

just
childhood
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Annual Report 2022



About Us

Just.Childhood has been registered as a local, non-profit non-governmental organization (NGO) with the Lebanese Ministry of Interior under number 2112 and with the Lebanese Ministry of Finance under number 3041173 since 2014. It operates in the education and psycho-social support sector and is autonomous, as well as politically and religiously independent. The NGO's goal is to actively protect the childhood of socially marginalized and traumatized children in Lebanon and to support their right to play, learn and develop in safety.

Just.Childhood sees education as one of the core issues of its development work: in particular, early childhood education as the foundation of any secondary education. Improving early childhood education not only has an immediate positive impact on further schooling, but also shows positive effects on further education and employment opportunities in the medium and long term. It counteracts possible radicalization at an early stage. For these reasons, access to quality early childhood education is one of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Just.Childhood originally emerged from a community initiative of people who primarily wanted to take up educational issues in the Palestinian refugee camps and reform the pedagogical approach, especially in early childhood education, in this context. To this day, the organization understands its work as involving the community, responding to its needs and implementing activities that serve these.

The organization and all its programs are based on social ideals and the conviction that early childhood education can make a decisive contribution to building a future society that is less violent, more just and more compassionate.



Local Developments

In 2022, the country and people continued to witness a countless number of events and crises, inflation in the currency along with the fuel crisis in Lebanon remained and even deteriorated. The crisis had a huge impact especially on refugees, as the majority of them found themselves sliding further into extreme poverty – a major 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 some areas, child labor rates rose to 45 percent.

During the reporting year, more than 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% respectively.¹

When it comes to the public education sector, the situation is beyond alarming. While many teachers have left the country, the remaining teachers are striking over pay and working conditions, adding to an education crisis that is leaving an estimated one million children without education. Already since October 2019, schools have been largely closed following protests against government corruption, the Beirut port explosion, the Covid-19 pandemic, rising xenophobia, and teachers' strikes as the economic crisis devalued their salaries by 90 percent.

Recently collected data has shown, that during the previous school year at least 700,000 of the two million school-age children in Lebanon were out of school, while it is worth noting that primary education is compulsory under Lebanese law and the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the child.

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

The Kindergarten Program: Bait al-Shams

Just.Childhood's first and core project, the kindergarten Bait al-Shams, was originally located in Shatila refugee camp in Beirut. Due to the volatile security situation, the organization moved to the adjacent camp Sabra at the end of 2021.

Since its inception, the kindergarten aims to initiate, as best practice, the reformation of the classical early childhood education approach, which in Lebanon is mainly based on purely academic subjects, towards an age-appropriate, non-violent, holistic style of education based on Waldorf pedagogy.

This approach challenges the traditional mindset of early childhood education in the Palestinian camps and in various refugee contexts in Lebanon. Waldorf pedagogy promotes peaceful behavior by making a clear connection between violence and the way parents and teachers educate children, while recognizing that early childhood education programs are a critical outlet for fostering the mental and physical development of young children.



To emphasize the important role of families in their children's upbringing, *Just.Childhood* continued also during this year to include the parents as much as possible in the planning and implementation of activities. This happened for example through the quarterly Parents and Educators meetings, the work of the Parents' Committee, as well as extending the Mother and Child Group program from formerly seven to now fourteen participants.

Beside the daily kindergarten routine which builds on the rhythmic daily structure creating a sense of safety and security, children experienced seasonal festivals and activities through educational trips and celebrations like the winter festival, spring festival, Mother's Day, planting, baking, olive harvesting and more. In 2022 the preschool group was bigger than in previous years, therefore the group was led by two educators as opposed to one per subject as in the previous years.

Since the moving to the new premises at the end of 2021, the playground for the children has lain fallow. With the support of the German NGO "Kukuk Kultur e.V.", this was changed in spring 2022: The Kukuk team traveled with three volunteer playground construction experts to turn the terrace of the kindergarten into a play paradise. With the organizational support of the kindergarten staff in the background, a wonderful play and sensory space was created for the children. Different huts, climbing possibilities, balancing elements and a slide were built around a sandbox. From there, a bridge now leads to a marble run and a ship, various seating platforms and a raised bed. The possibility for free climbing and playing as well as retreats for quiet moments with oneself or in small groups now extend over the terrace of the kindergarten.

In addition to building the playground, more was done to enhance our building in Sabra: *Just.Childhood* is now a proud owner of a solar system that makes us much less dependent on the extremely unreliable electricity supply in Lebanon – this was materialized with the support the Palestinian programme of UNICEF Lebanon and facilitated through terre des hommes Italy in Lebanon. Also, the Deutsche Postcode Lotterie swiftly and uncomplicatedly supported us in winter to make and keep our building warm. The newly installed heating system makes a huge difference for all children to play and learn in a warm and safe environment.





Teacher Training

Even though most of the educators working at *Just.Childhood* have received a certification in Waldorf Education, the organization decided to go one step further towards official pedagogical recognition. Thus, at the end of the year, *Just.Childhood* started a three-year accredited teacher training supported by the International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) in collaboration with the Lebanese Step Together Association.

The training encompasses 4 week-long modules per year over three years covering the IASWECE benchmarks and totaling 504 hours. Between the modules, the participants engage in regular study groups to immerse deeper into pedagogical theory and practice. The wish to establish an accredited local Waldorf Teacher Training was born out of the need to become more independent from external support as well as:

- Developing a training tailored for the needs of the country and its cultural and educational context
- Building the capacities of the local staff
- Being able to train other interested initiatives on Lebanon and in the region in their own language in order to avoid possible cultural barriers



Emergency Pedagogy Project

Background

In the reporting year, we started a new chapter with extending our activities beyond our Early Childhood Education and area focus. In September, we opened our second location in the Beirut neighbourhood of Karantina. The Psychosocial Support (PSS) project was initiated due to the latest and current developments in Lebanon such as the refugee situation - lack of return prospects and precarious living conditions for Syrian refugees, unresolved political situation with consequences for recognition, employment and living conditions of the Palestinian refugees - COVID-19, the explosion disaster in the port of Beirut, and the absolute impoverishment and livelihood threat to Lebanese families. The steadily increasing need was strongly noted by *Just.Childhood* also in its own projects and led to the conception of this project in cooperation with the Friends of Waldorf-Education (FWE) – Emergency Pedagogy and with the support of the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German help alliance Aktion Deutschland Hilft e.V., and, since later in the year also Terre des Hommes Germany.

This project consists of three components:

Counseling Center Program

The center, located in Sabra with a branch office in Karantina serves as a contact point for 100 directly or indirectly affected families of a traumatic event, as well as civil society actors. By establishing the centre, people seeking help are advised on their own options for action and then, depending on their competence and, if necessary, their self-involvement, those seeking help can either take action themselves or seek support from the counseling center in the institution or the home environment.



Emergency Pedagogical Activities Program

In 2022, 160 children between the ages of 3 and 12 benefited through direct participation in emergency and trauma informed pedagogy interventions in Sabra and Karantina. At both sites, initially one group consisting of 20 children were being cared for four times a week for six months each; in the second year, the aim is to care for at least two groups per day. Some of the children are not involved in any pedagogical structure, kindergarten, school or informal pedagogical measures, and therefore urgently need support.

Capacity Building Program

The Capacity Building programme as the third component of the PSS project started at the end of 2022 and consists of a module training offered to interested participants working in the fields of university teaching, pedagogy, medicine, school education, social work, as well as community representatives, NGO employees, and other stakeholders. Through the trainings, participants receive in-depth training in their practical and theoretical skills in emergency and trauma education.

The first two modules took place at the end of the year and included an online and offline component. *Just.Childhood* colleagues and colleagues from other local Lebanese NGOs were participating in the face-to-face training, while participants from Turkey and Syria attended online.





Skateboarding Project

In 2022, *Just.Childhood* launched two skateboarding programs, one focused on developing skateboarding skills and the other combining education, life skills, and skateboarding. The first program, the Horsh Refugee Skateboarding Initiative, was a collaboration with Make Life Skate Life, and it targeted youth in Shatila, the community we are part of since the establishment of the organization. The project aimed to increase the resilience and psycho-social well-being of youth through skateboarding, as the youth living in the camps suffer from severe economic, social, and psychological problems due to the harsh living conditions and violence within the society. The project registered 60 kids between the ages of 6 to 18 years, who were provided with skateboards, helmets, and safety gears. The project was extremely successful, as most participants had already mastered their skateboarding skills and become more empowered, confident, and sociable.

The second project, Skate Beirut, was a collaboration with Skateistan and aimed to help underprivileged communities through a combination of education and skateboarding. The program targeted kids that never attended school, kids that had no access to schools, and street kids. The project registered 80 kids distributed over 4 groups according to their education level. Educators performed assessments in Arabic, English literature, and Mathematics, and based on that, the kids were distributed over three skating groups. The project was initially structured with a 4-hour session/group with one teacher, but later changed to a 2-hour session/group with 2 teachers to improve efficiency. The educators and skate coaches worked on the aggressive behavior of the kids, group structure, and acceptance of class rules, which led to significant changes in the kids' behavior.



The educators used stories, photos, and sketches as methods to teach the kids important values such as friendship and tolerance, while the skate coaches used meditation before the skate sessions to help the kids relax and use their imagination in proper ways. The educators also integrated the Waldorf approach into the basic education program, with the help of the kindergarten educators. The skate coaches taught the kids how to be respectful, disciplined, and well-organized, and how to follow public space manners through skateboarding. Overall, the Skate Beirut project had a significant impact on the kids' behavior, and it helped them develop important life skills while engaging in sports and physical activities.



Outlook 2023

While making sure to keep up and enhance all existing projects, *Just.Childhood* keeps working on expanding to support other areas and communities in Lebanon. In particular, *Just.Childhood* aims at improving the quality of learning and create opportunities for children and educators. For the second half of 2023, the opening of a new Waldorf kindergarten is planned.

Conclusion

Despite the critical situation and the extremely challenging situation in Lebanon on the economic, social and health levels, *Just.Childhood* continued its mission and improved wherever possible. In general, the team can look back to a successful year as they were able to fulfill the yearly objectives with parents, children, communities, and partners.

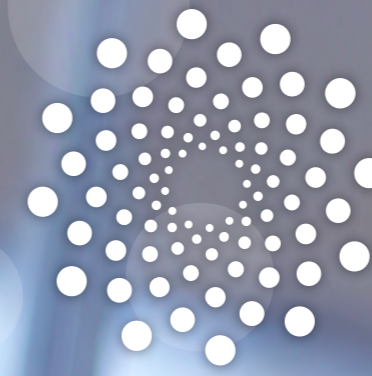
Just.Childhood continues to spread the idea of its educational approach beyond its kindergarten activities for parents and the community. During the past year, *Just. Childhood* has received a training request from different kindergarten initiatives in Kelli/ Syria. *Just.Childhood* team and management planned and prepared materials for the training in order to help the team in Kelli start up kindergartens taking Bait Al Shams Kindergarten as a best-practice example.

For almost eight years now, *Just.Childhood* has been one of the few presenters of an alternative educational approach based on Waldorf methods in the region and has been able to leave its mark in the educational field. Follow-up, monitoring, as well as feedback from parents and teachers showed, that children who graduate from Bait Al Shams Kindergarten are among the brightest students in the elementary schools and are doing very well both socially and academically. *Just.Childhood's* work was noticed and other organizations became curious about the approach practiced.

Our goal of moving 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. In this sense, *Just.Childhood* was able to create a healthy environment for educators, children, and parents. In general, the team is active and takes on more responsibilities naturally - supporting the idea and identity of a community project. This, at the same time, reflects on parents who learn about their children's rights, their own rights, and ways of articulating them beyond the routine of kindergarten.

Donors and Partners 2022





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