

## ***Mainstreaming***

Four girls and two boys from Al-Shurooq are being mainstreamed this year. They are integrated back into their own local community, as they are ready to attend local schools and live independently with their own families. Unfortunately none of them has started school yet, because of the strike.

These six children have not been replaced yet. Therefore, at present, we have only 20 children at Al-Shurooq School.

## ***Braille Book Production Unit***

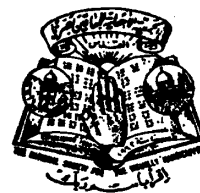
The typing of new books continues, but unfortunately we are having grave problems with our main Braille printer. We have been sending and receiving e-mails to the producers in Germany, but we can't seem to be able to fix it. We have almost come to the conclusion that maybe we ought to be looking for a replacement. The machine has been in use since 1995. It was donated by WorldVision at a cost of fifty thousand US dollars at the time.



Braille printer that needs to be replaced

As always, it is with great pleasure and much appreciation that we extend our love and warm gratitude to all our friends who have supported us and still continue to support us through their prayers and generous givings.

May our heavenly father pour His richest blessings upon you all.



## **THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

### **The National Library For The Blind**

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## **Quarterly Newsletter - Autumn 2006**

Dear Friends,

Misery and anguish, destruction and trepidation, poverty and indigence, all seem to be perpetual in the Middle East. July and August witnessed the pinnacle of carnage. People were constantly attached to television screens watching the tragic events unfold, starting in Gaza and spreading on to the Lebanon. What a shame, the whole world was watching too!

For us at Al-Shurooq, it took immense effort and patience to get our three children back home to Gaza two weeks after the summer holiday had started. They were only allowed to return on July the 12<sup>th</sup> and were glad to get back to school on August the 24<sup>th</sup>; they were the first to return. They must have had quite a tough time there, rarely allowed to leave their homes due to sudden and unexpected shelling poured upon them from air and sea. Both brother and sister returned with injuries, not from the shelling but from frustration. Lara had badly smashed two of her fingers under an iron door while trying to get out of the house, and Joujou came back with a fractured wrist while pretending to be a soldier!

Since the new government lead by Hamas took over seven months ago, the international community decided to withdraw all financial assistance to the Palestinian people, therefore rendering the government most vulnerable and unable to perform. Salaries to more than 165,000 civil servants have not been paid for seven months, including three of our staff members. State school teachers are on strike, children are without schools, hospitals accept emergency cases only, and the same applies to all other departments. The situation is quite grim.

**Helena Shehadeh**

## *Al-Shurooq School*

Despite the grimness, and as scheduled, the new school year began on August the 28<sup>th</sup>. All our children came back except for our six-year-old Abdullah, whose tragic story some of you may remember. Abdullah was a perfectly normal child up until the age of four, when he sadly fell victim of a vicious family feud. His parents divorced when he was three years and Abdullah went to live with his father and his extended family. A few months later, Abdullah was admitted into hospital suffering from severe abdominal pain, bruises and general weakness. Further investigation showed that he had lost his sight totally, as a result of a severe blow to the head. Abdullah then moved with his mother, who lives in El-Dheishah Refugee Camp in Bethlehem under very appalling living conditions and was admitted to Al-Shurooq in August 2004. During the summer holiday and whilst at home, Abdullah had a nasty accident; he tripped off some steps, bruised his head badly and dislocated his knee. According to doctor's orders, he is to lie on his bed for several weeks with a weight tied to his leg to prevent him from moving. When we last visited him at his home, he seemed terribly bored and quite agitated; anxious to return to school and be with his friends.



Abdullah bedridden with a dislocated knee

To date, we have had no new children this term. One five year old girl- Anwar- came from Tulkarem (about 80km north west of Bethlehem) and attended school for one day. The mother had to travel for seven hours, going through five checkpoints to be able to bring Anwar to school. It was heartbreaking to see the mother part from her daughter when it was time for the mother to go back home, knowing she had seven more hours and five checkpoints ahead! The little girl was clinging to her mother's long dress with her hands and teeth, not wanting her mother to leave. The next day we were not surprised to see the mother back at Al-Shurooq, going through the same five checkpoints, but this time she wanted her daughter back. Parting had not been in the least bit easy for either of them. Anwar had spent the night crying also. We know it is never easy for parents to leave their children behind, especially when they have to travel for long hours and withstand a lot of checkpoints and to do that on a regular weekly basis is practically impossible. Anwar will always be welcomed at Al-Shurooq whenever she and her mother are ready.

## *New Premises*

We are beginning to see a glimpse of hope for a new school building. Last week bids were advertised in a national newspaper by the UNPD - PAPP (United Nations Development Programme- Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People) who has undertaken to build two floors out of three of the permanent premises. Thirteen contractors have purchased the bids and hopefully the actual starting date would be in the coming few weeks. The contract will be awarded to the winning contractor after proper evaluation done by the UNDP. The third floor, however, which is the dormitory, we would have to fundraise for again, thereby completing the whole building.

## *Summer Visits*

In addition to the routine of the two summer months July and August, of thorough cleaning, repairs and painting walls, we managed to include a few visits to some of our children in their own homes. It is essential that we acquaint ourselves with the home environment and background of every child. We were struck by the influence this has on their behaviour, successes and failures.

The poorest home we visited was Hayat's, a seven-year old girl who lives in a village near Hebron. The family lives on the father's small pension, who like everyone else, has not received it for the last seven months. Despite the extreme poverty, with no furniture in the house and most likely with hardly anything to eat, we found Hayat very happy and content, enjoying the special attention she receives from her father. That accounts for the fact that she is always in tears when he brings her to school after weekends.

Another home we visited was one near Ramallah, where the two sisters Hana' and Fida' live. Hana', the eldest, was mainstreamed in the village school near their home this year. It was obvious that the family was not in financial difficulties, but the girls live in the most tragic situation. The mother is diabetic and as a result has lost her sight completely. The father has a job somewhere in Israel and comes home once a month and their two elder brothers; each has a life of his own. The rest of the family is uncared for.

It was really depressing to find the two girls alone in the house; they were so subdued, never daring to utter a single word in the presence of their brother-in-law, who was supposed to host us. He appeared to have the whole household under his control. We were awfully sorry for the two girls. Fida' was very happy and relieved when the holidays were over, and she could return to school. It must be dreadful to live with such an environment and that accounts for a lot of the girls' eccentric behaviour.

The four other children we visited had reasonably good homes; where they were well treated loved and cared for.

