



Star Mountain Rehabilitation Center – Moravian Church

January - December
2020

WELCOME

FEBRUARY 2021

About US

Star Mountain Rehabilitation Center (SMRC) is an institution of the Worldwide Moravian Church working in Palestine. It contributes in securing a life in dignity for persons with intellectual disabilities (PwIDs), through the provision of rehabilitation and training, integration and inclusion, awareness building and community mobilization, on the basis of love, dignity, justice and equality.

SMRC is located in a village called Abu Qash, in Ramallah and Al-Bireh District, West Bank, Palestine, 25 km to the north of Jerusalem. SMRC trains and rehabilitates around 90 PwIDs whose ages range from 3 months to 40 years old. Thirty qualified staff members work with great commitment and pride in this special mission.

Vision

To be pioneers in securing a life in dignity for people with intellectual disabilities in Palestine

Values:

- Love
- Dignity
- Transparency
- Justice and equality
- Innovation and excellence.

Strategic Goals:

1. Provide distinctive rehabilitation and training services to persons with intellectual disability regardless of disability level in Ramallah and Al-Bireh District.
2. Raise the awareness of the Palestinian community including families, individuals, institutions and policy-makers on the rights and capacities of persons with intellectual disability.
3. Strive to change local and national policies in accordance with the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Palestinian Law through the Advocacy Committee and partners.

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A word from the director, Ms. Ranya Francis Karam

"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Proverbs 16:3

In times of difficulty and struggle, I always think of this story that I came across once, and it always has a magical effect on me.

A man that was facing some life difficulties was talking to his friend and telling him about his worries and fears of what will happen to him, and then his friend asked:

"When you travel on a plane, you are high up in the sky, you have no control over the plane, yet you put your life in the hands of the pilot who you do not know but trust that the pilot will deliver you safely to your destination. So why do you worry when the pilot of your journey is God?"

2020 was a very difficult year for the whole world and perhaps a more difficult one for the Palestinians, given the very fragile economic situation and health system in the country. At SMRC we started the year not knowing how it will end. Will we be able to operate or will we need to shut down and stay confined to our homes?

Will we be able to obtain the necessary funding to keep serving our beneficiaries or might we need to close down some of our programs?

Yet with the team's faith to give it all up to the Lord and our strong commitment to serve his children, the Lord has laid down the path for us, and the following SMRC 2020 achievements are the best examples of that.

Construction of New Kindergarten Building

SMRC has been implementing a construction project of a new kindergarten building since 2019. Thanks to Sternstunden, Mission21 and other individual donors, SMRC received a grant and managed to complete the building and finish the internal fittings of the basement and ground floor in August 2020. Due to limited funds, SMRC has not yet managed to finish the external fittings of the new building (including playgrounds, yards, lightings, water and sewage installations...etc.). However, SMRC welcomes any grant to complete this construction project and to create a safe environment for children.



Old Building Renovation

It is with great happiness and a sense of achievement that one of the oldest buildings at SMRC will be completely renovated and operational by the beginning of 2021. This building consists of two floors and was serving as the old inclusive Kindergarten building. The building was in a very bad shape and not safe for children. Thanks to funding from KFW and under the supervision of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) the renovation work is already well under way. The



building will be used to serve our students and as a guesthouse during the summer.

Electricity Upgrade Project

Since its establishment in 1959, SMRC has been operating on 100 amps circuits. As the number of buildings and facilities increased, the old electric installations and power were not able to sustain these facilities. Power failures occurred repeatedly, especially during the winter season. During 2020 and with HMH funding, all electrical installations were upgraded and the voltage was increased from 100 amps to 315 amps to be able to handle the current load as well as future expansion. Recognition is also due to a local engineering company Al Takamul, who donated low voltage wiring and fiber optic cabling for all SMRC facilities.



Construction of New Greenhouses

With funding from the European Union SMRC applied to the Palestinian Agricultural Development Association (PARC) in 2020 to invest an area of 1035 m² in Green Houses to increase its agricultural produce as well as provide more training and work opportunities to people with an intellectual disability. Thanks to the hard work of the SMRC team and the newly employed farmer, SMRC has been able to conclude and cultivate the new greenhouse prior to the end of the year. The produce will be sold to generate income for SMRC as well as giving the students healthy and nutritious vegetables to eat.



Forest & Landscape Restoration

In 2019 two forestry experts visited SMRC to assess the forest situation at SMRC. The experts provided management with a number of recommendations to maintain the forest trees as well as make use of the existing land to plant different kinds of trees. With these funds SMRC was able to rehabilitate two pieces of land. One piece was planted with 25 citrus trees, 40 olive trees were planted in different pieces of land, the other piece of land that was rehabilitated will be planted with fruit trees in spring 2021. In the meantime, the land was cultivated with different types of vegetables.



The newly planted citrus trees. Hummus, fava beans and green peas cultivated in the 2nd piece of land.

Inclusive Activities

Three inclusive activities took place in 2020 to give PwIDs the opportunity to entertain persons without disability and engage in activities with them. In January 2020, the Student Council of Birzeit University conducted an inclusive entertainment activity with PwIDs from the Vocational Training Program (VTP) of SMRC. In February 2020, the Student Parliament of the Spanish School organized an inclusive sport and entertainment activity with children with intellectual disabilities from the School Program of SMRC. In June 2020, the Independence Youth Union initiated an entertainment (dancing) activity with PwIDs for both the School and VTP.



Inclusive activities with the Spanish School at SMRC

Participation of SMRC in the Regional Youth Leadership Summit

One of SMRC's outstanding students Halimeh, her sister and SMRC physiotherapist participated in the Regional Youth Leadership Summit in January 2020. This Summit aimed to empower youth and persons with disabilities (PwDs) to be included in the community.



SMRC during the outbreak of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed to have spread to the West Bank on 5 March 2020. On the 22nd of March, the Palestinian Government imposed stricter measures in the West Bank, preventing movement between governorates and closing all non-essential facilities including schools. Accordingly, the Management Team of SMRC decided to close its facility to comply with the containment measures of the Palestinian Government until May 2020. Nevertheless, SMRC Team maintained communication with its students and their family members through daily follow-up over the phone and using social media networks (Facebook and Whatsapp) to raise their

awareness on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and follow up on their rehabilitation and education process online. Accordingly, different training videos were made by SMRC team and its PwIDs as they apply such trainings at home. These videos were posted on SMRC Facebook page to be accessible to all PwIDs and their family members.

As the Palestinian Government eased quarantine measures in May and June 2020, SMRC rehabilitation workers conducted home visits to PwIDs and their parents to check on their needs and maintain the rehabilitation process. By end of June as the restrictions were eased, SMRC students returned to SMRC until the summer holidays started.

At the beginning of August 2020 SMRC resumed its operations as usual until the end of the month when several staff members became infected with COVID-19. This resulted in SMRC closing for two weeks until mid-September, when operations were resumed as usual until the Christmas Holidays.

Contribution of SMRC Personnel during the outbreak of COVID-19

Since not all SMRC staff are rehabilitation teachers who can work with PwIDs, the administration and management teams decided to do rehabilitation work to Star Mountain premises. Once the lockdown was eased and people were allowed to commute, the administration and management teams rolled up their sleeves and started cleaning up and planting the gardens, forest and agricultural lands. The group effort boosted everyone's moral, because they could see the result of their work exemplified in a more beautiful and green Star Mountain day after day.



Figure 1 Staff cleaning the premises of SMRC

Contribution of Community Members towards PwIDs during the outbreak of COVID-19



During the Coronavirus lockdown, SMRC communicated with different community members including institutions and individuals to provide food parcels for poor families of PwIDs.

Renovation of SMRC Guard's Room

Another SMRC achievement during the year was the renovation of the guard's room, which was in a very poor condition. Tiling, sanitary hardware, kitchen cabinets and electric wiring were all replaced. Most of the materials used were donations in kind from local shops.



Purchase of New Bus

Also in 2020 and with a generous donation from Ehmann Foundation and Mission 21 in Switzerland SMRC bought a brand new Mercedes Benz Bus to transport its students from and to their homes.



Inclusion of PwIDs in Schools

In coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE), SMRC was able to include one of its students "Mayar" in a regular school during the reporting period. SMRC Team also followed up with 7 PwIDs who were already included in regular schools.



Vocational Training Opportunities for PwIDs



Abdulrahman training at a car

wash facility, the second one as an assistant worker in a coffee booth's owner and 2 PwIDs as packaging workers for a cleaning products manufacturer.

Despite the gravity of the situation due to the spread of COVID-19 in the Palestinian Territories, SMRC Team managed to find vocational training opportunities for 5 PwIDs.

One of them has been trained as a housekeeping assistant in a local restaurant, the

Employment Opportunities for PwIDs

By the end of the year 2020, the cleaning products manufacturer (Star Company) employed two of SMRC students who had been trained on packaging and labeling. It was such a joy to hear from Star factory that Halimeh and Wasim are among their best performing employees.



Staff Capacity Building

In addition to attending a number of workshops on special education and how to develop class plans for PwIDs, SMRC teachers also participated in online training workshops on privacy and digitalization, how to avoid infection with COVID-19 as well as attending a training course on Microsoft Excel.



Training course on special education for SMRC staff members

Moreover, when SMRC teachers returned to SMRC in May, each teacher was requested to prepare and present a training topic on PwID rehabilitation to the rest of the team. Training topics included topics on psychological, social and economic empowerment of PwIDs as well as vocational training techniques.

Participation in Product Exhibitions

Due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus in the Palestinian Territories, SMRC participated in only one product exhibition called “Al-Babourya Market” in Birzeit to market and sell products made by PwIDs.



Participation of SMRC in Advocating for People with Disability

In November 2021 staff members and PwIDs from SMRC participated in a sit-in at the Legislative Council demanding the Palestinian Council of Ministers to issue a free, equitable and comprehensive national health insurance system for PwDs. The sit-in lasted for 63 days and ended by an approved comprehensive and free national health insurance for all people with disability and their children.



CISU funded “Inclusion of PwIDs in Palestinian Schools” project

In a new two-year project, that was awarded to SMRC towards the end of 2020, SMRC and the Danish Moravian Mission (BDM) worked together on an application to the Danish Civil Society in Development Mission (CISU) to support “Inclusion of PwIDs in Palestinian Schools”. The project aims at enabling PwIDs to access their right to education and protection.



Meeting with family members of PwIDs to raise their awareness on the right of their children to education and protection

GIZ Grant

SMRC received a one-year grant from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) to support a project called “Inclusion of PwIDs on the local level”. This project aims to raise the awareness of local councils, community institutions, PwIDs and their family members on disability rights to enable PwIDs to claim their rights, and to empower community institutions and local councils to mainstream such rights in their agendas and programs. It also aims to establish a body under the umbrella of the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) to follow up with local councils and support them to bear their responsibilities towards PwDs.



Joint meeting with representatives from the local councils of Jifna, Ein Sinia and Dura

SMRC welcomes five new staff members

It is with great pleasure that SMRC has welcomed five new staff members during the year:

Ms. Narmeen Ma’ali, a new graduate of Birzeit University, is a very talented and dedicated speech therapist.

Mr. Abdul Salam Neirat, although a young man, has more than 10 years of farming experience. His experience and hard work have been evident on the ground in spite of the short period of his employment during the second half of the year.

Mr. Mohammad N’airat, who holds a Bachelor degree in administrative and financial sciences with extensive experience in working with local councils, has been appointed as the GIZ Program Coordinator for the inclusion of PwIDs on the local level.

Ms. Ansar Quraan, who holds a Masters degree in Special Education with 7 years of experience in working with PwIDs, has been appointed as the CISU Program Coordinator for the right of PwIDs to education.

Last but not least, SMRC was very happy to welcome back one of its valued, previous employees, Ms. Rabiha Joudeh who rejoined the Team to serve as the CISU Program Coordinator for the right of PwIDs to protection. Ms. Joudeh holds a master degree in Education with over 20 years of experience in working with PwIDs.



Four of the new team members from left to right (Mr. Mohammad N’airat, Ms. Narmeen Ma’ali, Ms. Ansar Quraan and Mrs. Rabiha Joudeh)

Establishing a new rehabilitation center in Burqin

Funded by the Evangelical Church of Gohfeld in Germany and in cooperation with Burqin Municipality a new rehabilitation center for PwIDs was established by SMRC in Burqin village. Burqin is a two hour drive to the north of SMRC. Three teachers/therapists and a three classroom center with the necessary equipment and supplies will start providing rehabilitation services to develop the daily life, cognitive, behavioral, physical and speech skills of PwIDs in that area beginning 2021. The center will

be managed and supervised by an SMRC Team. It is expected that this center will serve at least 50 PwIDs.

APIC Grant

As part of their corporate social responsibility the Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC) has kindly awarded SMRC a second round of a three-year grant with a total amount of \$75000. This grant is to cover part of SMRC running costs during the years 2020-2021.

Penny Appeal USA

Another proud accomplishment of SMRC during this period was a newly built partnership between SMRC and Penny Appeal USA. Penny Appeal is an Islamic Charity that provides aid to marginalized people in over 30 countries, one of which is Palestine. The new project aims to promote agricultural activities at SMRC, that will provide our students with fresh food as well as increase our income generating capacity.

A success story of online teaching

SMRC was contacted by a parent from the US who has a child with intellectual disability. This mom asked SMRC to provide her son with online speech therapy. It was such a joy to learn that our good work has travelled abroad. And so our exceptional speech therapist Narmeen started providing speech therapy sessions to Ahmad using Zoom Meeting.

After approximately 50 sessions Ahmad has successfully developed his breathing skills and improved his vocabulary acquisition. He can pronounce many words that include animals, colors, verbs and antonyms.

Volunteering and internship opportunities for university students

It was not possible to host any foreign volunteers this year, due to Corona travel restrictions, but SMRC hosted 25 local university interns. Birzeit University sent SMRC 16 speech therapy trainees. Other interns joined other rehabilitation classes.

Christmas Spirit in spite of Corona

Of course SMRC could not let this season go by without celebrating the birth of our Lord. There was an outside celebration for our students, who enjoyed the beautiful weather with dances, music and – of course – presents from Santa. The SMRC team was just as lucky. Everyone enjoyed an outside brunch, played some games and exchanged gifts. It was a very beautiful day, a get away from daily routines and of course Corona ☺.



*Best wishes from
Star Mountain
Rehabilitation Center*



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