

Tent of Nations

Bent Al-Reef Women Empowerment Project



The Fourth Annual Women's Week

12-17 April 2010

Transforming Pain and Depression into a Constructive Power that lead to a Better Future

This year's title was very challenging for both the village women and the international women volunteers who participated with us during the whole week. Many issues, ideas, thoughts and principles were discussed, argued and compared within the Palestinians culture and other cultures and backgrounds of the international participants. We had nine women volunteers from France, Ireland, USA, Germany, Switzerland, UK and Japan. In all workshops and lectures we had around 20-30 village women, young, single and married.

Monday, April 12

Lecturer: Jihan Nassar, Coordinator, Bent Alreef Women Center

First Session: "Live in ways that are deeply fulfilling and at the same time socially and environmentally responsible."

- Personal Development and Confidence Building
- Toward a Healthy Environment
- Toward a Healthy Society
- Toward a Healthy and Happy Life

Here I talked about the title in relation to the bullet points and how important it is to learn how to be socially and environmentally responsible in order to live a happy healthy life, and at the same time learn new values and principles to maintain a sustainable future. We all agreed that fundamental changes are needed in our lives, values, and ways of living. Everyone on this planet shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human.

It was essential to divide the group into two groups, Palestinians and internationals in order to discuss the principles and beliefs that may contribute to the above topic.

The **Palestinian** response:

- Live in security
- To develop self-confidence... we need education and an open mind.
- Use the personal development as an influence on others.
- A main problem is the occupation
- Learn from our problems and tragedies to move on
- To be independent as women, to have a role in the society. They want to be economically and personally independent so they can give more to their community.
- They want to understand other cultures and religions, because the differences are not barriers but an opportunity for exchange. In this we cannot forget how to preserve our culture.

The **Internationals** response:

They come from individual based societies. They do not have as strong an idea of identity or an idea of where they come from. This question is very different for them than for non-Western women. Westerners focus on what they do versus who they are. They have a lot of freedom, but sometimes this leaves them feeling lonely and disconnected. Instead of personal development, they need to focus more on how to build community.

Second Session: "How Art and Art Therapy can build Resiliency in the Traumatized Child"

Lecturer: Hannah Benkemoun, Social Worker, France

Hannah in this session explained to the women the importance of art therapy in areas of conflict. Children express their experiences and their feelings in their art. Sometimes it is dark and ugly, but it is important that they express themselves in this way. As mothers, sisters and teachers we can encourage creativity and expression in our children through art. These activities need to continue. It can not just happen one time, because children, especially in Palestine, are continually under stress and need to express their fears and feelings.



As to let the women feel the importance of expressing feelings through art, she made them draw a picture to introduce themselves and then talk about it.

- Lailia drew a sun to represent freedom and a candle to represent hope.
- Kiera drew a person walking on a road leading to a mountain in the sun.
- Khadija drew herself after she finished university.
- Fatima drew a beach and sunset.
- Amani drew a sun to represent the light and an apple for health.
- Ahalam drew a broken tree to represent her childhood and her life before now. The sun and new trees in her picture represent her life now and the happiness she feels.
- Suhad drew a beautiful flower.
- Asma drew nature and hearts because she loves life.
- Fatima drew hearts.
- Riham drew a flower and a sun.
- Sajah drew a sun for freedom.
- Mariam drew a palm tree because she wants to be like a palm tree.
- Agnes drew a sunflower for happiness.
- Houda drew a scene of a farm, trees, house, birds and sun because she has always drawn that, since she was a child.

At the end we all agreed that art is a constructive power inside us that can be used to destruct negative feelings. It is a way to express our feelings and it is a tool to achieve our dreams, even if they are not yet realized in reality.

Tuesday, April 13

First Session: "Raise a Healthy and Happy Child"

Lecturer: Amal Nassar & Kokab Saed, Caritas Baby Hospital, Bethlehem

Amal and Kokab prepared an informative and interesting PowerPoint to explain important aspects of child rearing and early detection in children. Parents and guardians are key decision-makers when it comes to nutrition, physical activity, and health needs of their children. Each day, we can take advantage of the healthy choices around us and do little things that can affect your child's health in a big way. Some key concepts reviewed in the PowerPoint were discipline; it is very important to discipline children non-violently. Another concept was showing our kids love and always letting our kids know we care about them.

Many women shared with us stories about their children and families, and many had questions about child bearing and its difficulties. We all agreed at the end that child bearing is not an easy job, it needs patience, responsibility and devotion.

Second Session: "Understanding Violence in Children"

Lecturer: Ilse Brugger, Switzerland

Everywhere in the world violence is used and children and grown up persons are seeing it and suffering from it. Specially here in Palestine the situation for children is rather difficult and there is the danger that they themselves are using violence as they are confronted by seeing it almost every day.

Children as young as preschoolers can show violent behavior. Parents and other adults who witness the behavior may be concerned; however, they often hope that the young child will "grow out of it." Violent behavior in a child at any age always needs to be taken seriously. It should not be quickly dismissed as "just a phase they're going through!"

Ilse also talked about the different reasons behind being violent: feel threatened, feel weak and want to show power and strength, feel frustrated and somehow angry, revenge, fear and anxiety. However we have to try and educate our children to non violence as this is important for a happy family life and important to build later a healthy society.

Third Session: "Self Improvement through Service"

Lecturer: Maura James, England

During the introductions the day before, the women continually mentioned improving their community. This workshop identified the changes the women want to see in their community.

What are your hopes for your village?

- Clean and healthy community
- Farming, developed land → self sufficient small gardens
- Awareness campaign for youth:- Drug use, Social behaviours
- Build a playground
- Space for children to play other than the street
- Educate the mothers so they can encourage talents in their children
- Youth Center
- Security, village police

After composing the list, the women talked about creating small gardens. What was needed to start a garden? Why did people not start a garden? They need tools, soil, seeds, and water. They also invent simple ways for any women in the village to have a simple garden that can make her economically independent. Together, the women have power. They can make a positive change in their community. Maura hoped that the women will remember this list and start working together for positive changes in their village.

Wednesday, April 14

First Session: "Compassion and Non-Violence as Foundation for Daily Life"

Lecturer: Pastor Kimberly Meinecke, USA

First Pastor Kimberly introduced herself and explained the foundations of non-violence. Two assumptions we must make when practicing non-violence:

-We can only change ourselves; we cannot make someone else change.

-The “other” is human (not animal, not evil, or not demon) and is someone’s child (friend, spouse, or sibling)

Her story and the exercise with the women proved that our attitude towards other people affects us. Next she talked about thoughts; how do we think about ourselves? There are four ways in which we can improve our thoughts to change ourselves.

- Be kind to yourself.
- Think kind thought about others.
- How do you think about the world?
- Are you a victim?
- Are you part of the whole?
- Feel a sense of purpose in your community.

Then Pastor Kimberly talked about the difference between a reaction and a response, and judgement statements and comparison statements. We need to use communication to learn about others. She encouraged the women to take one thing from the workshop and practice it.

- How we think about ourselves.
- How we think about others.
- How we express our feelings.
- Get others to join us.

Second Session “Native Trees”

Lecturer: Alice Grace, UK

In this workshop Alice wanted to identify ways in which to live that are not harmful to the environment. In fact, how can we enhance the environment? What ever we do in our life effects the environment, so of course we have a lot of power to change the environment.

Alice explained the circular relationship between people, water, the environment, and resources. It is our responsibility to know from where those resources are coming and where our wastes are going in this cycle. We must remember the three “r”s: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The women had a lot to add. They talked about the difficulties and hardships they have to face within their village: Polluted air, water cisterns, farms, gardens and the village roads.

The women agreed that they can not rely on the government to solve their problems, it is their responsibility.

Since the Palestinian forests have been destroyed, many people like Alice are trying to re-grow them. She brought trees to show the women; dessert trees and mountain trees. She explained their function and purpose and why it would be good to plant them. When she was finished the women planted a tree together at the end of the street. The rest of the trees the women were welcome to take with them to plant at home.



Thursday, April 15

First Session: "Depression"

Lecturer: Pascaline, Switzerland

Pascaline introduced herself as a nurse from Switzerland. She works in a psychiatric hospital there. Many people are afraid of depression; they also have a lot of misconceptions about it. Often people think it is contagious or given by God.

Then she asked the women what they knew about depression.

After hearing what the women had to say, Pascaline gave the clinical definition of depression and outlined the symptoms of depression.

After learning about the symptoms, Pascaline addressed the causes of depression and noted the two main treatments for depression. The causes of depression are not the same for all people she said. Stress can also cause depression. In Palestine specifically, the lack of employment and status as a refugee can cause depression. When the women heard this they said the occupation makes them stronger because they learn to overcome those obstacles.

Second Session: "Hands"

Lecturer: Agnes Slunitschek, Germany

Agnes started by asking the women to look at their hands. She said they contain twenty seven bones. We have five fingers, and the tips of the fingers contain some of the most sensitive nerve endings in the body. Therefore, the hand is the richest source of tactile feedback for the body. The thumb is special because of its ability to rotate. In addition to strength and heavy lifting, the hands can also perform fine Next Agnes asked the women to think of talents they have from their hands, of bad things their hands do, and of good things our hands do.

At the end of the workshop , Agnes finished by asking the women to make shapes with their hands. The shapes were to symbolize things we like to do with our hands or things we like others to do with their hands.

The last day of the Women's Week a collage of the hands pictures were exhibited.



Third Session: "Let us listen to our bodies; pain is a message from our bodies."

Lecturer: Lan Komatsu, Chinese Medicine, Japan

Lan started by identifying the elements in Chinese medicine: energy, blood, and water. Lan focused on energy. There are three types of energy: not enough energy (sick), right energy (healthy), and bad energy (sick). Physical stress, mental stress, habit, and environment are dependant variables that can influence energy.

She also talked about causes of energy deficiency and ways of treatments. She also focused on many food items that can strengthen the digestive system and other food items that are bad for our digestive system.

Saturday, April 16
Evaluation Day
Palestinian Embroidery Exhibition
Reception

We started this session by giving our own wish as Palestinian and international women.

Here are some of the wishes:-

- Amani (her name means "wish") is twenty-three, single, and hopes to be a police woman or airplane stewardess.
- Khadija is twenty-one. She hopes to speak English, to finish school and learn to drive.
- Fhatma is twenty-five. She wants to get married and move far away. She also hopes to be very famous.
- Doah (her name means "to ask God") is twenty. She has seven sisters and four brothers. She likes Palestine, and she hopes to go to Jerusalem.
- Asma has six sisters and four brothers. She is married, and she wishes to adopt a baby because she is infertile.
- Pascaline hopes to speak Arabic fluently and get married one day. She is twenty-seven.
- Mariam is twenty. Her wish is to travel. She wants to see how the world works then come back to the village. She wants to enjoy riding her bike.
- Asma is eighteen. She will finish school next year. She has three sisters and four brothers. Her wish is to leave the village.
- Jamileh is thirty-seven. She loves her children and her husband. Her wish is to see Palestine free before she dies. She also wishes to have something of her own to show she's been here.
- Kim is American. She wishes for a job in America since currently she is jobless. (EAPPI)
- Stephan is Swedish. He wishes to bring an important message back to his people in Sweden from the people of Palestine. (EAPPI)
- Ingrid is Norwegian. She finds the women's situation under the occupation very interesting. She too wishes to tell others what she hears and sees in Palestine. (EAPPI)
- Hannah is French. She wished to be in Palestine. Now she is here, so her wish came true. (EAPPI)
- Estel is South African, and she wishes to understand Palestinians and their situation. (EAPPI)

Next the internationals asked the women questions about the workshops during the week.

Here are some of them:

Pascaline: Will the women change their behaviour after attending any of the workshops?

Yes, we will start with ourselves then tell our neighbours and families what we have learned.

Agnes: What specifically will you change?

Hadija is concerned about recycling and the environment.

Iman wishes for clean water.

Jamila is already using the children's workshop from Tuesday with her children.

Laila wants to open a library for the children, so they have a place to play and learn instead of being in the street.

Fhatma will bring books for Laila's library.

Hedaya wants a united community, not one politically divided.

Asma wants a women's center and job creation for women.

Inas will organize an exhibition for the products the women already make.

Ghada hopes for a hospital in the village.

Hannah: Were the workshops too influenced by our (western) culture?

Khadija said the native tree workshop was really helpful and she learned a lot.

Amani wanted to learn more about children and child rearing before the week started, and now she knows more.

Doah liked Pascaline's workshop.

Asma liked and benefited from the Chinese medicine workshop (and previous workshops done by Lan), especially the food.

Laila also benefited from Lan's workshops. She now does the therapy they practiced with her family.

Samah already used Hannah's art workshop with her children.

Fhatma also tried art therapy with her nieces and nephews.

Ilse: Do you have suggestions for future workshops?

Jamila would like a workshop on identifying and honing children's talents.

Agnes: Do you prefer international or Palestinian presenters?

We like international presenters. We learn from you and you learn from us.

Asma said the internationals give them encouragement and relief.

The village women also had some questions for the internationals.

Doah: What were your expectations before coming to Palestine?

Hannah thought it would be strict and official and a little bit stuffy. Instead it was relaxed yet very lively. She learned that this atmosphere was part of the culture, and she really likes it.

Fhatma: Why come to Palestine?

Pascaline spoke for all of us when she said we wanted to see the reality of the situation in Palestine. In our media we only hear about the physicality of war, eg. Bombs, but we wanted to know what it really means to be Palestinian.

Shyma: Could you be Palestinian?

It would be really hard. We're not sure.

Laila: Will you come back?

Yes, **Ilse** got the impression of a good relationship between the women. Together they will do something. She noticed that we do not have the same freedoms, and their culture allows them to be less lonely. She also feels bad that they want to leave to see the world but they cannot.

Kim noticed a curiosity in the women and an interest in learning. She was also able to learn the individual personalities of most of the women.

Doah: What do you think about Palestine and Israel?

Pascaline again answered for all of us when she said Palestinians are not terrorists, in fact, they have a great sense of hospitality. It is not that one or the other should have possession of the land. Both are here now, how can they live together?

Conclusion

Thoughts of the whole week:

- Pascaline felt that it was good to see daily life in the village and learn about the cultural differences between internationals and the village women. Listening to the workshops was also informative and educational.
- Agnes really enjoyed hearing the women's wishes. The atmosphere was comfortable.
- Ilse thought the women were open, curious, and really wanted to learn.
- Ciara really enjoyed the week. She wants to know if the women really benefited from it. She thinks a three month follow up would be helpful to gauge the usefulness of the workshops.

At the end, I would like to thank all locals, international participants, lecturers and project supporters for their time and effort in making this women's week a success.

A special thanks to Mrs. Ilse Brugger for her continuous support and effort.

Special thanks to Mss. Hanna Benkemoun, Mss. Maura James, Pastor Kimberly Meinecke, Mss. Alice Grace, Mss. Pascaline, Mss. Agnes Slunitschhek, Mss. Lan Komatsu, Mss. Amal Nassar and Mrs. Kokab Saed.

Salaam,

Jihan Nassar

Project Coordinator