

TDP-UNRWA, **Project Report** regarding UNRWA Service Contract  
GFO/SC/EP/091/2014

Gaza 28-12-2014. Report **Back To School Weeks Sep 2014**

**Background to the project:**

In August 2014, UNRWA requested that TDP will play an important role in schoolchildren's 'Back-to-School' weeks planned for September 2014.

In meetings with Ms Caroline Pontefract (Director of Education at UNRWA Headquarters Amman), Mr Scott Anderson (Deputy Director UNRWA Gaza), Mr Farid Al Athra (Head of Education Gaza), and Mr Fadel Al Saloul (Deputy Head of Education Gaza), 2 different sets of activities were agreed upon:

1-Training 120 UNRWA HRCRT-teachers in structured forms of play & drama and in drama techniques that can give children joy of learning, a first step towards the new school year and curriculum. The 120 HRCRT teachers would bring/ teach the newly learned skills to a selected group of colleague teachers in their schools. The selection of the group would be dependent on the activity recreation program in each school during the Back-to-School weeks.

2-Performing 192 theatre shows with connected drama workshops for schoolchildren, with 300 children per performance, in the 2 Back-to-School weeks.

**Stated objective of the project:**

a) To bring drama and theatre to Gaza youth as a means of entertainment, of personal expression, and of finding the joy of learning in phases 1 and 2 of UNRWA's 3-phase plan to facilitate the return to school of Gaza children/youth and continued education reform after the traumatizing experience of 51 days of war in July-August 2014.

b) Contribute to minimize the negative impact of the July-August 2014 violence on Gaza children by training structured play to UNRWA teachers, by showing the children a stimulating theatre performance and by creating a safe environment for a drama workshop where their stories can be shared, relevant games played, and stress relieved.

**Report:**

[A. Preparation of TDP's artistic team.](#)

-1 An internal after-war stress-relief project was set up for 12 actors and 16 drama teachers. A specialist for healing after trauma was invited to come to Gaza and work with TDP's entire staff and graduates. After initial hesitation to deal with anything the summer war had pressed on them and their families and friends, the ease and physical relief nature of the meetings encouraged our drama-teachers and actors to start sharing their experiences of loss

and fear, and find support with one another. It was a needed preparation for going back to work and use theatre and drama as a trauma relief tool ourselves.

-2 For the training of Human Rights teachers (HRCRT), a special Drama Manual was written and printed. 120 teachers received the manual for study and practice in 4 days of training and 1 day of preparations for applying and multiplying the training in their schools.

-3 Four plays on TDP's Gaza repertoire were rehearsed; each with a strong acting team of 3 actors/actresses; two plays by male actors, two by actresses.

-4 Orientation workshop for TDP professional drama teachers (16 training hours). 16 drama-teachers accompanying the 4 theatre plays were trained in special sessions for trauma relief and storytelling drama-work. This trauma orientation training was given by project supervising artistic director Jan Willems in TDP's theatre hall in Gaza, Aug 30 – Sep 11<sup>th</sup>. Main training subjects concerned well-structured drama exercises for groups of 50-60 children and offering a strict framework for careful guiding of stories by children after traumatic experiences.

## [B. Training of 120 Human Rights \(HRCRT\) teachers](#) (see attached database for all statistics)

Training teachers to work with children using drama and play in a structured way. During the 2 Back-to-School weeks following the training, the teachers would be able to give children relief of war experiences and let them find joy in learning through drama.

-1 Intensive 5-day training in teaching playful drama, for 120 Human Rights (HRCRT) teachers of 120 UNRWA schools. The training was for men and women in equal numbers. The training was given in a TOT (Training of Trainers) format. A comprehensive manual was written specially for this occasion (in Arabic). The HR teachers would later teach their fellow teachers in their schools during the 2 weeks after our training, supervised where possible by TDP's supervising team.

The training (and the drama-manual) followed the 2 steps of the process identified by UNRWA to bring children back to school after the war. Phase 1. A structured approach to entertainment, relief, and relaxation. Phase 2. Drama exercises related to the competence of Learning to Learn, providing children with the joy of learning, of doing playful research, quizzing, problem solving. The training happened in 2 groups, each for 60 teachers (m/f). One for teachers working in the North and Gaza areas; they worked in TDP's theatre in Gaza. And one for teachers working in the Middle and South areas; they worked in UNRWA's training center in Khan Yunis. 4 days of active training (8-11 Sep 2014) were followed by one day (13 Sep 2014) of coaching and logistic preparation for further supervising in the following week (14-21 Sep 2014).

-2 Feedback. The training was a remarkable experience for the teachers as well as for TDP's drama team. It didn't only provide teachers with new playful tools for working with children, it also gave them an immediate physical and emotional experience that allowed them to deal with, or leave behind, their own war trauma and negativism. They reported on newly found joy in working with their colleagues. Women reported that it was important to meet their male colleagues in a situation of humor and creativity, finding unexpected respect and equality.

-3 Two exemplary narratives.

-Teacher Im Tarek talks about the support she felt the drama training gave her.

- a) The drama exercises were psychosocial support for the teachers themselves. And, more fundamentally, she felt she could be the child she was never allowed to be in her life.
- b) The training changes the way teachers are, changes their souls, they are more open, more flexible. The regular curriculum is frozen stuff taught by frozen teachers. Drama opens us up and we are more close to our students.
- c) Teaching the exercises to my colleagues in school was fun. They are all happy, as I was myself in the training. We started to invent our own exercises.

-Teacher Haneen Hassan Al Bana says this was the greatest training in her life. She trained 43 teachers in her school after being trained by TDP. Her teachers enjoyed the untraditional way of learning. "It brings out their inner energy as well as the energy of their students." She thinks this will stimulate long term success of the students and influence their families at home. She sees the entire society benefitting. Practicing the work in her own classes, she found another atmosphere in class: "...students are more concentrated, entertained; there is a different way of talking, there is movement (...) drama is like a medicine we need."

-4 Supervision. In the week following the training TDP drama supervisors made field visits to the schools where the HR teachers were training their colleagues in structured play. Most appeared to be extremely motivated. Especially the drama discipline of 'Teaching-in-Role' appeared to be a favorite part of the newly shared skills.

### C. 192 Performances and Children Audience Drama-work planned (see attached database for all statistics)

-1 Performances. **188** theatre performances cum drama workshops were completed, equally divided between 4 different theatre productions, financed with UNRWA funds and additional TDP-donors consortium funding. They were also equally divided between the 5 regional areas of the Gaza Strip: North area, Gaza City area, Middle area, Khan Yunis area, and Rafah area. (see attached Excel database for details)

-The total number of school children reached was **54,570**. Girls 50.29%, boys 49.71%.

-The average number of children present at every schoolyard performance and drama workshop was **291**.

-In total **1795** teachers, parents, and visitors witnessed the performances and workshops.

-2 Content of the plays. The 4 selected plays - formerly performed by TDP in 2013 during the Summer Fun Weeks program of UNRWA Gaza - deal with the theme of loss and finding, finding of new perspectives, new friends, or new ideas and plans after a time of war with loss of important things or people. The plays were written in a light, comic style. In comparison with the previous year, all actors reported an important change in their performance and in audience reactions. They felt their acting to be more truthful. The characters and the acted situation could be felt more deeply, more truthful, navigated by the reality of the Gaza war. The children were watching with higher intensity and more joy than before. It was as if much more is at stake in the performance. The texts and the directing of the plays seemed to have found its proper environment, if even so sad!

-3 Drama work feed back. After each theatre show, the audience divided in 4 groups for further exercises and storytelling inspired by the content of the play with 4 drama teachers.

The children wanted to talk, they were happy to have the opportunity to speak out, to say what was on their mind and heart. There were tears and there were difficult moments. But almost always the drama group was able to bring a relaxing and comforting element connected to the stories that were shared. Only in a few cases we needed to notify the mental health counselor of the school for support of one of the children. TDP's drama team came back from the 2 weeks of performances and workshops carrying the weight of many hundreds of stories told by children. The massiveness of these stories and the often-cruel content, made clear to which extent Gaza children were traumatized in the war. It also showed the remarkable resilience of children once they are allowed to express themselves. Where we heard many educators saying that the children just need to forget about the war, be entertained without any reference to the war, TDP was able to show the great benefit of allowing children to speak out on their own initiative, while marking their own borders, and inspired by good theatre that connects imaginatively to their situation.

Where the kids found relief and strengthened themselves by playing relevant drama-games and by sharing their stories, our drama teachers were carrying the accumulated weight of all these war experiences. Before we were going to continue our drama work in October, we needed to find strength and relief ourselves in a week of sharing experiences and stories.

-4 Mental health counseling. As said before, only a few times mental health counselors were made attentive of a child that might need extra support. The nature of TDP's drama work seems to have a healing or comforting effect, and allow children to make their own choice whether they want to just be entertained or open up to the stories they need 'off their chest' and find relief by sharing and by thinking about good memories.

The proper way of guiding the children between playing and facilitating storytelling, need to be found in the process. The TDP team was supervised closely on following proper artistic rules, especially concerning 'forced debriefing', the mistake to ask children directly about their war experiences. This might have caused a new situation of trauma for the children. During the first day of work TDP supervisors were made attentive of this risk by several mental health counselors in UNRWA schools. This gave us an extra impulse for careful operating, proper monitoring, and extra late-afternoon supervision sessions with our drama teachers.

-5 Children and schoolteachers feedback. A small selection from our logbooks and collected narratives, in keywords:

#### Children

Negative:

No negative reactions/narratives by the children.

Positive:

-I'm very happy with the play, we have to be friends in order to overcome the crisis we live in;

-a comic performance that helps us to forget the sorrows;

-the play shows us the right to have good education and how we are oppressed by Israel, all in a comic way;

-I liked everything in the play. Tears came out of my eyes when the characters took their stuff and left the shelled house;

-I liked the play a lot. I learned many things, like not being desperate and to have hope, as life doesn't stop. I am happy and got rid of the despair and sorrow I had since our house was shelled.

### Schoolteachers

#### Negative:

- use of colloquial instead of classic Arabic;
- improper age of students;
- the play reminds the students of the war.

#### Positive:

- the play enjoys and refreshes the minds of the students, makes them better to start the new school year;
- it gives psychosocial support to the students and gets them out of the war atmosphere into an atmosphere full of safety;
- the play gives comic relief and gives possibility of expression for psychosocial support;
- the play suits the age of the children;
- meaningful content, the children are completely involved in what happens on stage;
- the play shows that the loss of a dear person or being wounded shouldn't stop us, we can deal with crises and catastrophes, we can find a smile, the show is great.
- The show was gorgeous. It talks about the misery of 52 days war on Gaza. The show has many positive points like showing how to deal with homeless and shocked people. This was a great show.
- The play is meaningful. It reduced the pressure the students have because of the war. Students were happy. The play stimulated them to be courageous and to get rid of despair. It gave them a motive to rebuild what was destroyed.

#### Note

Names of children and teachers known by TDP; all mentioned narratives are documented in English and Arabic. Other documented narratives related to this project are documented in Arabic only. All can be inspected upon request.

### [D\) Financial Statements](#)

See separate financial report in pdf.

#### **Appendices:**

- 1 Database statistics TOT HRCRT teachers and Back to School performances;**
- 2 pdf-Training Manual disseminated to all participating teachers – in Arabic;**
- 3 Analyses per performance play (The School, The Brother, The Shops, The Room) of children's feedback through collected questionnaires.**
- 4 Financial Statements.**