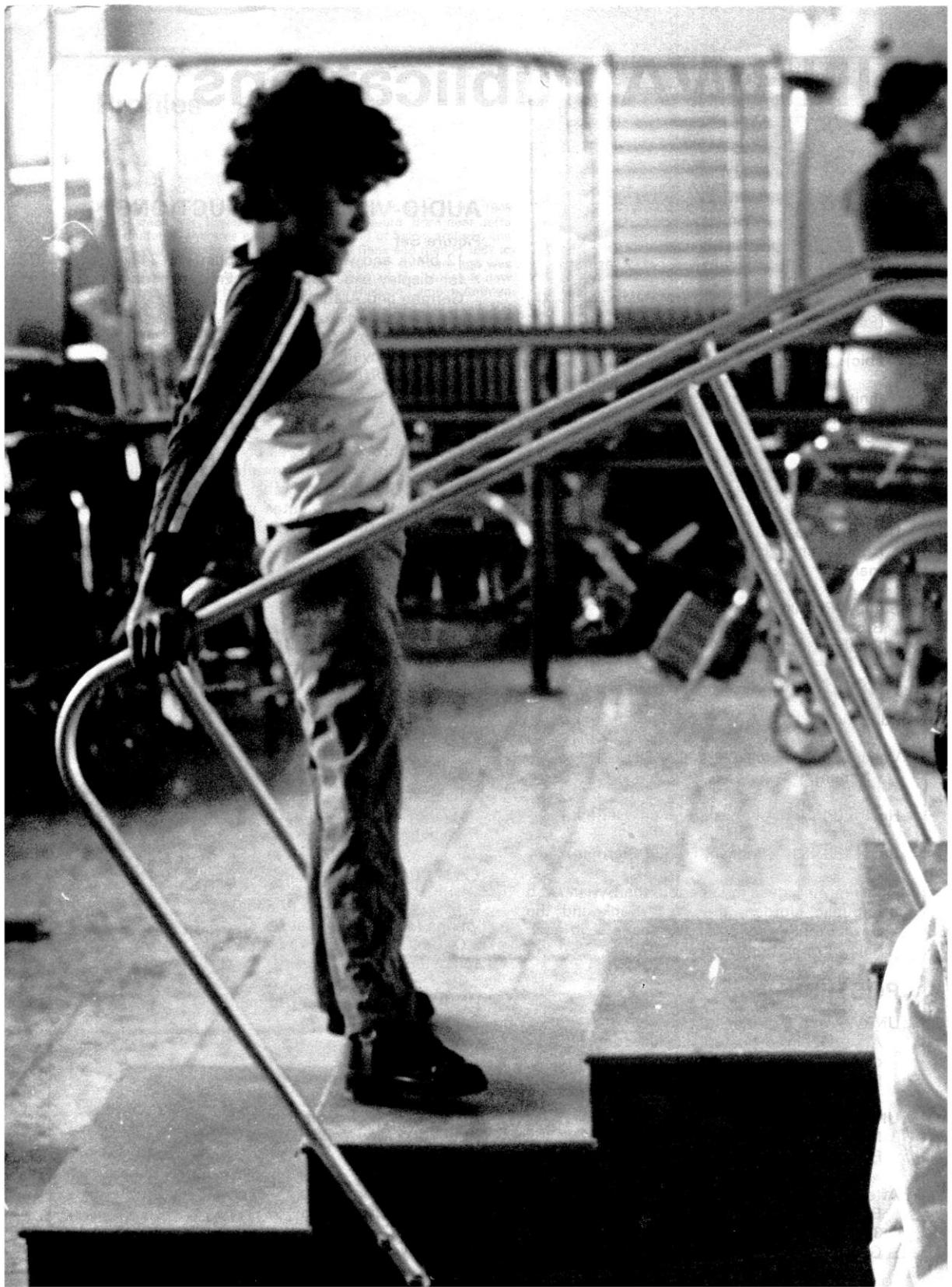


Palestine Refugees Today



No. 95



**1 Full
Partners**

1981 is the International Year of Disabled Persons. This issue of Palestine Refugees Today is devoted to a discussion of disabilities among Palestine refugees.

**2 The \$ 180
Miracle**

An eight-year-old child's behaviour is transformed with an investment of \$ 180 in a hearing aid which enables him to more fully participate in life.



**4 Through the
eyes of
Maha**

A young Palestine refugee girl, blind since birth, has had her sight partially restored thanks to a cornea transplant.



**7 Family
Shock**

In many cases a handicapped child produces a handicapped family. How does a family come to terms with the disability of one of its members?

**10 How can
UNRWA
help?**

During 1981, UNRWA hopes to help improve family and community attitudes to the disabled.



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Cover Photo: Crippled Palestine refugee children receive treatment and therapy at a hospital in Amman, Jordan.

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United Nations Relief and Works Agency
for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine Refugees Today

Full Participation and Equality



Growing international concern for the world's 450 million disabled led, in 1976, to the United Nations General Assembly deciding to declare 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons. Its theme is Full Participation and Equality, and covers national and international measures to promote full participation of disabled persons in the social life and development of the societies in which they live.

An International Labour Organization report last year stated that about 10 per cent of the world's population are seriously disabled by blindness, deafness, polio, leprosy and other debilitating diseases, tuberculosis, mental disorders, occupational diseases or as a result of accidents. The problem, the report continues, is spreading and most of these persons live in the Third World and cannot exercise their fundamental right to contribute to their own or their families' well-being or to the progress of their countries.

The existence of a large mass of invalids means a huge group of unproductive people who are a burden to the whole economy of a country. Looking after them is a burden for a family. In the absence of family help, the disabled must rely on social services and the cost of these services can sometimes prevent the allocation of resources to other programmes which may be urgently needed for development.

But there is good reason to believe that some types of work can be done more efficiently by some disabled than they could be by the able-bodied: this is true of blind persons in some paramedical occupations; the deaf who can work well in noisy surroundings; the mentally retarded who can and often do perform extremely well in simple and monotonous tasks. There are many occupational reports on disabled workers which give evidence of a productivity level above the average due to greater diligence, a high ability to concentrate, loyalty and a pride in doing well at work.

As a result, treatment and rehabilitation programmes, especially vocational rehabilitation, not only have indirect social and economic advantages for individuals and families, they can also contribute directly to economic development of a nation.

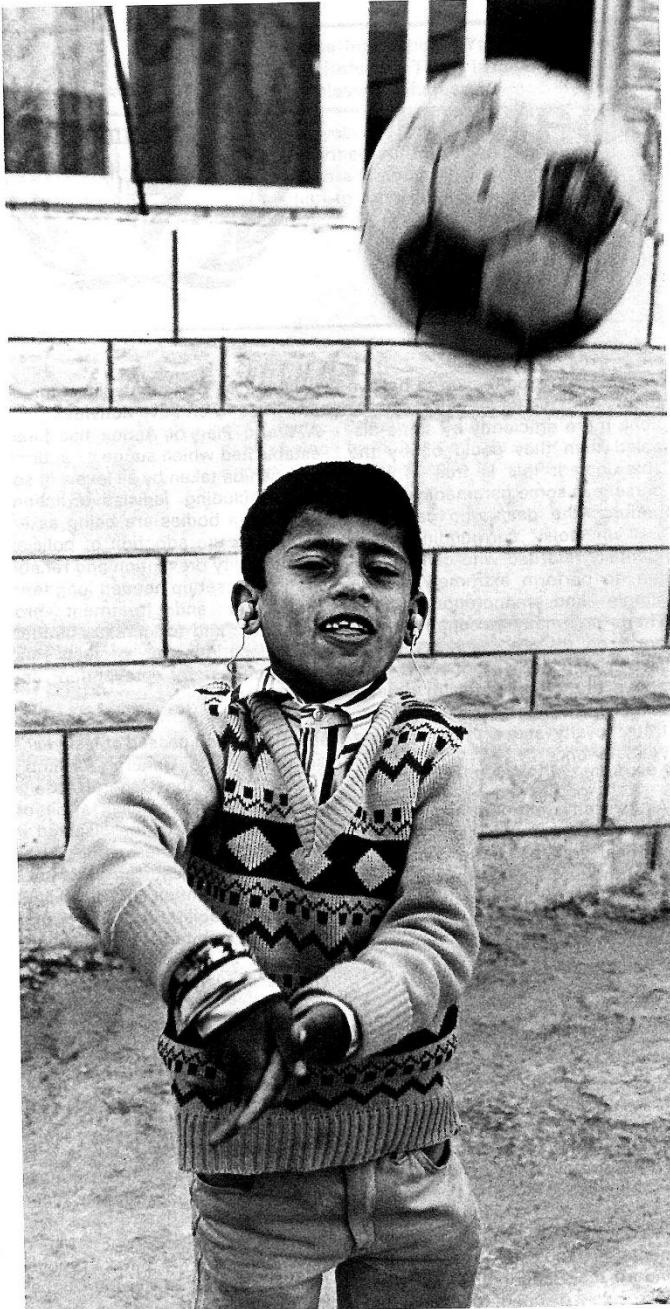
At the end of the International Year, an evaluation will be made of what has been accomplished in terms of building a more extensive body of knowledge regarding the prevention and treatment of disability; improving public awareness of the problem in general; what work has been done in the prevention of disability; what rehabilitation activities for the physically and mentally handicapped have been undertaken; and what activities have been planned to enable the

disabled to participate in community life and creative activities. A World Plan of Action has been established which suggests actions that can be taken by all levels of society including legislative action. Legislative bodies are being asked to look at the adoption of policies for disability prevention and rehabilitation; to set up needed long term prevention and treatment programmes; and to increase budgetary allocations for projects and programmes for prevention and treatment.

In a Resolution passed at last year's session of the General Assembly (Res. 34/154), the General Assembly noted that special attention should be given to the disabled in developing countries through the provision of technical assistance for the prevention of disabilities and for rehabilitation. The resolution also pointed out that large numbers of disabled persons are victims of war and other forms of violence.

Doubly Disabled

This issue of *Palestine Refugees Today* looks at the problems faced by disabled Palestine refugees and the role of UNRWA in assisting these persons who have a double disability as they are both refugees and disabled.



The \$ 180 miracle

At the age of eight, Ahmad Mohammed Odeh was a problem child. In less than a year he has become a model child, looked up to by the children of Hai Nazzal, a poor section of South Amman in Jordan.

The transformation happened almost overnight.

Ahmad had been destructive, throwing rocks and breaking windows in the Nazzal Community centre near his home. Then its founder, Dr. Sari Naser, had tests taken and found Ahmad was partially deaf. He guessed this was the cause of Ahmad's disturbance. After some persuasion his father bought Ahmad a hearing aid at a cost of around \$ 180... a huge sum, half a month's wages for a day labourer with 12 mouths to feed.

"The change was miraculous", says Dr. Naser. Almost immediately Ahmad began to speak and soon was learning to read. And no longer is he teased into frustrated violence by the other children. Now they admire him.

No disability is typical, but Ahmad's case does show how simple changes can have profound significance. Simple measures can often turn a meaningless life into one with purpose.

And as well as cure there is prevention. Better understanding of how defects can be created and passed on from parents to child can prevent some disabilities ever arising in the first place.

But what is disability? And why is UNRWA involved in the Interna-

tional Year of Disabled Persons? Permanent or long term disablement means having difficulty with everyday life—looking after yourself, getting on with other people and earning a living.

Curing, or learning to live with a disability can therefore make the difference between being a burden on society and being an asset to it. The ability to work is not the only test however. Just being happy can be a benefit to those around you. In the jungle only the fittest survive, but this way is slow and cruel. The modern, humane alternative is to help the disabled to adapt, to fit in to the world around them.

UNRWA is involved because disabilities flourish among the poor and the undernourished, the war-shocked and the emotionally disturbed.

But no one, it has to be admitted, knows how many disabled there are among the 1.8 million Palestine refugees. Only small numbers of the thousands of disabled describe themselves as disabled, partly because of embarrassment, partly because their families are ashamed of their afflictions.

But based on figures for the world as whole, there are probably in the region of 110,000 disabled or even more among the 1.8 million registered Palestine refugees. And yet last year the number of children placed by UNRWA in various Middle East institutions was below 300.

Because of shortage of funds and age limits at treatment centres, UNRWA can only help refugee children of school age. And then only those whose mental capacity and general physical state suggest that they will be able to contribute materially to their own support. These include the visually disabled, the hard-of-hearing and the crippled.

Not eligible for help at the moment are the mentally disturbed, the undernourished and almost all adults—whether blind, deaf or crippled, suffering from alcoholism, drug misuse or just aging.

So, the problem is huge and the ability to tackle it seems to be severely hampered by lack of funds.

Money is needed to carry out a pilot project to find how best to size up the difficulties. One answer could be more residential homes. The problems caused by institutional segregation are sometimes outweighed by the advantages.

Brother Andrew Carpentier, Director of the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf, at Salt in Jordan, spent four years teaching and training 75 children, mostly Palestine refugees paid for by UNRWA and mostly from very poor backgrounds. "We make a constant, conscious effort not to set their horizons too high", says Brother Andrew. "They must be kept in touch with their families, community and society." But too often, through ignorance, their homes and communities are not prepared to meet their special needs.

"We are faced," says Brother Andrew, "with a situation where a good institution is far better than a bad family or community atmosphere." He says there is practically no general understanding of the handicapped and what can be done for them. "The International Year of

Disabled Persons will help local pioneers in their work."

It might seem therefore that institutions, for all their drawbacks, are needed in the Middle East. But experts who have made close studies of the problems of the disabled feel that, for once, money is not the only answer. In the current situation of crisis, it can be argued that only the most severely mentally retarded children (and adults) need the constant supervision of an institutional home with professional care.

For most disabled Palestine refugees, life could be made much better just by helping families become more understanding and the community more tolerant and understanding.

UNRWA's main goal is to identify those in need and then to integrate them into their communities, not necessarily as workers but at least as respected individuals. UNRWA believes that "Full Participation and Equality," the motto of the International Year of Disabled Persons, means helping more Palestine refugees to live with more meaning.





traditional designs, until just one single motif could cover an item such as a wall-hanging or a large handbag made out of rough, gaily coloured hessian. Thus a brick-coloured wall-hanging would sport just a single 'Tree of Life', or a green cushion just a single, enormous 'Damascus Rose'.

This method may lack some of the delicacy of traditional Palestinian embroidery. But Miss May Aboud of the Nejdeh points out that by keeping prices to a minimum they have been able to open up vast new markets for the Palestinian designs. The Nejdeh's range of cushion covers retails for between \$ 6 and \$ 17, and with prices like these the Nejdeh was able to report that in 1979 its major markets (after local Lebanon) were Italy, the USA and Switzerland.

The Nejdeh has workshops at four different camps throughout Lebanon, each one with about 30 full-time workers totally dependent on the continuing flow of work. So the pressure to find markets is great.

Miss Aboud says that this is pushing the Nejdeh in two main directions in its designs. On the one hand they are developing more finely worked decorative items (though she stresses they do not want to duplicate the work of the Inaash exactly). On the other they are developing the sewing side of the work to produce women's and especially children's clothes involving relatively little embroidery and a lot of ordinary tailoring. With a simple cotton dress featuring two embroidered camels on the yoke retailing for around \$ 8, they find they are competitive in the children's clothing market, and now they are working on an order for 100 dresses for a Lebanese wholesaler.

This may seem a long way away from the village bride, quietly stitching to prepare her trousseau. But the continuity of skills and designs remains. As one expert on Palestinian embroidery commented, "The variety of designs is like a complete language." If so, it speaks of hope for the future, for the thousands of women now able, through their traditional skills, to contribute to the family budget.

Palestine Portraits

Aishe Ahmed el-Azzi

In her western dress, Aishe Ahmed el-Azzi could belong anywhere. But she lives in New Amman Camp, one of two large Palestine refugee camps located within the city limits of Amman, the capital of Jordan. Just months before she was born, her family was uprooted by the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

"Life has always been difficult for us. It is run, run, run for a loaf of bread. My husband has been in east Jordan since 1957 and he does whatever work he can find. I cannot go out to work because I have no one to look after my young children. I feel their formative years are now and my role is to be with them, to teach them and to guide them," explains Aishe.

A trained seamstress, Aishe attended UNRWA elementary and lower secondary schools in Hebron in the now occupied West Bank, completing her secondary education at a Jordan Government school. After passing the Tawjiji (Secondary General Education Certificate) in 1968, she stayed at home for two years because of the upheavals resulting from the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

In 1970 she took a six-month course at a nearby UNRWA Sewing Centre. "This course was invaluable and opened the door to a position at the Beni Na'im Charitable Society Centre where I worked for four years," Aishe recalls. "Then in 1976 I married my cousin, who had been left with two young daughters to rear on his own. This is what brought me to Amman.

"When I was living in Hebron, I was closer to our village of Ajour, located in that part of the Hebron area which was taken in the creation of Israel. My father was killed in the 1948 war and my mother who was pregnant—with me—made her way with relatives and other villagers to Hebron. She had my two older brothers and sister in tow; I do not know how she made it."

Aishe's childhood was like that of any other refugee child in that area, "so near and yet so far from our family home . . . We somehow went on living although heartache and sadness seemed to permeate every day of our lives. Then coming to Amman in 1976 made my heart even heavier because it meant removing myself from my loved ones as well as the area of my family home."

Within the el-Azzi courtyard, encircled by a cement wall, are three small rooms built independently of one another. "We have to keep the girls—Muntaha, aged 10 years, Misha'al, 12 years old, and Ahlan, 1½ years old—inside the courtyard because there is no place for them to play in New Amman Camp. The older girls go to school and then come straight home," Aishe says. "I try to amuse them and to teach them to cook and do housework by giving them light chores to fill their time. We can do no more for them. But we dream of the day they will be able to romp through the fields of our family village in Palestine."

Abdullah Iadeh Samhadaneh

Children are the hope of the future. That is the firm belief of Abdullah Iadeh Samhadaneh, an UNRWA mathematics supervisor since 1976 in the Amman, Jordan area.

Each time he sees the children lined up in the schoolyard before the day's classes begin, he says, "I feel a pride in our Palestinian youth and a satisfaction in the fact that the education they are receiving will help us raise our standard of living and strengthen our future as a people." For this reason, Abdullah is concerned about the threat of closing parts of UNRWA's school system because of money shortage.

A 1976 graduate of Bir Zeit University in the Israeli-occupied West

Family shock—and how to treat it

"It is a shock to find you have a disabled child, and in far too many cases a handicapped child produces a handicapped family," says UNRWA social worker Qasem Mohammad Hussein. He sees the biggest problem in the Arab world as a lack of public awareness.

"We must begin with the families," says Qasem. "They must be taught how to help, especially during the first years of a child's life. Parents are often helpless. They cannot help because they do not know how." Qasem works in the Balqa area of Jordan which includes Baqa'a camp (population 59,000) the largest Palestine refugee camp in the Middle East.

He knows at first hand the obstacles that have to be overcome. Over-protection for instance can be as harmful as lack of care. Some disabled are so sheltered by their relatives that they have no opportunity to develop independence outside the family. At the same time, crippled or mentally retarded members of a family are sometimes hidden at home because of a feeling of shame and embarrassment.

This is not always the case. Often attitudes in the Middle East are found to be better than in, say, Europe. "In Jordan, people are much more accepting and tolerant than in Sweden where mental retardation has been focused on for more than

100 years," says Swedish-born Gunhild Sehlin, director of the Swedish Home for Mentally Retarded Children, in Amman.

"I do not know if it has to do with the Muslim religion, their acceptance of the will of God. But I think it must. Most parents are very concerned about the welfare of their retarded children. It will be a very long time before institutions can be done away with in Jordan," says Ms. Sehlin.

Certainly tolerance and acceptance do help, but they can also cloud the issues and hamper better understanding of how to prevent passing on problems from generation to generation.

In one family, the parents are first cousins. The father is slightly mentally retarded. Of the nine children, all four sons are also mentally retarded. The father was a tenant farmer until an accident prevented him from working.

The family now lives in Nuzha refugee community, Amman, Jordan, in a hut with one single bed. The boys are aged 8 to 22. Efforts to have them placed in an institution have failed. Their mother cannot go out to work because the children depend on her.

"What more can I do than take care of them and love them?" she asks. "It is God's will that I have them. I must take care of them. God gives me strength to carry on."

Unfortunately the precise size of the problem of the mentally retarded, the visually handicapped and the crippled among the Palestine refugees is unknown. Just how many disabled there are can only be guessed. A recent UNESCO study of children in the United States showed that 10 in every 100 in the U.S. suffered from some form of disability. In the Middle East, where living conditions are far worse, the proportion must be higher, although even 10 per cent would mean some 90,000 disabled children of Palestine refugees plus perhaps as many adults.

The problem is not a new one, but that makes it no more acceptable. Partly it is the product of centuries of fear, superstition and ignorance. More immediately, disability is caused by inadequate nutrition, faulty childbearing practices, diseases, infections and accidents. Among adults, aging itself is a disability among 20 per cent of the population aged 60 years and over.

UNICEF found that programmes to develop better health services, improved diets, basic education and family planning were of value. But the disabled were usually excluded from existing services. Because of a chronic shortage of funds, UNRWA health services are at a minimum level already. And since a major priority is the avoidance of ep-



UNRWA social workers like Qasem Mohammad Hussein visit families regularly to provide advice and assess needs.

idemics and serious malnutrition there is little room for change or expansion.

In its early years, UNRWA necessarily devoted the greater part of its resources to relief services. As it became obvious that no quick solution was likely, the emphasis moved to education which now takes more than half the annual budget. Relief (including welfare) takes a further quarter and health services receive only 16 per cent. This is spent on preventive medicine, health centres, communicable disease control, maternal and child health clinics, medical staff, health education and environmental sanitation.

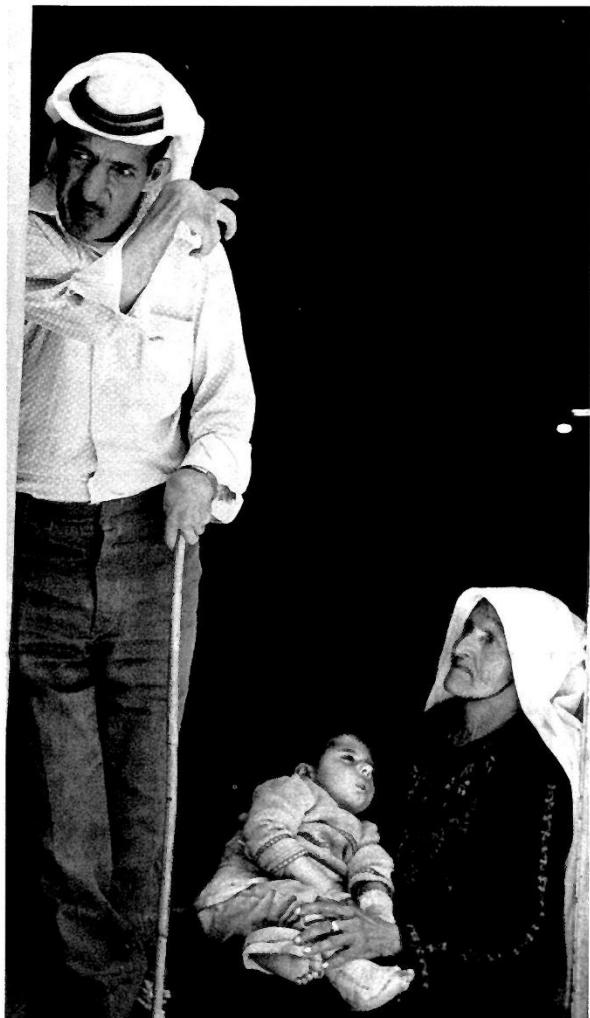
UNRWA welfare workers do help the handicapped with special training but funds are so limited that only very few can be helped. In 1978/79 some 560 destitute old people were placed in institutions, 1,400 orphans were placed by local charitable organisations and 189 handicapped refugees were trained to integrate them into the life of their communities. The main reason so few are helped is shortage of funds, but this in turn is because the problem is not recognized.

Qasem Mohammad Hussein speaks of a lack of public awareness in his part of the world. UNESCO says people everywhere are uninformed as to the causes, prevention and treatment of childhood disability (which in turn leads to adult disability) and are filled with misinformation, superstition and fear about the subject. This is true, says UNESCO, not only of unsophisticated villagers but also of community leaders, professional people, government officials, and international planners and administrators.

Sponsors of the International Year of Disabled Persons hope to bring some clearer understanding to all these people.

Qasem Mohammad Hussein hopes it succeeds. He says all those working with Palestine refugees in Jordan have high hopes pinned on 1981.

Profile



Mahmoud Ali Hat Jali lost his small shop when it was washed away by a rainstorm. His stock, valued at JD 1,500 (US\$ 4,500) was uninsured. No one had told him about insurance — just as when he was a child no one recommended treatment for the joint disorder with which he was born. Now, with maimed feet and hands his walk is slow and painful with the help of an awkwardly-held cane. Too disabled to work, his debts are mounting, and he is taking food on credit to feed his blind mother, his wife and their two children. The younger child, Saber, has just had his eighth operation to correct foot and wrist joints. Doctors say he should now be almost normal. Mahmoud hopes they are right. With no chance of raising the money to start another shop, he has little else to hope for.



Through the eyes of Maha

Everyone knows that the sunset is a beautiful rose-red, that spring rains leave fields covered in greenery and wild flowers, and that a smile can light up the face of a loved one... but not everyone can see it. For Maha Tawfiq Abu Dos, last spring was filled with revelations, the likes of which she had never imagined.

An energetic 15-year-old, Maha appears shy and reserved to those she does not know. Blind since birth, she has always worn sunglasses when in public. Her bowed head and slow gait always made it clear that she was handicapped. Her family, refugees displaced to east Jordan as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli hostilities, live in a community of squatters in the Wadi Abdoun area of the Jordanian capital of Amman. Their hastily built shelter is composed of two small rooms, erected separately as money became available to house the family of eight children and the parents.

Someone to Help

Money has been hard to come by since Maha's father Tawfiq took ill several years ago. That illness left him unable to continue work as a day labourer. He was fortunate last year to find his present job as a messenger for a local lawyer at a salary of JD 40 (US \$ 130) a month. In spite of this situation, Maha's mother and father have spared no effort to help her, taking her from

doctor to doctor in hopes that one of them would be able to work a miracle.

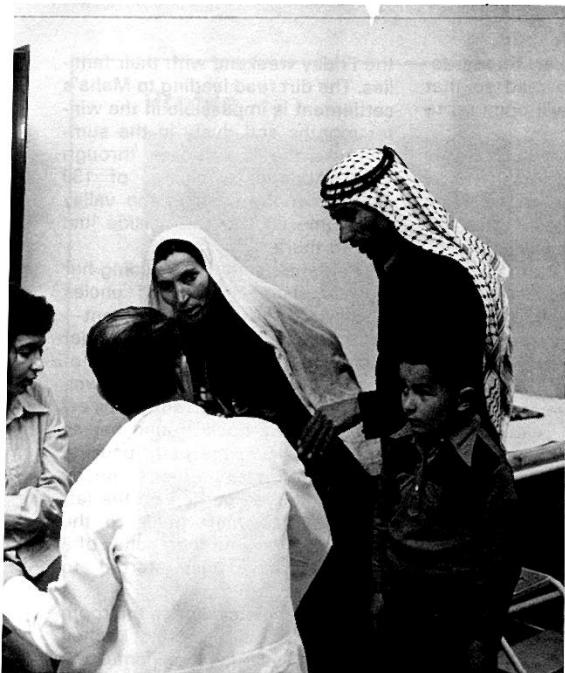
One of their medical visits took Maha to Dr. Adnan Jarjuli, himself a 1948 refugee from the Tulkarem area of Palestine. Having performed a number of cornea grafts in 1979, he examined Maha in late November to find that surgery would be in order for her condition.

Hardly able to believe their ears, Maha's parents began to prepare her psychologically for the ordeal ahead, its possible success and its possible failure. On 9 January 1980, her left eye received the first cornea transplant in a delicate two-hour operation carried out under a microscope. Termed an initial success, it was followed 41 days later by a second transplant to her right eye.

Corneas for Maha

"For Maha, whose congenital problem kept her from seeing properly, we determined that new corneas would function with the remaining





eye apparatus and that her eyes could be taught to see", explained Dr. Jarjuli. "After the first transplant to her left eye, we wanted to give her a second as soon as another suitable cornea was available. "The younger the recipient of the cornea graft, the better the chances of success," continued Dr. Jarjuli. "However, we choose those patients who are in greatest need. This makes our work even more difficult and accounts for the relatively low 60 to 70 per cent success rate we have had in the 80 cornea transplants performed since early 1979."

Each of Maha's operations cost about JD 200 (US \$ 660), including two weeks in hospital. The Ministry of Health of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan absorbed 80 per cent of the medical expenses, with the remaining amount left to Maha's family to pay. Until money could be raised, Maha's sister placed her gold bracelets as a guarantee.

The corneas Maha received came from Jordan's Eye Bank. First inaugurated by King Hussein in the mid-

1960s, the Eye Bank closed down after the 1967 hostilities. It was not until 1979 that it was reactivated when the International Eye Foundation in Washington, D.C., provided special surgery equipment for the University of Jordan Hospital and the Al-Hussein Medical Centre in addition to an operating microscope for Al-Bashir Government Hospital, all in Amman.

Shortly thereafter, the Foundation arranged for a shipment of 35 corneas, collected from eye banks all over the United States, and for the training of several Jordanian medical personnel. The Eye Bank was officially housed in the main building of the University Hospital on the outskirts of Amman.

Within a few months, it became obvious that the supply of corneas was insufficient for the work which had begun. Jordan's Friendship Society for the Blind then stepped in to secure more corneas. In late 1979, Prince Ra'ed, President of the Society, flew to Sri Lanka which was known to have cornea supplies. By visiting the National Eye Bank, Prince Ra'ed was able to ar-

range for a small but regular supply of corneas to the Jordan Eye Bank. ALIA, the Royal Jordanian Airlines, then agreed to fly a package of two to four corneas to Amman free of charge every two weeks. Maha was one of the first blind people to benefit from these arrangements.

Training for the Future

Back at school now, Maha continues to get moral support from her classmates and teachers. This is her last year at the Regional Centre for the Rehabilitation and Training of Blind Girls, located in Amman. The modern and spacious Centre was opened in 1974 by the Regional Office of the Middle East Committee for the Welfare of the Blind, which represents some 17 countries.

Serving as the Committee's President is its founder, Saudi Arabian Sheikh Abdullah Ghanem, who is himself blind. The Regional Centre in Amman operates with an annual budget of one million Saudi riyals (US \$ 330,000), 60 per cent of which is provided by the Arab Gulf



States and 40 per cent by the Government of Saudi Arabia.

Director of the Regional Centre for two years now has been Salwa Amar, daughter of the Cultural Attaché of the Saudi Embassy in Amman. Her busy schedule includes her full-time responsibilities at the Centre in addition to pursuing a Master's degree programme in education and social work at the University of Jordan.

Ms. Amar explained that Maha, one of 35 boarding students between 14 and 25 years of age, is an impressionable teenager, quickly affected by the mood and attitude of those with her. "She needs lots of encouragement right now. She worries about the possible complications which could affect her new-found vision. The girls are really good with her.

"Maha is a bright child," continued Ms. Amar, "so eager to learn particularly now that she can see the

page of the newspaper. She is determined to learn to read so that the world of books will open up to her."

The Regional Centre—which closes only for Ramadan (the Moslem holy month of fasting) and the feast celebration immediately after—is housed in three large villas. In addition to the Braille instruction, its students receive vocational training in sewing, machine knitting and different types of handwork, with time also spent each day in music classes. Beginning with the 1980-81 academic year, its activities were expanded to include an elementary school programme for blind girls 6 to 12 years of age.

Home for the Weekend

Every Thursday afternoon Maha and the other girls who live near Amman are transported in buses belonging to the Centre to spend

the Friday weekend with their families. The dirt road leading to Maha's settlement is impossible in the winter months and dusty in the summer. As the bus moves through Wadi Abdoun, a cluster of 130 shacks can be seen in the valley and some 200 on the hillside just behind them.

All of Maha's family—including her married sister, aunts and uncles who live in the same settlement—gather to see Maha and to hear her news. The tin and wooden door of the family courtyard opens to welcome her even before she steps off the bus. They flock around her as she walks down the path, pausing to admire her mother's neatly weeded kitchen garden on the left and the make-shift trellis to the right on which young branches of a grapevine have just started to climb.

Her younger sister runs to the room which serves as the family kitchen to put on the large blue enamel teapot. Then they all gather in the second room which serves as the family bedroom at night. All eyes are fixed on Maha as she breathlessly tells them of her week and her new discoveries. From time to time, she sighs with seeming anxiety over what the future will hold for her.

Only Time Will Tell

As the months pass, Maha's new corneas have remained clear. Eye glasses have been prescribed to further strengthen her vision. In a few months they will have to be changed, another expense for the already over-burdened family budget.

Because she has been told what could happen, the good and bad possibilities, Maha is continually filled with anxiety whenever dust irritates her eyes, she gets a headache or her tear ducts seem too active. Dr. Jarjuli reassures her at each bi-weekly visit that everything is thus far perfect. Still, only time will tell if the corneas will remain clear as they settle into place... and whether the sight with which she has been recently blessed will last forever.

Profile



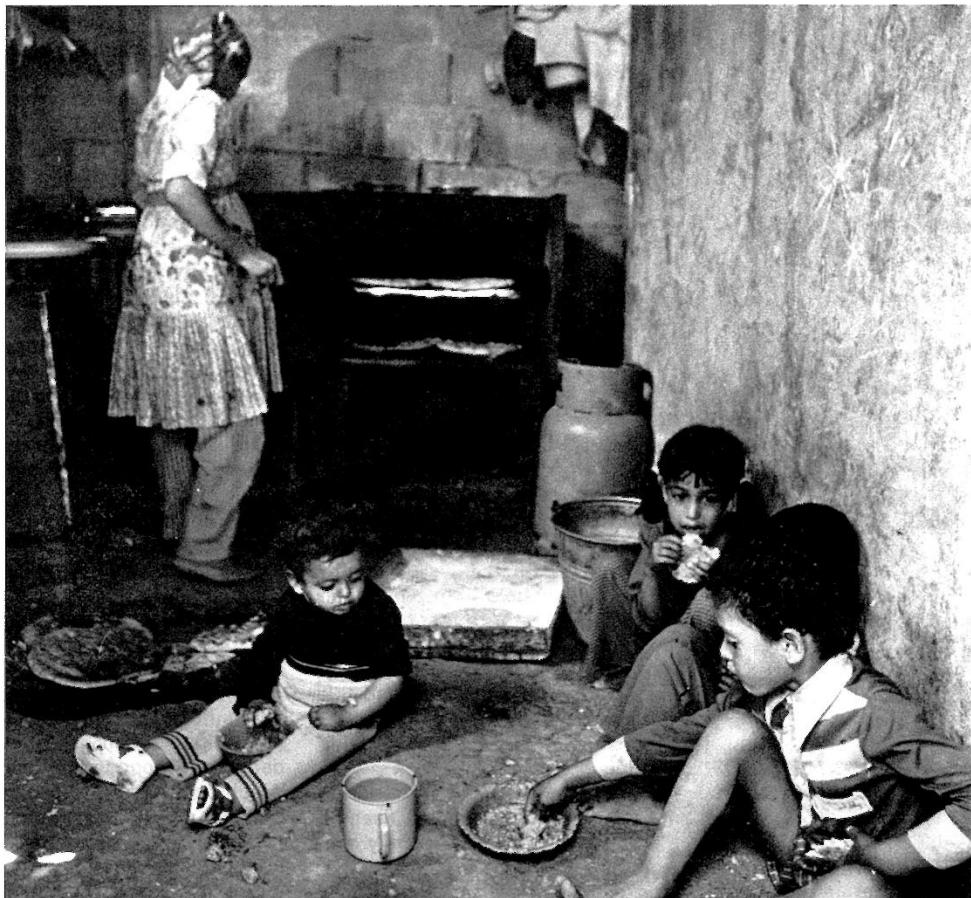
Fatmeh Ibrahim Abu Om is 14 and would like to become a seamstress. But her secondary school has stairs and Fatmeh is crippled. The leg brace she had seven years ago is too small and her crutches are too short. In a family of 12 there is no money to spare for such "luxuries".

Profile



Fatmeh Ibrahim Abu Om is 14 and would like to become a seamstress. But her secondary school has stairs and Fatmeh is crippled. The leg brace she had seven years ago is too small and her crutches are too short. In a family of 12 there is no money to spare for such "luxuries".

Profile



No normal school will accept Bilal (6) and his younger brother Nidal (5). Their mother, Fat'hieh Karim Mu'enis, was given medical treatment during her pregnancies which may have caused their disability. Her three other children are normal but the two boys seemed slow to develop. Three years ago tests showed they are almost totally deaf.

"When we found they were doomed to a silent world of deafness, what could we do but accept it as God's will?" says Fat'hieh. Bilal and Nidal are going to live in the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf in Salt, Jordan. Their father, road construction worker Abdul Karim, says: "We would like to keep them home with us in Baqa'a camp but we do not know how to teach them anything. Now they have the chance to learn to read and write. We have to let them go to give them a chance for the future, to give them hope."

His wife adds: "I look at them and marvel as I see them developing normally in other ways—running, jumping and playing, going on small errands for us—I thank God a hundred times a day that they are not worse."





How can UNRWA help?

Helping the disabled is not just providing wheelchairs for the crippled, hearing-aids for the hard-of-hearing, or even psychotherapy for the emotionally disturbed. It is all these things, but far more as well. Caring for the handicapped is more than making schools available and

building homes for the disabled. And it is not just relieving the immediate problem—the visual impairment or the learning disability. Helping means a whole new attitude, not just within families, but among the groups of families which make up what we know as our local community. For many years it was believed that providing a home where special care was available was the ideal. But experience has shown that institutions can become ghettos unable to help the disabled towards their eventual aim of being accepted in the outside world. In other words, segregation is in itself a disability factor. UNRWA has very few institutions to which to turn because of the general shortage of funds in the Middle East for helping the disabled. This has meant that most of the disabled among the Palestine refugees have been left with their families. At worst, this has meant neglect. At best, it has provided care for their physical needs, but rarely any help to improve their mental abilities or to meet their social needs. The families are not to blame. They are mostly unaware of ways to help the disabled and this ignorance has often led, in turn, to a sense of family shame at having produced a disabled person.

What UNRWA hopes to do during the International Year of Disabled Persons is to improve family and community attitudes. UNRWA hopes to make Palestine refugees realize that all of them can help by sharing the care.

To be unlike the other members of your family and your friends is one of the worst parts of being disabled. With help from relatives a handicap may matter less. With acceptance by the community it may matter hardly at all.

A disability shared and accepted is a disability overcome.

Even families in prosperous countries often feel blighted by the disability of one of their members. In refugee families, for parents upset by constant insecurity and poverty, the birth of a crippled or handicapped child can seem like a punishment for some past misbehaviour, hence the common feeling of shame. Too often the supposed

cause of the shame is hidden away, or, if admitted, is felt to be the responsibility of the family alone, or possibly of an institution. During the Year, UNRWA hopes to begin to encourage an attitude which recognizes a disabled person as a less fortunate member not just of a family but of the community, and as such entitled by the right of that misfortune to any help that the whole community can give to improve the quality of life.

The International Year of Disabled Persons is an opportunity for community leaders, religious leaders and teachers to be given this message, and to prepare the way for a wider publicity campaign followed by a detailed survey of just how many disabled Palestine refugees there are. If this can be achieved, families of disabled persons who are not receiving regular medical treatment can then be encouraged to do so. If there are sufficient numbers of mentally handicapped young children, for example, the local communities can be persuaded to start play-groups.

Paths and ramps can be built for wheelchair users and railings erected to help the blind. And advice and guidance can be given on the dangers of congenital disabilities which can arise from certain child-bearing practices and inadequate maternal care.

It sounds an ambitious campaign and it is. But if it succeeded in improving the quality of life for the physically and mentally disabled it would almost certainly have improved the quality of life for the whole community.

And the cost to UNRWA and its supporters—already hard-pressed to provide basic education, health and relief services—need not be high. Such an information campaign and supervisory welfare staff would be the only real costs, in addition to which contributions for self-help community projects could be regarded as investments.

Needs vary however from one area to another. In east Jordan for example the first task is to locate the disabled, then to inform them, and then to help them. The helping

stage would concentrate first on emphasizing the importance of pre-school rehabilitation of disabled children. It would then encourage the greatest possible mainstreaming of handicapped children in schools, and help the adult disabled.

But in the Syrian Arab Republic on the other hand the rehabilitation programmes and opportunities are very different. All the services are highly centralised and institutionalised. This is because of the large concentration of population around the capital, Damascus. There is one benefit: the high technical quality of the existing rehabilitation work. However, disabled children are sometimes segregated.

The problem to be tackled here is that of social and economic integration. UNRWA believes this could be helped by creating a disabled refugees' association. This association, representing adults from every kind of disability, would examine ways of combining their efforts to find jobs, to achieve greater participation in cultural, religious and recreational activities in their community, to receive legal assistance for the defence of their rights and to make known their willingness to fulfil their social and economic obligations.

The disabled can thus make a virtue of necessity, turning the disability of their segregation into the unity of a self-help movement.

UNRWA staff help

UNRWA staff members are always eager to help their fellow refugees even outside work. Recently the Staff Club at UNRWA headquarters (Vienna) made funds available to help three disabled refugee children in Lebanon. The \$ 1,270 donated will buy a wheelchair for Ali Abdallah Khatib; dressmaking materials for Badriyah, the crippled daughter of a widow; and tools and spare parts for Mahmoud a crippled boy who was trained as a watchmaker in a Damascus centre for rehabilitation of the disabled. This gift will enable three Palestine refugee children to have a better life and help two of them to support themselves.

Profile



Ibrahim (45) and Inam Namrouti (35) are both blind. They are rarely able to leave their hut outside the Jebal Hussein Refugee Camp, Amman, Jordan. Their seven children are not disabled and can pick their way through the rubble in the pot-holed path beside the camp's open sewer. Khalid, the eldest (16) earns the family's entire income of JD 3 (US\$ 10) a week. Ibrahim, blind since a childhood illness, lost his job when a government project for making brooms and dusters closed two years ago. He was then found to suffer from high blood pressure and diabetes. To be given work in Jordan, the blind must be certified free from all other health problems. Without work, Ibrahim cannot afford to give his children further education. Physical or mental disability need not be inherited to affect the next generation.

Profiles

Fatmeh Shehadeh remembers the sound of shelling in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. It was the last thing she heard. Born near Jaffa and deafened there as a child by the sound of heavy artillery, she moved with her parents, first to the West Bank and then in 1967 to east Jordan. She married at the age of 30, but six years ago was left a widow with three young children. Ahmad, the eldest, is now 9. Fatmeh lives with her children in Jebal Hussein Camp in Amman and explains in a heavy tongue that she has God—and the kindness of her neighbours. By the shelter door is the grapevine she planted when she moved in as a bride. Fatmeh says she is happy to be alive.



In 1967 the Hamdan family fled for the second time in 20 years. Refugees of 1948 from the area between Jerusalem and Ramallah, they ended up in the Baq'a emergency camp in the hills north of Amman. Walid, still not two years old, suddenly developed a raging fever. Apparently normal until this time, he lost his hearing. Walid was lucky enough to get a place at the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf in Salt, Jordan where in 1978 he completed his elementary schooling. His intelligence and aptitude then won him a place at the Institute for the Deaf in Beirut, Lebanon.

UNRWA Publications

GENERAL

UNRWA: Basic Facts (PL 1006)
Printed Leaflet (English, French, German)

After 30 Years... UNRWA's 30th anniversary (PL 1008)
Printed Leaflet (English, French, German, Arabic)

Definitions and Statistics
Summary of UNRWA data (English and Arabic)

Map of UNRWA's area of operations with refugee location data (English, Arabic)

UNRWA: The facts (S.T.1)
Agency financial data (English, French, German)

Survey (PB 1002)
Brochure of facts and figures (English, French, German and Arabic).

PROGRAMME LEAFLETS

Education (PL 2002—English, French, German)

Vocational Training (PL 2001—English, French, German)

Health (PL 3001—English, French, German)

Relief (PL 4001—English, French, German)

Palestine Refugees in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A series of five leaflets on each field of operation (English).

POSTERS

UNRWA and Children
A set of three posters on Palestine refugee children. Black and white. Titles in English, French, German.

UNRWA: Born in 1950...
Marking UNRWA's 30th anniversary. Titles in English, French, German.

After 30 years...
Black and white poster to mark UNRWA's 30th anniversary. Titles in English, French, German or Arabic.

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTIONS

Picture Set
12 black and white photographs (18 x 24 cm) for display use. Captions in English, French, German and Arabic.

Slide/Tape Shows
ST 1002: A seven-minute slide/tape production showing UNRWA's activities with Palestine refugees. Commentary in English, French, German or Arabic.

ST 1003: Through the Eyes of Ibrahim, a 10-minute slide-tape presentation in English, French, German and Arabic. Kit with map, posters and teaching notes included. Available on loan or purchase at \$ 45 per set.

Palestine Dresses: A set of 27 colour slides showing Palestine dresses from various regions. Included is a descriptive note in English, French, German or Arabic.

My Name is Fadwa
A 15-minute, 16 mm colour film on a deaf Palestine refugee child. Available for loan or purchase in English, French, German or Italian.

My Father's Land
A half-hour, 16 mm colour film on the Gaza blind school for Palestine refugee children. Available for purchase or loan in English, French or German.

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