

Safe you, safe me from child abuse – 80 children attended the winter camp on sexual and reproductive health rights



“Safe you, safe me, from any bad touch, protect me from abuse” sing the children and teenagers during the winter camp

January 2012 – “Did you understand a word I just said? No? That’s exactly how children feel when they are subjected to sexual abuse – they don’t know what is going on” says the 15 year old Sabrin from Dura and looks curiously into the audience. She and a group of other teenagers just presented a sketch as part of the “Safe you safe me” Winter Camp for the **“Protecting Adolescents from Gender based Violence through the Promotion of their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights”**¹ project, where she spoke in an invented “secret language” to the audience. Her aim: make adults and other children aware of how important it is for children to know as much as possible about sexual abuse, children’s rights and related issues, so that they can react properly.

In January, 80 children from all peer groups of the five project impact areas Aqabet Jaber, Arrub, Ayda, Ein El Sultan, and Dura as well as 14 facilitators, volunteers and counselors attended the winter camp in Jericho to raise awareness

amongst children and youth about their rights, responsibilities, gender equality and about knowledge on sexual abuse. In five stations different age groups of 16 children in each group had worked for 4 days on different approaches on how to use a

child rights approach to address and protect themselves from child abuse and how to best communicate with parents.

Through posters, sketches, songs, models and other means of creative expression the children presented their most pressing issues. One group had prepared messages for their parents, which the 16 year old Moath from Dura explains further: “Most parents approach their children in the wrong way: they shout or disapprove of the things we as teenagers find important in our lives. Other than being aware of our rights as

children, we also learned in the camp how to talk to our parents.” ‘Give us love, trust, safety’ is written on those posters, too.



“We learned so much today: what sexual abuse is, what we can do against it, how to talk to our parents”, say the children in regards of the winter camp

“I really think half of the work to stop sexual abuse can be done by raising awareness on this subject and by teaching children how to protect themselves. How come for example, there is no sexual education integrated into the curriculum of schools? That has to change!”

Sabrin from Dura, 15 years



Other children highlighted sexual abuse: “This drawing on the poster represents a sexual perpetrator: We drew him 3 heads, to make clear that such a person has many faces. One that is deceiving and tries to lure the child into actions he or she doesn’t approve of, one that is angry with the child when he or she doesn’t “obey” and then of course: his real face and real intentions”, says one of the teenagers presenting the group’s poster on sexual abuse. The children also discussed the consequences of child abuse for them such as nightmares, depression, lack of appetite, anxiety, mental instability, introverted behaviour.

15 year old Khaled talks about the effect the camp has on him: “I tend to be nervous and aggressive. The living conditions for Palestinians are not the best, and this makes me very angry sometimes. But being around friends together with the advice and guidance by the counselors helps me to get calmer and more confident”. Part of the winter camp was also an advocacy training for children to help them express their concerns and develop advocacy messages to make sure decision makers are aware of their living conditions.

In one of the groups everybody who enters the room was asked to leave their “fingerprint” behind: on the wall across the entry a big poster is filled with visitor’s notes that the teenagers enthusiastically read while passing – ‘Keep your spirit up’, ‘Feel free, feel safe – you are the future leaders!’ and a Ghandi quote saying ‘Be the change you want to see in the world’. In the meantime, children are singing and dancing in the yard of the camp, “Safe you, safe me from any bad touch, from anyone big or small, protect me from abuse”. The **“Protecting Adolescents from Gender based Violence through the Promotion of their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights”**¹ project continues to fight for these rights and protection.

“Protecting Adolescents from Gender based Violence through the Promotion of their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights”

As part of this project child/adolescent friendly and culturally appropriate SRHR education materials are being developed and made available to children and adolescents in education structures, health facilities and community based structures as well as relied on for awareness raising sessions through peer to peer methodologies. In addition to that awareness raising materials are being distributed for parents and service providers. Key personnel of service providers are being trained to present to adolescents adequate information and comprehensive services, from prevention to early detection and response. A referral mechanism between service providers will be established and a safe and confidential reporting mechanism pilot tested. Furthermore, the projects aims at improving the policy environment for SRHR while addressing local/national authorities for policy change in the field of SRHR through a vast advocacy plan .

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