

just
childhood
جستِ نسايدرهو



Annual Report 2021



About Us

With the kindergarten project *Bait al-Shams*, and its additional programs, *Just.Childhood* is offering the children of Sabra and Shatila Refugee Camp a safe space for learning and simply being a child on a continuous, reliable basis and prepare them for school. *Just.Childhood's* work is based on 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 projects 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 all our projects is based on Waldorf Education and emphasizes on the role of imagination in learning and developing thinking that includes a creative as well as an analytic component. *Just.Childhood* aims at providing 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 Liban 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 of 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

Kindergarten Project Coordinator

Mahmoud Al Chanati

Logistics Officer-Skateboarding Program

Khaled Kassem

Accountant

Zahia Hamza

Office Support

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

Zakia Hammou

Kindergarten Educator

Sara Iskandarani

Kindergarten Educator



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 74 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 curriculum.

A qualitative study of the American University of Beirut already in 2011 has analyzed 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

In 2021 the country and people continued to witness a countless number of events and crisis, inflation in the currency along with the fuel crisis in Lebanon remained and even deteriorated. The crisis had a huge impact on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, as the majority of them found themselves sliding further into extreme poverty. Poverty is an obstacle to children's access to educational opportunities. Poor families are either unable to provide for educational needs or depend on their children for their daily sustenance. In 2021, 55% of families in Lebanon suffered from poverty, and the situation was worse for Palestinian and Syrian refugees, where the poverty rates reached 70% and 90% respectively¹.

In Lebanon, after nearly two years of closure and distance learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, children were finally able to return to school after easing the measures that were imposed by the state to limit the spread of the Coronavirus.

Just.Childhood was also able to welcome back its children as of September 2021, and this time in a better and safer environment. After years of struggling with the security situation and the terrifying spread of drug mafias and daily armed clashes, *Just.Childhood* was finally able to find a new suitable building in the Sabra area. The new building is located on the camp's border, which allowed the *Just.Childhood* team to continue to work and preserve the already established bonds with the local community.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unrwa-raises-alarm-situation-palestine-refugees-lebanon>



Although *Just.Childhood* managed to complete the renovation and move to its new building in October 2021, the process was not as smooth as desired. The renovation process flattered due to many reasons, the most important of which is the electricity and fuel crisis that the country faced at the time, in addition to the recurrent lockdowns imposed by the state as part of Covid-19 preventive measures. Thus, the team and the children had to start the academic year in the old kindergarten building in Shatila Camp, until the renovation process was completed.

The new space provides security for children since it offers a larger safe space where they can freely play, run and learn. The place is sunny and has a large outside playground for the children, which affected their mental health positively and showed an impact on their performance.

It is also much easier for parents to drop and pick up their children from the kindergarten as the alleys around the building are wider and easier to reach. The spacious place allowed JC to expand and open a new group, reaching out to 20 additional children. The total number of children at Bait al-Shams kindergarten increased from 55 to 75.

Based on research, many people in Lebanon showed signs of a further deterioration in their mental health after the Covid-19 crisis².

It has been observed that the interrupted physical attendance of the children to the kindergarten affected the parents' and children's levels of stress, and following the return to school in September 2021, they showed signs of relief to have the kindergarten opening regularly again.

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. As a team, *Just.Childhood* 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.

² Bou-Hamad, I., Hoteit, R., & Harajli, D. (2021). Health worries, life satisfaction, and social well-being concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic: Insights from Lebanon. *PLoS one*, 16(7), e0254989. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0254989>

Methodology

Just.Childhood Bait al-Shams Kindergarten is open to all children living in Shatila, providing 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 strongly rely on the help of the parents. Such collaboration includes parent-teacher conferences, courses and lectures. Currently *Just.Childhood* hosts four age-mixed groups, each led 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, 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 2021

Bait al-Shams Kindergarten

Following the moving to the new building in the Sabra area and expanding the number of children and staff, *Just.Childhood* worked on further strengthening the bonds with the local community and the parents. Its strategy focused on including the parents as much as possible in the planning and executing of activities. This was achieved through quarterly *Parents and Educators meetings*, reactivating the *Parents' committee* in each of the four kindergarten groups and increasing the number of participants in the *Mother and Child Group* program from seven to fourteen participants.

Emergency Pedagogy and Capacity building

The explosion in Beirut on August 4th, 2020 left many children in urgent need of psycho-social support, especially in areas that were directly affected such as Karantina and Nabaa. 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 the *Just.Childhood* team, which is rather small, did 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, several partners working in the field were contacted.

Following this, *Just.Childhood* started a psycho-social support project in collaboration with the Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARD), 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 and gatherings.

Just.Childhood continued its collaboration which started in 2020 with PARD throughout 2021, in the one-year trauma healing project in Karantina and Nabaa, which targeted 100 children between the ages of seven and twelve and seventy-five caregivers previously registered in their database.



Just.Childhood used PARD's space in Nabaa and Karantina to provide the children already registered with them with additional needed psycho-social support through conducting various emergency pedagogical activities that were specifically tailored to match their needs over one year.

Local and Regional Trainings

Through years of hard work, *Just.Childhood* managed to create a distinctive mark in the field of education in Lebanon through its not so common and therefore quite unique curriculum that is based on Waldorf education. This has captured the attention of other local and regional educational institutions and organizations, which became interested in knowing more about the work of *Just.Childhood*.

In 2021, *Just.Childhood* provided a training consisting of five two-day workshops on Emergency Pedagogy and psycho-social support to more than 30 participants from different organizations in Syria. The training occurred over the course of one year, and was carried out by *Just.Childhood's* educators.

The unique emergency pedagogical approach combines learning with holistic, trauma-sensitive teaching methods and focuses on the psycho-social aspect of kindergartens, schools and training in crisis contexts. Children are highly vulnerable during and after crisis situations. Trauma creates high level of stress and can have long term negative impacts, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), on children's psychological and physical well-being and development.

The emergency pedagogical training and related activities and principals aimed to teach pedagogues, caretakers, and social workers to understand what trauma and PTSD are. At the same time, trainees learned practical skills how to reduce the level of toxic stress when working with children. Some of the main focus areas of the work are healthy and reliable relationships, connection, routine, stability, joy and understanding of trauma and its effects on children. The physical and mental paralysis



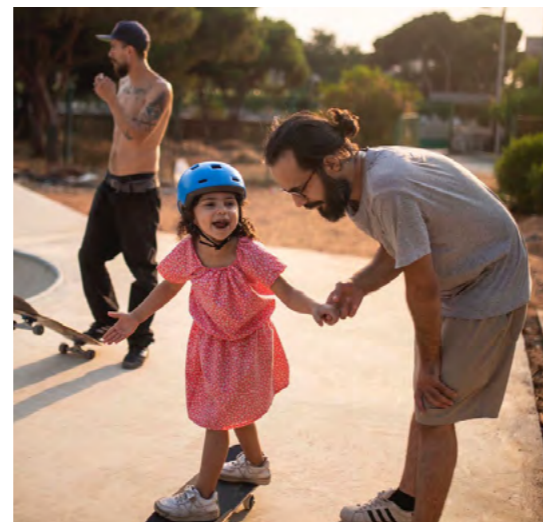
often created by traumatic experiences leading to high levels of stress is counteracted by specific physical exercises and activities, and children are given the opportunities to express their feelings and emotions in a non-verbal manner through creative-artistic activities. These measures help children regain self-confidence and confidence in others to help them to re-learn healthy social interaction, as well as strengthen their learning and concentration abilities. All these factors combined provide the ground for a healthier child development, which leads to increased resilience abilities and general improved psychological and physical well-being.

It is worth noting that there was a very high interaction from the participants and a desire to delve deeper into the Waldorf educational methods, which prompted *Just.Childhood* to offer the participants individual counselling sessions to better tackle their specific needs and interests.

In Lebanon in 2021, *Just.Childhood* also offered training to another local NGO, Defense for Children International (DCI) working in the field of education and PSS activities. The training period had two phases. The first part included receiving the participants to *Just.Childhood's* kindergarten in Shatila camp and spending a full day with the educators and children. The training included both practical and observational parts, where the participants had the chance to observe the method of work practiced and implemented the activities with the children. The presence on the ground helped create a clearer understanding of *Just.Childhood* educational concept and provided the basis for the training taking part at the participants' workspace that followed. Through the training, the twelve participants received both theoretical and practical training on Waldorf education, the fundamental work of *Just.Childhood*, and the daily structure and activities of Bait al-Shams kindergarten.

During the second phase of the training, there was as chance to join the summer activities implemented by the Friends of Waldorf Education - Emergency pedagogical team and the *Just.Childhood* colleagues in Shatila camp. These activities represented hands-on training for the trainees, which aimed to transfer theory into practice and to benefit from the multiple experiences of trainers and educators.





The Skateboarding Project

Another highlight of the year was *Just.Childhood's* collaboration with *Make Life Skate Life*. Following a relief fund in support of the skate community in Lebanon after the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020, an international team of volunteers constructed Lebanon's first public skatepark. *Make Life Skate Life* initiated the *Snoubar Skatepark* project, a free-of-charge community skatepark at the urban park Horsh Beirut. The project addresses underprivileged youth in Beirut to contribute towards increasing their resilience and psycho-social well-being through skateboarding.

Immediately after the six-week building phase of *Snoubar Skatepark*, the program for refugee children in cooperation with *Just.Childhood* and local skaters was established for 60 children living in Shatila and Borj el Barajneh camps. The program started with three hours per week of skating lessons.

This project constitutes an important step in giving children and youth the necessary and safe space to engage in physical activities, which positively reflects on their physical and psychological health and contributes to their integration into the local community outside the camp.

In addition, the project created a reliable rhythm and strengthened relationships between parents and children through the participation of parents who walk with their children to the park, which is located ten minutes away from Shatila camp. It also helped in breaking of gender stereotypes through the high participation of girls and young women with the encouragement and support of their parents.

© Photos by Samantha Robison (MSL)



Early Childhood Education Trainings

We are in our sixth year of teacher training in the kindergarten. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only one out of three annual planned trainings took place at the end of 2021. Topics of the training were the theme of Self-Education, which is related to pedagogical expertise and competencies.

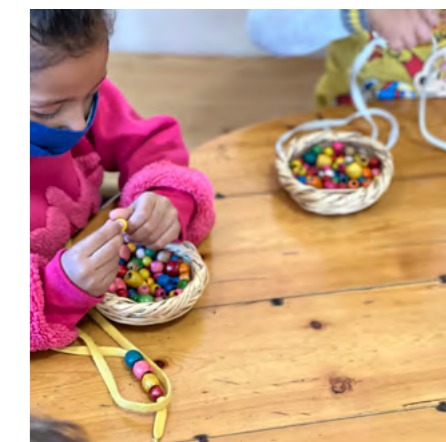
Another important topic was Training of Trainers, as some of the advanced, already certified, educators are requested to give instructions in Waldorf methods in other places and for new colleagues joining the organization. The trainers introduced the pre-conditions and qualifications needed in teaching adults. For the new staff members an introductory course was offered about the basics of Waldorf Education. The previously trained participants of the partner NGO DCI were invited as well and an introduction into basic concepts of human nature as a bodily, living, emotional, individual being was given.

The administrative staff got extra lessons which focused on social techniques in administration. The demands of competence in social administration in the field of Waldorf Education was discussed, which differ from other fields of management.

Within the artistic – practical work a new and rich experience was assessed by making puppets on strings. The project contained different levels of artistic, pedagogical and practical issues, such as story-telling, handicrafts, puppet theater production in many details like costumes, characters, colors, materials, equipment.

The trainers are part of a network of trainers mainly from Germany who have come to Beirut ever since the kindergarten work started in 2015. They 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 religions, 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).





Other Distinctive Trainings

The administration staff and educators at *Just.Childhood* underwent training on Monitoring and Evaluation in August and September 2021 conducted by Kindernothilfe e.V. (KNH), one of *Just.Childhood* long-term donors.

Pre-school Program

This program started in September 2016 and is now in its sixth year. Two educators are specialized in teaching children the essential knowledge needed by entering the school in the following academic year. In cooperation with Waldorf class teachers at schools and educators in Germany, a specially tailored curriculum for our oldest children was developed. 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 and a half hours 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 have safe access to kindergarten through an equipped friendly space and structured daily plan developed by the team
- Children develop a positive attitude to learning
- Children develop language competencies in English and Arabic as well as numbers
- Children are able to cope with their traumatic experiences and anger through play and educational activities
- Children develop skills of non-violent communication through play and using their senses to connect with the self and the outside world
- Children can fulfill certain tasks according to their ages
- Parents participate in the educational path of their children
- Educators constantly improve curriculum and skills



Outlook 2022

Currently, *Just.Childhood* is seeking to expand and support other marginalized areas and communities in Lebanon. In specific, a competence center offering module training in emergency pedagogy and psycho-social support to institutions, associations and people working directly with children is in planning. In addition, psycho-social and emergency pedagogical activities to improve the mental health and well-being of children in the areas of Sabra and Karantina for children between three and twelve years old are being developed.

Through the Skateboarding program, *Just.Childhood* assessed the situation of many children who are spending their time in and around the Skatepark. Most of these children are out of school, thus *Just.Childhood* is planning to initiate a program for these children and youth to provide them with basic literacy and numeracy through an afternoon program in collaboration with the NGO Skateistan. On top of the educational part, the project is aiming to provide the children and youth with weekly skateboarding sessions.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, despite the challenges that come with the environment *Just.Childhood* is working in and the Covid-19 pandemic, the team could look back to a successful year. After the children spent a long time at home, the team was able to work on mitigating the negative effects caused by Covid-19 for parents and children.

Just.Childhood started on spreading the idea of its educational approach beyond its kindergarten activities. During the past years, *Just.Childhood* has received multiple training requests from different local and regional organizations.

For almost seven years now, *Just.Childhood* has been one of the very few presenters of the Waldorf Educational approach in the region and is able to leave its mark in the educational field. The impact of its work and approach can be seen in the target groups of the organizations it works with. *Just.Childhood's* work became highly noticed and other organizations became curious about the approach practiced. This has encouraged *Just.Childhood* to expand further; the staff is currently working on preparing a training curriculum for other NGO's, kindergartens and institutions locally and regionally.



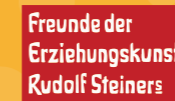
Just.Childhood was able to strengthen the ties with the local community. In addition to further integrating the parents into the educational process of their children and changing stereotypical educational patterns through the activation of new programs such as the Parents Committee and the expansion of programs based on capacity development like the Mother and Child Group.

Just.Childhood was able to expand the range of services it provides and enter into new areas as sports for development.

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. *Just.Childhood* was 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.



Donors and Partners 2021



Just.Childhood

Shatila Camp, Beirut
info@justchildhood.org

www.justchildhood.org

