening the general safety in the neighborhood. Eventually, the drug mafia was forced out of the camp due to a huge battle and armed conflict. This time and many other times, our colleagues were trapped in the office with no way out. Afterwards, things became calmer and we were able to operate normally and safely for almost a year until the recent event. At the end of 2020, another drug mafia settled in the building next to us.

Due to this new situation and the reoccurrence of random shooting and armed clashes, we decided that staying in the camp is no longer an option.

Due to all these insecurities, the prevailing violence and unforeseen events, a rhythmic and structured day is of utmost importance for the children. The kindergarten can provide them with these structures that help cope with traumatic experiences. We as a team worked on an improved risk management in order to be as safe as possible, but at the same time as reliably open and operating as possible.



Methodology



Our Kindergarten Bait al-Shams is open to all children living in Shatila, giving them a safe space for learning and simply being a child on a continuous, reliable basis, and a future of possibility and hope. The appropriate and culturally sensitive humanitarian assistance is providing a foundation for sustainable development by actively involving the target group in the planning, implementation and management process.

To achieve the biggest benefit for the children, the kindergarten educators will strongly rely on the help of the parents. Such collaboration includes parent-teacher conferences, courses and lectures. The kindergarten is not only open to all children living in Beirut's Shatila Camp, but also children with special needs are, if possible, welcome in our kindergarten. Currently we have three age-mixed groups with 20 children, each lead by two qualified educators.



With our work we aim at actively protecting childhood, by respecting age-appropriate life- and development conditions and making this the base of the pedagogic daily routine. In this daily routine of the group, "good habits" are initiated and cultivated according to the need of the children for rhythm and repetition of similar actions and experiences.

The competencies in language (Bait al-Shams is a bilingual kindergarten using Arabic as well as English), movement, playing, learning, and social skills that need to be achieved by entering school are supported on a permanent basis through the composition of everyday life. In the year before entering school the children attend a pre-school program tailored to their needs and the schools' requirements. If possible we seek cooperation with the schools to ensure a smooth entry for the children. It should be mentioned though, that this kindergarten does not aim to be a school, but a place where children are allowed to gain their first experiences outside their families in a secure environment.

In our educational approach, which follows the Waldorf Early Childhood Education, teaching is by example rather than by direct instruction and is integrated rather than subject based. In recognition of its vital role in early childhood education, children



are given time to play. Emphasis is given to regular patterns of activities both within the day and over each week. The child presents a particular set of physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics, which require a particular (empathetic) educational response in return. In Bait al-Shams we consider the first seven years as the period of greatest physical growth and development. At this time the young child's primary mode of learning is through doing and experiencing – he or she "thinks" with the entire physical being.

The nature of this learning should be self-motivated, allowing the child to come to know the world in the way most appropriate to his or her age – through active feeling, touching, exploring and imitating, in other words, through doing. Children are encouraged to master physical skills before abstract intellectual ones.





Summary of 2020



Lebanon has witnessed many tragic events since the beginning of 2020, which required the initiation of immediate intervention plans and emergency support programs.

Food support Campaign

The devastating socio-economic situation that Lebanon is currently going through shrank the middle class. High poverty and unemployment rates further increased, depriving people of their ability to buy basic commodities. In April 2020 *Just.Childhood* launched its food support campaign and we were able to raise more than 20,000 Euros to provide monthly food support for 55 families in Shatila and 175 families Wavel Camps.

Covid-19 Emergency Assistance

Through this project, we covered the basic needs of 55 families during the Covid-19 pandemic by:

1. Providing 55 families in Shatila camp with monthly food support
2. Providing 55 families in Shatila camps with needed hygiene kits
3. Preparing and providing our children with educational kits
4. Providing 55 families with clothing and masks. This program also aimed to support families financially through employing two of our mothers to assist the dressmaker in the sewing procedure.

Emergency Pedagogy and Capacity building Beirut

The explosion in Beirut on August 4th, 2020 left many children in urgent need of psychosocial support, especially in areas that were directly affected as the Karantina and Nabaa areas. The predominantly low-income mixed-use residential, commercial, and semi-industrial neighborhood is located in northeastern Beirut and lies east to



the port of Beirut. Since we as *Just.Childhood* team, which is rather small, do not have the logistic capacities to start a child friendly space from scratch, but still wanted to contribute to the relief efforts after the explosion, we contacted several partners working in the field.

We decided to start the PSS project in collaboration with the Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARAD), a nongovernmental organization founded in 1985 that aims to improve the social, health, and environmental conditions of the marginalized and vulnerable groups, especially in the Palestinian camps.

PARAD has started a one-year trauma healing project in Karantina and Nabaa areas targeting 100 children between the ages of 7 and 12 and 75 caregivers previously registered in their database.

Just.Childhood is using PARAD's space in the Karantina area to provide the children already registered with PARAD with the needed psycho-social support through conducting various activities based on the approach of *Waldorf Emergency* that are specifically tailored to match their needs over one year.

Registration

With the start of the new academic year, the number of registered children at Bait al-Shams kindergarten grew to 55. We have paid attention to gender and also age-balance in our age-mixed groups. The majority of children are Palestinian from Shatila or around, but we have admitted a number of Syrian children, whose parents found refuge in the camp, and a number of Lebanese children as well.

As in the previous years we are officially announcing our registration dates usually in May and then follow a first-come first-serve policy, but with two constraints: if we have a sibling already registered, his or her brother or sister is prioritized. Also, the parents need to agree to our way of education and have to be willing to engage in





our Parent Program for the benefit of their children. The demand is there, but many families especially from Syria were looking for a temporary space in our kindergarten, sometimes only for a couple of weeks. As we believe that our work makes more sense when the children actually stay with us for at least two years, we gave preference to the children who are staying in Shatila.

The majority of children are Palestinians from Lebanon. The selection criteria for the ones on the waiting list are as above: The child on the list's top position gets the space if an already enrolled child leaves our kindergarten. Indirect target group: The siblings of our kindergarten children, the overall community in Shatila Camp as well as other organizations working on ECE on a local and national level.

Early Childhood Education Trainings

We were in our sixth year of teacher training in the kindergarten. The concept of *Bait al-Shams* follows the guidelines of Waldorf Early Childhood Education. One training module comprises four to six days, including class observation in the morning, evaluation, lectures, artistic exercises, methodology in the afternoon. Subjects of the training are arranged on three levels:

1. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS Methods in Waldorf Early Childhood Education; structure of day, week, year; handwork; toys; circle games; gestures; play with dolls, puppet play; paperwork; nutrition; working with parents and more.

2. ARTISTIC EXERCISES Painting; music; form-drawing; eurythmy; storytelling.

It is worth to mention that two of our educators have started a two-year training in Eurythmy at Step Together Association in Daichounieh in October 2018. At the end of the training, they will be certified by the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland¹.

¹ For more information see: <https://www.goetheanum.org/en/>



With this, we'll be able to do music education and Eurythmy in house without being dependent on additional staff.

3. BASIC CONCEPTS OF WALDORF EDUCATION Study of human: development of the child; biography; social structures; self-education.

The trainers, coming from Germany and Great Britain, are experts in Waldorf Early Childhood Education with professional experience for many years in Waldorf kindergartens. They all graduated from Waldorf training centers. The trainers are qualified and experienced in teaching in exceptional situations, as in foreign cultures, languages, and religion, under extraordinary conditions.

Curriculum and fields of study in the training follow the guidelines of the International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE).

Early Childhood Training in Bait al-Shams is an ongoing process. In 2019 there were four modules to improve and develop the quality of the kindergarten consistently. In addition to that, we there were three trainings conducted by the trainer Uta Stolz, a specialist for learning support and learning difficulties, for the teachers who are leading our learning support program, which started in June 2018.

Summed up, we can say that all the educators demonstrate respectful relationships with the children, which is evident in all interactions including supporting children in managing their behavior.

Other capacity building

Emergency Pedagogy training organized by our donor Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V..



Pre-school program

This program started in September 2016 and is now in the fifth year. Two educators are specializing in teaching the children the essential knowledge they will need by entering the school in the following academic year. In cooperation with Waldorf class teachers at schools and educators in Germany we have developed a specially tailored curriculum for our oldest children. In a creative, flexible and age-appropriate approach the children learn the English and Arabic alphabet and numbers and do simple writing and reading exercises. The children gather once a day for one hour and learn in a separate classroom according to a structured cycle consisting of movement and concentration/studying exercise. The subjects English, Arabic, Math, and Form-drawing, are taught in so-called epochs of three weeks in a row after each other before being repeated.

Outcomes

- Children are developing strong relationships with the staff, which is evident in improved confidence, and engagement with learning
- System of child observation has been developed (Child case studies, home visits)
- The educators demonstrate respectful relationships with the children which is evident in all interactions including supporting children in managing their behavior
- Children are demonstrating curiosity and resilience
- Parents are more familiar with our methodology; absorb the curriculum and follow-up with their children and their siblings at home
- Closely working with parents to establish a social link through participation in supporting their children in kindergarten and beyond
- Healthy environment
- Parents are involved and responsible
- Children are prepared for school
- Evaluation standards developed
- Child Protection Policy developed

Outlook 2021

One of the major changes will be finding new donors to support the overall costs of the kindergarten and its additional programs. Other than that we reported on the second year of a three-year project so far. We will continue in the way we are working for now.

This basically means:

- To move forward with expected program put down by team and trainers
- Advancing community work
- Extending the system of milestones to be achieved concerning the development of the children/developing tools to measure success
- Developing the best-practice approach by developing strategies for opening more kindergarten branches in the other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon
- Continue intensive training
- Strengthen the fundraising plan towards more independence from political circumstances/ visibility

We are currently thinking about further expansion of our educational approach. There is a great chance of starting a new project in another Palestinian Refugee camp in Lebanon. As a start we would like to establish a sort of sample project by providing children with activities once or twice a week; this will allow us to have a better assessment of the situation and people's needs.

Also, there is a great possibility of providing training for other NGOs, kindergartens, and institutions across the region. The training will focus on illustrating the basic principles of Waldorf education. Our educators will work on developing a curriculum based on the needs of the participants.





Conclusion

In a nutshell, despite the challenges that come with the environment we are working in and the Covid-19 pandemic, the team could look back to a successful year. The work with the children continued even through online videos. We tried to provide our children with activities that could relieve their stress and allow them to have a sense of structure throughout the day.

Just.Childhood consists of people who have many years of experience working with social or political-related work within Lebanon in general and its current refugee and host community context in specific. The staff working in Shatila Camp is all from the respective community. With the additional programs like the Parent/Community Awareness and Learning support mainly, we were able to support and strengthen the effectiveness of the overall ECE project. Follow-up strategies to evolve from best practice to a larger scale project, possibly in other refugee camps in Lebanon, and, if possible regionally, will be developed additionally.

We need to develop and strengthen the network of Waldorf schools and kindergartens mainly in Germany and Europe, in order to have alternative funding possibilities so to avoid further dependency on international donor organizations.

We started on spreading the idea of our educational approach beyond our kindergarten activities. The staff teamed up with a kindergarten project in Gaza. They shared their experiences and tutored their colleagues in Palestine. We did a consultancy in Jordan, where Early Childhood Education is getting a lot of attention in the context of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals².

For almost 6 years now, *Just.Childhood* has been the sole presenter of Waldorf approach in the region. After all these years, *Just.Childhood* is able to leave its mark in the educational field. The impact of its work and approach is directly reflected in the target groups we work with. *Just.Childhood's* work became highly noticed and other organizations became curious about the approach practiced. This has encouraged



² Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>



Just.Childhood to expand further; the staff is currently working on preparing a training curriculum for other NGO's, kindergartens and institutions in Syria and other regional initiatives.

After intense annual trainings, the *Just.Childhood* staff is well-capable of transferring the needed knowledge of Waldorf's principles to other interested parties. The educators were able to prove themselves as trainers through previously training the former staff in the Baalbek project. This advantage can be used later on as a business idea for income generation which is highly needed in these tough circumstances.

Realizing the amount of damage caused by the drastic Beirut blast, *Just.Childhood* decided to join forces with Step Together Association. On August 16th, both teams received an intense training on Emergency Pedagogy. The training which focused on socio-emotional support and trauma response was delivered by a team of experts from Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V..

The blast left so many children in urgent need for psycho-social support, especially in highly affected areas like Nabaa and Karantina. Therefore, *Just.Childhood* collaborated with the Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARAD). Using PARAD's space in Nabaa and Karantina, *Just.Childhood* wants to provide 150 children registered in PARAD's database with the needed Psychosocial support activities over a period of one year. These activities are based on Waldorf approach, and are specifically developed to suit the needs of affected children.



Our goal to move from best practice to common practice in terms of Early Childhood Education as well as growing expertise in Elementary Education is getting closer. Also, the team is more confident and is working closely with the parents to establish a social link through participation in supporting their children in the kindergarten and beyond. We were able to create a healthy environment for educators, children and parents.

In general, the team is much more active and is taking responsibilities more naturally. This, at the same time reflects on the parents, who learn about their children's rights, their own rights and ways of articulating them beyond the kindergarten routine.



Water color paintings by our children enrolled in the Shatila kindergarten as well as from the children participating in our psycho-social support sessions in Nabaa and Karantina.



Water color paintings by our children enrolled in the Shatila kindergarten as well as from the children participating in our psycho-social support sessions in Nabaa and Karantina.

Donors 2020



Supported by



Annual Budget for all Programs

STAFF COSTS:	137.656 USD
OPERATIONAL/ADMINISTRATIONAL EXPENSES:	60.431 USD
TOTAL:	198.087 USD

