

How do you select the children?

We have an application to be filled out by the children's parents or guardians, which focuses on the child's social environment. We accept 200 children every year, but we receive about 600 applications. It is a difficult job to choose whom to accept. We give priority to those from the poorest families, children of martyrs and orphans.

What are the qualifications of the educational personnel?

High school graduation is the minimum requirement for our teachers. For the first year, she would be an assistant in a class with another teacher. We also have an annual 15-day training course. For the last five years, all the Kanafani Foundation's teachers have been sent to Beirut College for specialization in education. During the training year, a close watch is kept on the new teacher to see her development. Sometimes we have to extend the training period for an extra year.

Do you give the children a patriotic education?

We educate our children about their surroundings and about their homeland, Palestine. We explain to them that they are only here temporarily, because their families were forced to leave Palestine. We tie everything we teach to Palestine, like lemons and oranges. We talk about Palestinian tradition. With such work, we make the kindergarten a revolutionary center where children grow up knowing about their people and country.

What days do you celebrate in the school?

We observe all national occasions and religious holidays (Moslem and Christian). On days like Martyrs' Day and Land Day, we have a program for drawing Palestinian flags and singing nationalist songs. The children dress in the colors of the Palestinian flag, and we send cards to their families.

How is your relationship with the children's families? Do you relate the education at the kindergarten with the education at home?

Visiting the families is part of our educational program. We believe that without a positive attitude at home, we cannot be successful in our work. Every two months we have a general family meeting. We discuss the psychological conditions of the children, and our educational approach. We have strong relations with the families.

Is there follow-up on the children after they leave the kindergarten?

That is also part of our program. Every year 100 children leave the kindergarten and enter elementary school. At mid-year we visit these schools and get reports on the children. This is important for us, because it is how we see the results of our educational work. We notice that most of our children are top students in school and have an interest in continuing their education.

Do you have plans to expand?

We are preparing to have a school for handicapped children. We have nearly completed three rooms on top of the kindergarten. It will be opened in March. Every year we notice that we have a small number of slightly handicapped children. The families consider them normal, but they are not. With the help

of a Norwegian organization that covered the costs, we decided to start this project. Ragerding expansion like building new schools, that is very difficult because we had many losses during the 1982 Zionist invasion and the 1985 camp war in Beirut. First we are going to renew what we had in the past.

What happened with this kindergarten during the 1982 Israeli invasion?

The kindergarten was heavily bombed. The top floor of our building was destroyed. We had to work in the basement. We contacted those children who were in a very bad situation, whose homes were destroyed, or whose fathers were in Ansar concentration camp. We took an extra 100 children over our capacity, because we felt it was our duty. Then the Phalangists and Saad Haddad's army occupied our building. We are a legally recognized institution, so we were able to reopen after a lot of struggle. We were harassed several times by the Israeli army and its Lebanese lackeys. Once a doctor came to check the children, but he had to go back to his clinic to get something. He left his bag with the stethoscope in the kindergarten. Within minutes, the kindergarten was surrounded by Israeli tanks and troops. They wanted to know what was left in the school. I told them what was in the bag, but they entered the classrooms and terrorized the children and teachers. Even foreign delegations who visited us were subjected to harassment and interrogation.

What are the conditions for children in the camp?

From our work with families, we see that the Palestinian children live a very difficult life. There are not enough schools; families have financial difficulties because of inflation and lack of jobs. Palestinian families are large, so the mother cannot give enough attention to each child. Health care is not as it should be. Skin diseases are common, and teeth are not taken care of. We also have special cases. This month in our health check-up of 300 children, we found eight cases of heart disease that require surgery. Such an operation costs 150,000 Lebanese pounds, and the families cannot afford this. We are trying to contact international humanitarian organizations to help, but until now we have not been successful. UNRWA does some health work in the camp, but it is not enough. As a result of the war, the psychological health of the children is not good, and there are a number of mentally retarded children.

How did the recent budget cut in UNRWA affect the camp?

In the past, the UNRWA services were not enough. Their health clinic was very bad - non-professional; medicine was not available. Then UNRWA stopped the basic financial aid it used to give, which increased hardships for families. UNRWA has stopped giving books and notebooks in their schools. The number of teachers is being reduced. They closed the Sibleen Institute for vocational training that had 500 students.

In closing, I would like to ask your readers to strengthen their position on the just cause of the Palestinian people, to speak out about the situation of Palestinian children, especially in the camps, and to give us at least moral support.

The Kanafani Foundation and its kindergartens are dependent on contributions. Anyone wishing more information or wanting to give a donation, should write to: GKCF, P.O. Box 135/375, Chouran, Beirut, Lebanon.