

# **CHILD FRIENDLY SPACE PROJECT**

## **EVALUATION REPORT**

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# Acknowledgement

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I would like to thank the mothers who gave their time and efforts to finish this evaluation. I also thank Qattan Center for the Child staff including the staff working on the project and the management staff for their cooperation and patience. My gratitude to Ms Marwa Maarouf, the field coordinator who was of great help in coordinating the needed meetings.

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# List of abbreviations

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QCC	Qattan Center for the Child
FWE	Friends of Waldorf Education
CFS	Child Friendly Space
GCMHP	Gaza Community Mental Health Program

# Executive Summary

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The purpose of the evaluation is to investigate the effect of the project on helping the children overcome the psychological problems they developed due to the war.

The evaluation methodology had the following main phases: project documents review, developing the tools, data collection, and data analysis and reporting.

Data collection involved mainly focus groups with children, mothers and animators. Another three in-depth interviews took place with project coordinators and QCC director. In total, 20 children, 19 mothers, 6 animators, 1 field coordinator, 2 project coordinators, and 1 director were met during the evaluation process.

Focus groups that involved the children used simple questions for the assessment including how they find the CFS, do they like the animators, what are their best activities, what are their products, how do they spend Fridays, how do they spend their free time, and what do they want to become in the future.

Focus groups that involved the parents involved assessment of the child mental health and psychological well-being after the war, how do they find their children now, how do they find the project, what are the needed changes on implementing the project (if needed), and how did it affect their children.

Animators were asked to talk about the project aim, objectives, the difficulties they faced, how did the project affect the children, and what do they look for.

Project coordinators and QCC director gave details on project aim, objective, implementation, difficulties, challenges, and how do they assess the success and further development of the project.

The results of the evaluation show that the project succeeded to a considerable level in stabilizing the children through giving them a safe and supportive environment. Children were very positive about the project and they see in it the only place that they have caring people beside their house.

Mothers also evaluated the project positive, and they requested its continuity and made it clear that there is no other place for their children to ventilate. They also requested some help with their children education.

Staff involved in the project from both QCC, and FWE considered the project a successful one, and they reported improvement of the children.

### **Conclusion**

The project was very successful in offering children support in a safe place that is next to their homes. The children improved at the developmental level, social level, and they developed many skills. They are emotionally stable, attending schools, and moving according to the other children routine life. Still, the mothers participation and engagement is minimal, and work should be done as this will give the mothers the needed skills to deal with their children problems, and offer the child an understandable space at home. The project needs also to continue and deal with the aggression and bullying among the children using collective playes and activities. Another major issue, is that the area is marginaliazed and lack any other place for the children to ventilate.

### **Recommendations**

The evaluator recommends to continue the project and give more focus on the mothers and to engage them more in the project activities. More collective play activities should be added to the implemented programme in an attempt to deal with bullying between the children, and give them better ways of dealing with their differences. Staff involved in the project are to receive a form of supervision that help them deal with any issues they feel, or that the children raise. A youth center, or social club is highly needed in that area.

# Introduction:

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Gaza Strip lies on the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean sea, and has one of the highest population density in the world. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics – 2007 statistics, more than 1.6 million people live in the coastal strip that has the total area of 360 square kilometers. The highest population density area was Gaza city with 6.708 (person/km<sup>2</sup>). More than 52% of the population are children below 18, and with an average house hold of 6.5.

Gaza Strip is part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It was occupied by Israel in 1967. In the year 1994 and in accordance with the Oslo agreement, the Palestinian authority took care of the administrative issues of Gaza Strip. Despite the disengagement plan that Israel implemented in 2005, Israel continue to control people, and goods coming in and out of the strip, and when Hamas took power on the year 2007 after an internal fighting with Fatah Israel imposed the siege on Gaza. The siege continued to affect the Gazan population heavily as it did not only block reconstruction material from coming into Gaza, but also, detergents, hygiene materials, clothes, and even most of the food items.

The siege made the life of Gazans more difficult and intensified their suffering also taking into consideration the high unemployment rate (more than 35%), and that about 80% of population live under poverty line<sup>1</sup>.

## **The Cast Lead Operation:**

Israel launched a major military operation on Gaza Strip between 27 December, 2008 and 18 January, 2009. Immediate casualties counts showed that more than 1380 Palestinians were killed including 431 children and 112 women and Another 5380 people were injured including 1872 children, and 800 women<sup>2</sup>. The military operation included air strike, and land invasions. The operation had a major impact on the psychological wellbeing of children and also adults. A study that was conducted during February 2009 by Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, a key organization working in the field of mental health and human rights in Gaza Strip found that 51.9% of the parents reported that their children have emotional problems,

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<sup>1</sup> The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> MOH

40.6% reported peer relationships problems, 23.5% reported hyperactivity, and 13% reported social problems.

One of the most brutal land invasions was the one that affected Al-Zeitoun area near Gaza city. Many of the houses were demolished, and more than forty five people were killed in front of their relatives eyes. The main family living in that area is Samouni family who lost more than thirty members. About 100 people of Samouni people where gathered in one of the houses, while the Israeli army started demolishing the other houses. Many of the children saw their parents, siblings, or friends die, and most of them saw their houses demolished.

## The Project:

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In February 2009 a crisis intervention team from Friends of Waldorf Education (FWE) visited Gaza Strip with the aim of providing first aid assistance and support to the traumatized children with the help of Waldorf pedagogical methods. The visit continued for four days only as the team had to leave Gaza. The team returned to Gaza to continue their work during July 2009. At the last day of that visit and during an evaluation discussion senior professionals from the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme advised continuation of the visits and work, and the need of local professionals for (an outside view, and creative indications)<sup>3</sup>

### **Project Aim:**

Later on, a project was developed with the aim of using Waldorf pedagogical methods with the children and the creation of a Child Friendly Space, training of animators aiming at stabilizing the children, strengthening healing processes, and helping them integrate the trauma and go on with their life.

### **Key actors:**

The project is implemented in cooperation with Qattan Center for the Child (QCC). Qattan Centre for the Child is an independent children's library and information centre aimed at improving the cultural, social, educational, recreational and psychological environment for a large section of the Gaza Strip's child population, without social, physical, religious, sexual or racial discrimination. QCC has a strong

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<sup>3</sup> Reports from FEW web site <http://www.freunde-waldorf.de>



network with main actors specially in the field of children and youth. The project will also benefit from the existing link with Gaza Community Mental Health Programme.

**Target group:**

The project targets children living in Samouni (Zaitoun) area.

**Project Objectives:**

1. Train animators and educators on pedagogical activities that help stabilize the children.
2. Pedagogical activities are supposed to provide the children with the needed support to overcome psychological effects of the war.
3. Provide the needed advice to parents on dealing with the difficulties their children has.

## The Evaluation:

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**Purpose of Evaluation**

The main purpose of the evaluation is to investigate the effect of Child Friendly Space project on helping the children overcome the psychological problems that they developed due to the last war on Gaza.

**Objectives of Evaluation**

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the project on helping the children gain the needed psychological balance and stability to go back to their normal routine live.
2. To examine, if the project was successful in helping the parents gain the needed skills to deal with the psychological difficulties their children have.

3. Give advice on further continuation of the project, and future assessment tools.

**Methodology:**

- Project Documents Review:

The evaluator reviewed all the documents related to the project proposal, implementation reports, and other documents related to the project.

- Focus groups:

The evaluator conducted six focus groups involving the children, parents, and animators. The target groups were as follow:

- One focus group targeting 7 children from Future group (children below age of six.
- One focus group targeting 6 children from Hope group (age 7-10)
- One focus group targeting 7 children from Freedom group (age 11-15)
- Two focus groups targeting 19 mothers in total
- One focus group for the animators working in the project.

- In Depth Interviews:

Three in-depth interviews were carried on interviewing Mr Mamdouh Abu Kmail Outreach Activity Coordinator – QCC, and Ms Marwa Ma'rouf, the project field coordinator. The second interview was with Ms Reem Abu Jaber, QCC Director. The third one was with Ms Kristina Manz, Head of Department Emergency pedagogy - Friends of Waldorf Education (FWE).

**Procedure:**

All the focus groups, and in-depth interviews were conducted by the evaluator. The QCC field coordinator was of great help on coordinating the time and place of the meetings.

### **Data analysis and reporting:**

The data analysis started once data collection was made. Most of the data was of the qualitative type. Main findings and recommendations follow in the report.

### **Challenges:**

As there was no pre assessment of the target group, the evaluator compared the current findings to the research findings that were found assessing the impact of Cast Lead operation on the Palestinian children.

## **Main findings :**

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### **Documents Review:**

The evaluator has reviewed the available documents including the project proposal, activity weekly/monthly reports, and weekly action plans.

- Activity reports contained information about the reporting period, number of participants, participating animators, key observations regarding the children groups, main positive changes, and challenges.
- Number of children participating in the activities varied from about 20 children to more than 120, with about 80 children present most of the time. .
- Main reasons for the low numbers were school exam time, and bad weather. Main reason for high numbers was the school vacation time.
- The implementation started from last week of July 2010, and still ongoing.
- Staff working with the children are one coordinator, and six animators. A seventh one was added on June 2011.
- QCC team was very dynamic in responding to the needs of the children and the field developments. Examples are following:
  - The project started with two main activities: Art and drawing, and movement activities. A third activity (Book Corner) was added on April

2011. This was as it was noticed the increased interest of the children to listen to stories.

- The project also had open days when children could sing, play, and use the open microphone.
- The type of the activity took into the consideration the age of the child, and the Palestinian culture.
- In the very beginning of the project, children were divided in two main groups according to age (one is 6 and below, the other is 7 and above). As the animators noticed some difficulty among children of the second group due to age difference, the group was divided in two (younger than 10, and 10 and above).
- During trips and journeys, the elder children were divided according to sex (male children above 7, and female children above 7).
- The reports also show the difficulties that the animators faced during the beginning of the project. Examples are following:
  - Children did not commit themselves to their groups. In the beginning they were moving from one group to the other.
  - Some of the children were throwing sand at the container that was used in the safe place, even in one day, the animators had to break the locker as a small wood was inserted in it, making it impossible to insert the key and open it.
  - Also, it was noticed that children were less concentrated on their group activity as they were also interested in following the other group work.
  - Children were also in general very active, difficult to handle, and not tidy.
- After four months of the beginning of the project children were more committed to their groups. Group work was apparent. Most of the difficulties related to the children mal behavior disappeared.
- In June 2011, a major change took place with the renovation of the allocated place for the project. This was accompanied by a change of the type of

activities that were implemented. More activities are to make the child productive.

- With time, more positive feedback was written in the report regarding the children participation in the activities, and most of the challenges were overcome. A main positive finding was that the groups became homogenous, and that the children became committed to the schedules and activities.
- Only one report (January monthly report) showed that the parents were involved in the activities.

### **Focus Groups:**

The evaluator conducted six focus groups including three focus groups with children, two focus groups with the parents, and one with the animators.

#### **Children focus groups:**

Three focus groups meetings (twenty children in total) were carried with the children with each group representing a specific age group.

Children were asked simple questions that are suitable for their age, and allow them to express their feelings and ideas about the project.

The evaluator had also the chance to observe the children during the focus groups meetings as they took place within the child friendly space premises.

#### **A) Below age 6 group:**

- The children were happy with the CFS, and the activity that they liked too much was the drawing.
- When they were asked about the topic of the drawing, their answers were: Drawing flowers, trees, coloring drawings, and a house.
- The children were very satisfied with the animators, and were cooperative with them.

B) Age 7-10 group:

- This age group was more expressive than the younger ones.
- Most of the children also enjoyed the drawing activity, but they mainly drew butterflies, birds, cats.
- They also were very happy with the book corner, and they spoke about their favorite tales (Laila and the wolf, the coward rabbit)
- When they were asked to decide which activity is their favorite, half of them said all the activities.
- When the children were asked about other places that they could spend enjoyable time, most of them responded none.
- They were also asked about the way they spend Friday, and most of them answered by saying that they stay at home (helping their mothers).
- The children were having good relations with the animators. Most of them spoke about their favorite animator, and some were asking about the animators who worked previously in the project.

C) Age above 10:

- These age group children were the most expressive (as expected)
- Most of the children liked the book corner, and named many of the tales they like.
- They were also cooperative with the animators, and expressed their happiness from their presence, and from the CFS.
- When they were asked if they want the CFS to be in another place, they said that they like it being in their neighborhood.
- Another question was asked about what do they want to be in the future, two said that they want to become teachers, one wants to be physician, one wants to be a hospital director, a journalist, Quran reader, and an animator.
- Although these are older children, but unfortunately when they were asked about Friday activities, or other place to have fun, they had no other place beside the CFS, and they spend the other time at home.

- Interestingly when the evaluator asked about the benefits of the CFS one child said: They made us forget about the war through games, and trips.
- The children spoke about the benefits of the CFS as they can learn to draw, read, express themselves, know more tales to tell the others.
- When they were asked about their opinion regarding the animators, they said that they were very nice, if a child is sad, they make him happy, and that they never shouted.
- Girls preferred to be fully separated from boys.

**Evaluator observation:**

- The atmosphere in the CFS was very friendly.
- Children were engaged in the activities and most of them were following the roles.
- The animators work together in full coordination making the available space as useful as possible.
- Although most of the children were happy and laughing, some of the very young ones were crying.
- It was clearly noticed that some children have bullying behaviors. These were about five children among the 70 that were present in the CFS.
- Although the current place is renovated, in the evaluator opinion there is a need for a bigger place, with better room for the activities, and facilities for the animators.

**Mothers focus groups:**

Two focus groups were conducted involving 19 mothers of the children attending the CFS. The main findings were as follows:

- The mothers believe that the CFS aims at alleviating the suffering of the children, make the children forget the war, let their spirits calm, give them a chance to play together, and improve their skills.

- When the mothers were asked about how the war affected their children most of them talked about fear of the darkness, night mares and terrors, bedwetting, nervousness, bullying, and aggression.
- Then they were asked how they find their children at the moment and they reported a big improvement at all these problems, with just aggression and bullying still an issue. They also complained that the children sometimes do not listen.
- In reply to the question about how the CFS affected the children the mothers said:
  - The mothers said that the children love going to the CFS and they started to care about their clothes, and they want to be tidy.
  - Children return home and bring stories to the mothers about how they spent the day, and sometimes bring their products (drawing) and insist on hanging them to the wall.
  - The mothers believe that the CFS helped the children gain confidence in themselves and have great self-esteem.
  - One of the mothers said that the camp (CFS) is the only chance the children has. There is no other place in the area to ventilate. Only the TV at home and nothing else.
  - Another mother was happy as her child now draws very well, and that he now can also talk and play.
  - One woman said: The camp also make the children love each other. It spreads love among the children. They do it through the fairy tales, the video tapes, and the trips. She continued: We also need such trips.
- The mothers were also asked about their opinion about the animators, and they were all grateful for the work they do. One mother said: They are even more patient with them than us!
- The mothers believe that the children improved a lot at different social and intellectual capacities, and their behavior is better due to the atmosphere that the CFS and the animators create.



- When the mothers were asked if they want something to change about the CFS they replied that may be its time to give more time to education. They suggested to give one hour for the activities, and two for education. They also said that there is no one to help the children with education in the area and that they hope that there would be a library.
- When they were asked about their participation in the CFS, they said that they have no time. They also recalled on meeting that they participated in and said that it was fun and great, and they wish if it could happen again.
- One other question was asked: What if the CFS closes? What would happen? The mothers responded that the children will be definitely unhappy. This will also add more pressure on the families as the time children spend in the CFS give the mother time to ventilate, and work on other life issues. They also said: If this will happen, then our children will go back to the streets and they will go back to fighting.

**Evaluator observation:**

- The mothers agreed and believed in the importance of the CFS.
- They focus more on future needs of the children when they were asked about changes. Their concern about education reflects that they are now thinking about the development of the children, rather than the effects of the war.
- Mothers concern about education comes from the fact they only four women in the neighborhood has a bachelor degree, and the others have very low education, and in poor environment and bad conditions, the best investment a family can afford is a highly educated child.
- Although when the mothers said that they have no time for participating in the activities, they were showing willingness to learn how to deal with the children as the animators do. The mother of Noorhan said: My daughter was not happy with going to the camp in the beginning. She used to be a silent and lonely child. With time, she loved it, and then she started to talk and sing. I started to tell her: If you want to go to the camp, then do your homework. That was the first time she was so interested in doing the homework. The girl became more active, her sole was renovated, and her personality became better.

### **Animators focus group:**

- The animators are well oriented to the project goal, and objectives.
- With the exception of Rana, the current animators are not the animators the project started with, and four of them were just employed in July.
- Three animators received training from the German team, with Rana having received four training courses.
- The animators combined their experience, Palestinian games, and the German training into the activities that were planned in the CFS.
- The animators were divided in three groups according to the type of activity: Two for the book corner, two for the movement games, and three for the art and drawing.
- The team decides about the activity plan, and can modify it as needed.
- The current activities focus mainly on developing the children skills.
- In the animators opinion the changes in the children that took place are as follows:
  - Children were in the beginning of the project less talkative, more lonely, and did not like participatory activities. Now, they enjoy participatory activities, play together, and even like tournament games.
  - Children were having difficulties with concentration, and used to like movement games that do not require any concentration. Now they spend time on drawing, art work, and other activities that require concentration.
  - In the beginning of the project the children were aggressive, hyperactive, and fighting a lot. Now things are a lot better as they are playing together, and try to follow the roles of the CFS.
  - In one instant in the beginning of the project children were throwing sand and stone at the container. Now the children care about the place and keep it tidy.

- The children did not trust the animators, and there was no eye contact. But now they are friendly and playing together.
- When the animators were asked what does the project give the children, they replied:
  - The CFS is a safe place where children find people to care for them.
  - The activities help the children ventilate and debrief.
  - The project makes the children trust themselves, stabilized them, and gives them the chance to go further with their live.
  - The improvement in the place was very important.
- When they were asked about the worst thing that happened during the project they said that when they had to stop for few days as they were not sure about the project extension, they saw the children crying. They said that even if the project is going to stop there should be a gradual phasing out strategy. They also noticed that the children are attached to the animators, and when some of them changed, the children were raising a lot of questions about the animators that stopped working.
- When they were asked about their own feelings during the work they said that in the beginning there were feeling pity and sorry for the children. They were also afraid of failing as it was very difficult to deal with the children in the beginning, but things improved with time. They also said that nowadays they come to work with a lot of joy, and fun, and that the difficulty they have during the middle of the day turns into another joy at the end of the day.
- The animators also advised that the area is deprived of resources, marginalized. There is a need for the establishment of an organization or a club that can help the children further.
- The animators were requested to write down the most important event or story that they have during the project, and most of them wrote how they were touched by the children, and their stories.

### **Evaluator observation:**

- The animators were working closely and cooperatively for the success of the project.
- They have great spirit and team work.
- In the evaluator opinion, the animators have to have support through supervision as they can ventilate and talk about their concerns, feelings, and emotions.

### **In-depth Interviews:**

Three in-depth interviews were carried on. The first one was with Mr Mamdouh Abu Kmail Outreach Activity Coordinator – QCC, and Ms Marwa Ma'rouf, the project field coordinator. The second interview was with Ms Reem Abu Jaber, QCC Director. The third one was with Ms Kristina Manz, Head of Department Emergency pedagogy - Friends of Waldorf Education (FWE). The main findings were as follow:

- Both officials from Qattan Center for the Child, and Friends of Waldorf Education were clear about the project aim, goals, and activities.
- The teams were highly cooperative and responsible in dealing with the training needs. Most of these were discussed and decided in cooperation between QCC, and FWE.
- FEW was responsible for finding the needed trainers, and bringing them to Gaza, and QCC was responsible for the field work in the CFS.
- The evaluator observed that the communication between both organizations was smooth and productive.
- The evaluator questioned the reason behind the change in the staff (animators) that were allocated to the project. QCC officials pointed out that some of the animators were less task oriented, and that they were not making proper use of the time spent with the children. Interestingly, Ms Manz noticed that the current staff are a lot better than the previous.

- The evaluator also asked about a sudden period of stoppage of activities that made the children angry, and frustrated. Apparently this was due to the delay in having the decision of the possibility for project extension. The situation created by the stoppage warned the need for proper phasing out plan in the future (in case of project termination).
- QCC also made all possible efforts in making the project succeed including moving the project implementation to the outreach activity department, as they are the most experienced with the work implemented.
- The project was followed mainly through field visits, meetings, and monthly reports.
- The evaluator requested from Ms Manz to describe the way she saw the children during the different visits (as she used to come to Gaza every few months, the evaluators expected that she could note changes among the children). Ms Manz reported the following:
  - During the first year when we were coming to Gaza, all the people including the children talked about the war.
  - This time and during the visit we had in February children stopped talking about the war, they want to show what they achieved and not what happened.
  - Even children when they show us the pictures now, they show them together without fighting with each other.
- Another example that was given by Ms Manz was the child Mahmoud. Mahmoud was showing her some of the pictures, including one that contained the picture of his killed father and brother. She noticed that after showing her the picture he put it aside without showing reaction. Ms Manz says: I have the feeling that he integrated the experience as his face was calm.

**Evaluator observation:**

- People responsible for the implementation of the project from both organizations felt that the children improved, but they requested an expert opinion.

- There is also a general feeling that still more work to be done with the children.
- The next question was if the project should continue, and how!

### **Summary of the main findings:**

- QCC, and FEW teams had the same understanding of the project aim, goals, and activities.
- German teams were training animators on how to help the children ventilate and provide a friendly space that would help the children stabilize, overcome the effects of the war, and move on with their life.
- The implementation of the designed activities including movement activity, art and drawing, started from the beginning of the project. Few months later the book corner was added to the two activities making them three.
- Other activities as open days, movie shows, trips, plays were also included in the activity plan.
- Animators were very dynamic, and sensitive to the needs of the children. They were very successful in dealing with the children, and making the friendly space one of the important aspects of their daily routine.
- Children, their mothers, and the animators agreed on the improvement of the children at different levels, including intellectual, behavioral, and social functioning.
- The child friendly space is the only available place that the children could ventilate and enjoy their time at the moment.
- Its their only chance to the development of their skills, and to avoid any possible regression due to the harsh circumstances they live in.
- Mothers are interested also in learning how to deal with their children, and also show huge concern about their children education.

- The mothers also showed their fears that if the project stops, then their children could go to the streets and fight.
- They also spoke about the need in the area for a library, or a permanent place where the children could enjoy their time.
- QCC, and FEW are committed for the success of the project, and the continuity of its activities as much as needed for the benefit of the children in the area.
- High cooperation, and openness ensured successful implementation of the project activities, and thus good result and outcome for the children.
- Animators are also in need for care, as they were touched by the stories the children had.

# Recommendations:

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Although the project have very positive results at the level of stabilizing the children, improving the psychological well-being this is just the first step towards bringing them back to their normal routine live. Unfortunately with no other available space for the children in the area, the risk of relapse is high.

The evaluator advise the continuity of the project in its current shape at least till February 2012, and then further work should include working with the families (parents) hoping to make them able provide the needed containment for their children.

An extension of the project after February 2012 is needed adding more emphasis on parent education and participation. Thus making the child own house, a friendly space. Mothers participation could be encouraged either through their engagement with the children ongoing activities and trips, or through specific programmes that target parents.

In the same time the project activities should focus on group play, collective play, group activities as it will give the children the possibility solve their problems in friendly and constructive way instead of bullying and fighting.

Another very important issue is to investigate the possibility of having a long standing social club that would serve the children in that area. It should have a library, group games, and other activities. The children will be given the chance then to have their own long-lasting friendly space.

The animators were highly committed to the project, and the children. They were touched more than once due to the difficulties they had with the children in the beginning of the project, or by the stories they heard from them. Although work at the moment is enjoyable, the evaluator believes that they are to be given the chance to ventilate through supervision and care for care givers sessions.

The cooperation between Qattan Center for the Child and Friends of Waldorf Education is essential and vital for the continuity of the project. Further cooperation and exchange of experience is recommended.