

New Waldorf Kindergarten Project in Shatila, Beirut

Bernard Merzenich



Shatila is one of three Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. Refugees have lived here since 1948 (today there are approximately 28 000 inhabitants). They have lived for years and generations without a homeland or opportunities to attempt to shape their own lives.

During the civil war in Lebanon a massacre took place here on September 16 1982, the most appalling massacre since the expulsion of the Palestinians.

The number of residents has been climbing dramatically again since 2011 - refugees from neighboring Syria are in search of emergency shelter.



Naturally this place and the human beings here are traumatised; trauma is contagious and can be inherited. Nonetheless there is an immeasurable liveliness and energy in this place that makes it possible for small children to grow up to be quite normal and healthy, despite being surrounded by trash, smog, and other health dangers. There are many children in the camp and very few kindergarten places available.

Adults here are concerned with their own problems. There is a lot of poverty, neglect, and drug- and alcohol abuse, which are hidden and not visible to outsiders. Psychic and psychiatric disturbances are very prevalent and opportunities for support are lacking.

Numerous social organisations are active in the camps- NGO's of all kinds. For the most part, cooperation does not function well. Problems of competition and political and religious one-sidedness are great hindrances to working together in partnerships.



In the middle of the camp, on the main shopping street, on the 3rd and 4th floor of a rear building, preparations are underway for the opening of a Waldorf kindergarten. Everything is being cleaned and painted, seminars and workshops are taking place, and Palestinian educators are getting to know

Waldorf education. One of the local initiators, Mariam Wali, will do an internship in Hamburg, Germany, in July (at the intercultural Waldorf kindergarten in Wilhelmsburg and at the kindergarten of the Christian Morgenstern School). In September, if all goes well, work will begin here with 36 children in 3 groups.

Is a miracle taking place? As is so often the case, at the beginning there were encounters and initiative. Wiebke Eden-Fleig, a journalist and political scientist from Hamburg, had a number of encounters during her years of work in Beirut that stimulated her to develop social and educational support. She encountered Waldorf education through her own children, which led her to want the Shatila Project to be based on Waldorf education.



June 2015: Workshop with Sabine Gonzales



Financing for the project is being sought through various foundations and sponsors in Lebanon and Germany at the moment; contacts are being made and fundraising programs developed. For more information, go to www.justchildhood.org or contact wiebke.eden-fleig@just.childhood.org

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Feb 2015: Seminar with Bernard Merzenich

