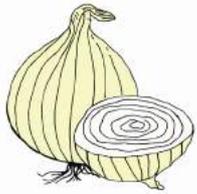




Youth Empowerment Program

Palestinian Counseling Center



Youth Empowerment Program¹

Region	MENA
Country	State of Palestine
Organization	Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC)
Name	Youth Empowerment Program
Category	Skills development
Start date	1998
End date	Ongoing
Partners	Diakonia and Save the Children
UN involvement	Non-UN
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1. Background and description

Since 1998, the Palestinian Counselling Center (PCC) has been implementing an empowerment programme for youth. The program was developed in response to increased rates of school dropout, early marriage and child labour. The information about dropouts (specifically students from grades 9, 10, 11 and 12) is retrieved mainly from Israeli schools (as Palestinians attend those schools), and where the dropout rate is around 50 per cent (the highest among the different types of schools²), or from UNRWA or local Palestinian schools, but these sources do not provide accurate information on dropout rates. The programme evolved over the years. It began as a general programme for youth, and during 2005-2009, it was called 'Youth at Risk' as it became a programme for at-risk youth that targeted youth aged 12-18 years who were at risk of dropping out of school and getting married at an early age. Between 2009 and end-2010, the programme continued to operate and was restructured as the implementers realized that the behaviour of young people was affected by other indicators mainly related to the surrounding environment. Between 2011 and 2014, the programme was refocused to become a youth resilience programme called 'Youth Empowerment Program' (YEP) which targets youth at risk of developing psychosocial problems and focuses on building the resilience of youth aged 15-22 years by decreasing factors that may negatively influence youth. The programme focuses on developing young people's identity and sense of self-worth, including their ability to take decisions and to plan for the future. The PCC also conducts recreational activities and

¹ Desk review (May-September 2014); Inquiry form (1 October 2014); Interview (23 October 2014 and 5 February 2015); Write up (12 February 2015); Internal Validation (12 February 2015); Implementer Validation (18 March 2015); Final validation (October 2015).

² Interview with Shadi Jaber, Consultant with PCC, 5 February 2015.



awareness-raising workshops with youth, and works with their parents with the aim of empowering them to address the issues facing their children, understand the changes that adolescents experience and improve communication between parents and youth.

In light of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian youth struggle with their individual and national identities and are at risk of being alienated within their society and becoming increasingly violent due to social and economic factors. Moreover, the results of a survey on violence carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2011, indicated that 20.8 per cent of youth (19.4 per cent male, 33.2 per cent female) were exposed to at least one type of violence (the focus is on violence caused by their surrounding environment and own communities and not by Israelis). Some 31.4 per cent of them were exposed to psychological violence, 38.7 per cent to physical violence and 1.1 per cent to sexual assault.

In addition, research conducted by the PCC indicated that a sense of self-worth and a proper sense of identity positively affect young people's mental health. It is important to provide youth with skills to adapt to the surrounding context and to be able to make decisions and plan the future. However, in order to ensure that they receive the necessary support, it is important to include parents in the process as they are the most influential people in the life of youth.⁴

Organization profile

The PCC is a non-governmental organization that provides comprehensive services in the field of mental health, including therapy, psychological counselling, socio-educational services to prevent the development of psychological problems, capacity-building and consultations to organizations and individuals working in the field of mental health. The PCC also undertakes lobbying and advocacy to influence legislation and policies that enhance the right to a state of mental well-being in the State of Palestine.

The programme aimed to improve the psychological well-being of the youth. It is based on the premise that improving the coping skills and empowering youth improves their psychological well-being, which in turn increases their productivity and their ability to become active members of their communities.



³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



2. Goal and objectives

2.1. Goal

The programme focuses on developing young people's identity and sense of self-worth, including their ability to take decisions and plan for the future.

2.2. Objectives

1. To empower youth in marginalized areas to adopt alternatives to violence and develop their resilience in order to be able to deal with difficult life situations.
2. To raise the awareness of parents about the needs of youth and methods of empowering them.

3. Target group

The minimum number of youth who are enrolled is 120, but more can be enrolled when additional funding is provided, as for example in 2013, when there were around 180 participants.

3.1. Age group

15-22 years old.

3.2. Gender considerations

The programme addresses both males and females, with 60-70 per cent females and 30-40 per cent males.⁵ When recruiting youth, the programme implementers always aim to have an equal number of males and females. During some of the sessions, discussions revolve around gender equality challenges and attitudes towards gender roles, allowing the programme to promote values encouraging gender equality and the rights of women.

3.3. Ethnic / disability considerations

The programme has an inclusionary approach. Youth with disabilities can take part in the group sessions. In addition, members of some ethnic groups, e.g., Palestinians of African or gypsy descent, are included in the group sessions without

any discrimination. Anyone can join the sessions as long as they are facing the issues that the programme aims to resolve.⁶

3.4. Targeting the most marginalized / most at risk

The programme targets youth who are currently in school or living in Nablus or Jerusalem and have at least one of the following problems: divorced parents; imprisoned parents; drugs; family problems; exposure to violence; and low socioeconomic status.⁷ The youth identified are not necessarily those with low grades but instead are those facing difficult living conditions as mentioned earlier.

Targeting of the participants was achieved through multiple methods:

- Members of the group of youth who are still attending school are reached through the schools. The school guides the selection of youth who fit the profile; 60 per cent of youth are recruited in this way.
- Organizations, specifically community centres, guide PCC in the selection of youth who meet the criteria of the target group. Around 30 per cent of youth are recruited through this mechanism.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

- Referrals through PCC itself. Because PCC implements other programmes, youth are referred to this programme by facilitators of other programmes.
- Finally, some parents come to the organization to ask that their children participate in the programme; 10 per cent of youth are recruited through referrals and parents.

After PCC identifies the youth who fit the criteria, it undertakes direct outreach by visiting the youth at home to inform them about the programme. Alternatively, some are informed about the programme if they visit PCC directly.⁸

3.5. Human right programming

The YEP promotes the participation of young people as active change agents in their communities. It promotes acceptance of others on the grounds of non-discrimination. The programme encourages youth to voice their concerns and express their feelings, fight for their rights without infringing on the rights of others, and use dialogue and communication as alternatives to violence.⁹

3.6. Youth involvement

Starting in 1998, youth were involved in developing the objectives and planning prior to actual implementation of the programme by providing input through focus groups. For example, in 2010, a group of 44 youth (31 males and 13 females) met with PCC staff and evaluated the programme that had taken place from 2005 to 2009. They made suggestions regarding the topics that the programme should focus on during the next phase. Some of the suggestions were to: (1) provide the youth with chances to implement the programme's activities and be engaged in community development;

and (2) empower and encourage youth who have spent a lot of time on the streets to return to school or refer them to institutions that would keep them off the street and rehabilitate them professionally and psychologically.¹⁰ As a result of this focus group's input, the programme was changed during 2011-2014 to focus on building the resilience of the young people.

Youth also are continuously involved by providing feedback about the programme on a yearly basis through pre- and post-programme tests.

In 2014, youth volunteers from universities were heavily involved in implementing sessions with the youth. These volunteers were recruited either through the recruitment officer at PCC or were referred by their universities to the PCC student training programme, which provides university students of social work and psychology with opportunities to train and engage in practical experience in its various programmes.

4. Strategy and Implementation

4.1. Strategies / theoretical approaches / methodologies

The programme was developed based on the extensive experience of the PCC, which implements a vast array of programmes in the State of Palestine,¹¹ including youth programming. The YEP is based on several theories¹² which guide its implementation and continuous evolution. There is no stand-alone theory behind the programme, but rather various psychological theories are applied, including Erikson's psychosocial theory of development which "considers the impact

7 Interview with Shadi Jaber, Consultant with PCC, 23 October 2014.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Report from PCC (2010).

11 Interview with Shadi Jaber, Consultant with PCC, 23 October 2014.



of external factors, parents and society on personality development from childhood to adulthood".¹³ This theory is manifested in sessions where there is a focus on finding one's identity. In addition, youth are taught that they are not individuals living alone but rather are surrounded and affected by their environment and in return they need to positively influence this environment.¹⁴ This refers to Kurt Lewin's force field analysis theory, which focuses on the individual and his/her interaction with the environment. In order for change to take place in a person's life, the equilibrium between forces must be disturbed. Change happens either by strengthening the driving forces (those seeking to promote change) or weakening the restraining forces (forces that are attempting to maintain the status quo). This is why the PCC focuses on the individual as well as the environment, and the interaction between the two.¹⁵

4.2. Activities

Because the PCC has limited resources, each year 120 youth who are most in need of the programme are targeted to participate. This number can increase to 180-185 if funding is available. Youth who apply to the programme are shortlisted via the following process:

1. The selection is facilitated by schools, local NGOs and community centres in Nablus and Jerusalem. In addition, youth are nominated by school counsellors and social counsellors of the local NGOs and community centres. The youth are then contacted either through organizations or through house visits;
2. Youth are interviewed to make sure they fit the profile of the target group for YEP;

3. The final selection is made from those most at risk who fit the criteria (living in difficult conditions, being exposed to violence and having troubles at school). Those who are not selected are usually involved in other activities related to community service, e.g., they might be working with young children.

Youth enrolled in YEP attend sessions led by a team of social counsellors from the PCC and youth university volunteers (as described above). On average, each school year, a team of four individuals (including the programme coordinator) is responsible for implementing the programme with youth enrolled in YEP. The sessions revolve around the concepts of empowerment, ways to address psychosocial problems, expressive arts and group management.¹⁶

Over the course of a school year, a total of 24 group sessions are held approximately once a week, encompassing role playing, brainstorming activities, video screenings, interactive activities and group work. The first session is a needs assessment of the group in order to determine the members' needs and properly plan the future sessions. The PCC believes that each group has particular needs and priorities which should be reflected in plans as opposed to applying a convergent approach where one plan applies to all groups. One-on-one sessions are available for youth who ask for them or those who have manifested the need for individual counselling sessions.

The groups are formed in coordination with local community centres (cultural centres, social centres, etc.). An average of 12 young people (a mixture of ages and males and females) participate in the sessions, which focus on the following topics:¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Learning Theories.com (website)

¹⁴ Interview with Shadi Jaber, Consultant with PCC, 23 October 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.





- Stages of growth: The ability of youth to communicate and negotiate; positive and negative traits of the youth's age group;
- Resilience: Focusing on confidence-building and building on the youth's strengths;
- What makes us unique as individuals;
- How society and social norms/attitudes shape our characters and personhood;
- Expressing emotions and alternative ways of self-expression;
- Changes during adolescence;
- Acceptance of the 'other', including people of different genders and cultures;
- Rights and responsibilities, obstacles to obtaining rights and how to overcome them.

PCC developed a manual for the programme which has three main parts: (1) a theoretical section explaining the basis for the programme; (2) a section about the process of operating the programme; and (3) a section which clearly describes the content and mode of delivery of each session. The manual will be disseminated publically in 2015 to anyone who wishes to follow the YEP model.¹⁸

In addition to the youth sessions, group sessions are offered to parents who wish to participate. On average, one session per month is held with parents and is mainly attended by mothers. Fathers sometimes join only in individual sessions. The group sessions aim to keep the parents informed about the programme and the progress of their children in general. The sessions discuss ways for parents to communicate with their children, understand their needs and how to deal with those needs, using techniques such as role playing,

movie screenings and open discussion. However, many parents prefer to have individual sessions to freely discuss their own cases through consultations. If the need for therapy arises, they are referred to a clinical psychologist who is part of the PCC counselling services department.¹⁹

In 2014, PCC began approaching youth in universities (as discussed earlier in the youth involvement sections). These youth volunteers receive a three-day intensive training course to prepare them for both, hand-on practical experience as well as theoretical approaches in working with youth. They are trained by a clinical psychologist to have the proper skills to co-facilitate sessions with programme staff. These volunteers receive monthly supervision and guidance in order to support them and ensure their preparedness in working with youth and families. Training sessions revolve around team building and theoretical concepts related to youth and addressing their issues. Many case studies are shared throughout the training.

Another aspect of YEP is recreational activities, including some workshops, which provide youth with much needed space to interact with one another in a non-formal setting, in a country where they lack safe spaces and opportunities for interaction and exchange of information. Additionally, the winter camps present youth with challenging conditions that they must overcome creatively and think through; this helps to build the young people's resilience and decision-making abilities.

4.3. Innovativeness

This programme gives young people the guiding tools to prevent them from developing

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.





psychosocial problems and to direct/support those who are already experiencing problems. Through the different sessions, the programme intends to build the capacity of youth to deal with their surrounding environment, become more confident, analyse the situation around them, develop skills that allow them organize their lives, understand differences and deal with emotions. These skills will help them to build a better future. The innovativeness in the Palestinian context is noteworthy because programmes targeting youth usually rely only on political culture and youth acquiring artistic or sport skills. YEP goes beyond these issues and is based on needs assessments that highlighted the needs of the youth. It thus responds to these needs and does not impose specific topics on the youth.

4.4. Cost and funding

Funders for YEP are Diakonia and Save the Children. From 2010 to 2014 the programme's overall cost was \$459,700, 50 per cent of which is for personnel (one coordinator and two counselors in Jerusalem and one counsellor in Nablus, including transportation) and the other 50 per cent for preparation of activities (materials, workshop preparation and recreational activities), allowance and capacity-building trainings for the 30 recruited volunteers, and administrative costs (rent, utilities).

4.5. Sustainability

The programme started in 1998 and is still ongoing with the aid of funding from Diakonia and Save the Children. Additionally, starting in 2014, PCC adopted the peer-to-peer approach, through which youth from universities are trained by PCC to deliver the YEP sessions in their communities, which will allow the scope of

YEP to expand beyond PCC. The university youth are meant to act as role models for the youth groups. The YEP manual, which will be disseminated publically, will allow anyone to be able to replicate YEP with the necessary adaptation to context. Finally, the PCC undertakes an external evaluation of all its programmes every five years, after which it develops a strategic plan to ensure the continuity and adaptation of programmes, including YEP, based on assessments to ensure that needs of youth are being addressed.

4.6. Replicability

The programme has not been replicated.

5. Evaluation of effectiveness²¹

The evaluation method is based on an assessment form that is given at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. It is a process evaluation and only changes in participants' knowledge are noted. The results below are based on the evaluation in Jerusalem (evaluation results from Nablus are not included).

The following objectives were set for the years 2010-2014:

Specific objective 1: To empower youth to adopt alternatives to violence, and develop their resilience in order to be able to deal with difficult life situations in marginalized areas

Outcome 1.1: Youth have increased resilience and possess positive alternatives to deal with difficult circumstances through having a clear understanding of, and are comfortable with, their identity and are able

²¹ Report from PCC (2013).





to participate actively in their communities.

Indicator 1: 120-180 youth participate in activities that empower them to face the difficult life stresses.

Achievement: In 2013, 185 youth participated in activities enabling them to face difficult life challenges.

Indicator 2: 120 of 180 youth have developed the ability to express themselves, accept the 'other' and understand the changes that occur during the adolescent years.

Achievement: In 2013, the PCC conducted an evaluation with 81 of the 185 youth who participated in the programme. Implementers did not reach out to all the participants because some of them had exams. Others did not attend the evaluation sessions. Those who continued to participate in the programme in 2014 will be evaluated following the completion of their group work.

Results of the evaluation:

- 38 of 81 youth (46.9 per cent) indicated improvement in their ability to express themselves.

This percentage is a bit low due to the fact that the youth were given some background on how to express themselves prior to filling out the pre-test, and had some understanding already of the concept of self-expression and how to communicate ideas to others.

- 46 of 81 youth (56.7 per cent) indicated a better understanding of the other and accepting others.

The concept of 'the other' and accepting people who are different was new to youth. Religious belief played a major role in preventing them from accepting people

from different faiths and from changing their attitudes.

- 47 of 81 youth (58 per cent) indicated a better understanding of the different physical and psychological changes that they undergo during adolescence.

The youth expressed a great need to understand the changes that they go through during adolescence, and this is where the greatest shift in attitude took place, even though it was also challenging due to the incorrect concepts the youth had about some issues.

Outcome 1.2: The youth have become more knowledgeable about and able to deal with difficult life situations.

Indicator 1: 29 of 50 youth who participated in workshops help in parallel to the group sessions are aware of alternative skills to deal with difficult life situations.

Achievement: One workshop was conducted, in which 15 youth participated. Results of the evaluation conducted during the workshop are as follows:

- 14 of 15 participants expressed gaining new knowledge as a result of the workshop, particularly with regard to identity, planning for the future and alternative ways of dealing with problems;
- 9 of 15 participants expressed gaining new information that helped them address their problems;
- 11 of 15 participants expressed gaining new tools to help them solve their problems.

Indicator 2: 29 youth have received individual consultations about specific issues in violence, identity and self-awareness.





Achievement: 28 youth received consultations.

Specific Objective 2: To raise the awareness of parents with regards to the needs of youth and methods of empowering them

Outcome 2.1: Parties directly affecting the youths' lives are aware of the needs and protection issues of youth and methods for empowering them

Indicator 1: 60 parents participate in awareness-raising activities that empower them to address the needs of their children. The number of parents is only 60 because it is very difficult to ensure the commitment of parents throughout this programme.

Achievement: the indicator was achieved as 60 parents participated in awareness-raising activities that empower them to address the needs of their children

Indicator 2: 40 of 60 parents are more aware of the needs and rights of the youth.

Achievement: Post-intervention tests were conducted with 59 parents, the results of which were :

- 53 of 59 participants (89.7 per cent) indicated that they gained new information as a result of the lectures;
- 45 of 59 parents (76.4 per cent) indicated that information gained will help them to deal with difficulties that they face;
- 56 of 59 parents (94.8 per cent) indicated that skills gained during sessions will help them solve their problems.

6. Strengths and opportunities

- Adopting a peer-to-peer approach through the young volunteers who deliver sessions to the targeted youth.

- Adopting a peer-to-peer approach through the recent work done in universities, through which youth could eventually target their fellow students.

7. Challenges

The challenges faced in the implementation phase were convincing the parents that the programme is beneficial to their children and ensuring the commitment of the youth to be active participants throughout the programme. The challenges faced in the evaluation phase revolved around the attendance of youth during the evaluation sessions, and developing the tools for proper evaluation. An outcome/impact evaluation was not possible and only a process evaluation could be conducted. Sustainability is considered a challenge since the programme needs to be continuously improved and expanded to ensure a wider circle of beneficiaries. Despite these challenges, PCC is making efforts to ensure that the programme continues.

8. Next steps and the way forward

The programme's reach is expanding through the initiation of the volunteering mechanism through which university volunteers deliver sessions to their peers. This new mechanism is expanding and aims to cover other cities in the State of Palestine. In addition, an external evaluator will be asked to assess the effectiveness of the programme and offer recommendations for the coming five years.

9. Lessons learned and recommendations



Lessons learned:

The youth in a society are a power for change but they need the necessary tools and life skills to help them make that change. Even youth who have problems have a high degree of motivation for change and improvement.

The following were the recommendations for continuing the programme:

- Ability to properly address the needs of targeted youth;
- Building on the psychosocial positive mentality;
- Have a programme that intervenes on a long-term basis;
- Have a programme that is linked with many services (such as group-based activities, individual consultations, youth and parent activities, etc.) in order to meet the needs of the youth;
- View the youth within their context and environment, not only at the individual level.

10. Components to consider for scale-up in MENA

- Strategy used for Peer to peer approach - a programme manual that allows anyone to implement with contextual adaptation;
- Strategy to develop a programme based on the identified needs of young people.

11. Resources

Youth Empowerment Program Manual

12. References

Interview with Shadi Jaber, Consultant with PCC on 23 October 2014 and on 5 February 2015

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