

# Middle East Children's Institute (MECI) Mid-year Report | 2023

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## Hope Through Education

### HIGHLIGHTS

Afterschool Program reached a record number of students  
Prestigious journal featured MECI Palestine/Muviklabs.io digital anxiety pilot program  
Three new scholars joined the MECI scholarship program  
MECI adjusted program schedules to cover for teacher's strike, showcased adaptability

### IMPACT THIS YEAR

1,215 students reached with the Afterschool Program  
26,650 meals distributed  
53 women employed  
9 university scholarships



## ***Dear MECI Friends,***

We are pleased to provide an update on MECI's progress and achievements during the first half of this school year. Your generous support has been instrumental in empowering vulnerable children and women in the Middle East and enabling us to navigate these challenging times.

In spite of the severe security situation in the West Bank, MECI Palestine has been able to stay open and serving our beneficiaries with critically needed interventions. Post-Covid, we were hoping for a relatively smooth year, but in a region where every day we must expect the unexpected, this was not possible. Recent months have presented fierce challenges, as violence escalated, directly affecting our community. In the West Bank, recurrent incursions by the Israeli army into villages in the Beni Zaid area have resulted in tragedies, arrests and injuries. Rua, our star medical scholar, lost two of her brothers, who were former exemplary MECI students, in a fatal shooting. Their deaths plunged her family into despair, and the entire community experienced profound shock, grief, and anger. In response, MECI mobilized its team, working tirelessly to convey the vital message that "violence must never be met with violence" and stressing the importance of our healing purpose to build resiliency. During this critical time, MECI has offered crucial outlets and psychosocial support, trying to maintain a calm environment while remaining steadfast in our mission to keep **HOPE** alive.

Additionally, starting in February, a 90-day-long teachers' strike put schooling for children across the West Bank on hold. As a result, MECI adjusted its program schedule so that activities took place in the mornings instead of the afternoons. This shift ensured children remained cared for and made MECI the only consistent educational presence in Beit Rima. During holiday time, by continuing to host fun-filled events like celebrating Children's Day and International Women's Day, MECI allowed children and their families to experience moments of joy amidst the prevailing difficulties.

In the face of these adversities, MECI remains committed to its mission of addressing the educational, psychosocial, health and other basic humanitarian needs of Middle Eastern children and women in both war-torn and impoverished areas, and continues to adapt and innovate to meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of thousands of children, providing them with hope, education and opportunities for a brighter future. Thank you being part of MECI's family —and keeping hope alive.

## **PROGRAM'S UPDATE**

### **1. MECI Afterschool Program Showcases Resilience and Flexibility**

MECI's Afterschool Program continues to operate in five schools, reaching a record 1,215 students since September 2022. The Program provides a safe, structured, and enriching experience to the participating students to educate and nurture "the whole child". To improve the children mental wellbeing, an array of psychosocial activities that facilitate healing are offered, including visual arts, drama, sports and mental exercises. Our three full-

time psychologists on staff also provide counseling through individual and group sessions, which are of utmost importance after the dramatic incidents in the area.

Additionally, for the children's nutritional wellbeing, healthy meals are offered. 26,650 meals have been provided since the beginning of the school year and *over half a million* since inception. These meals are prepared by the local women's association.

This winter, schoolteachers went on strike for 90 days. MECI stepped in and showcased flexibility by operating in the morning, replacing regular school hours to keep children in school. The adaptability of the MECI field team is highly valued in the community.

## 2. MECI Pioneers Digital Breathing Intervention for Anxiety in Children

The pilot MECI/Muviklabs.io digital breathing intervention has been highly impactful in targeting our students' anxiety. The initial intervention was conducted by trained MECI facilitators under clinical trial conditions, and the results proved positively statistically significant in reducing stress and anxiety in the trial group, compared to the control group. Given the success of the instrument, the clinical assessment was published in the journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health. Lara Bouchededid, MECI's Director of Operations, was one of the paper's co-authors.

Now, 20 MECI facilitators have been trained to deliver the intervention and hence all children in the elementary schools start the MECI afterschool program with digital breathing. A trial adaptation for older (adolescent) students will commence in October 2023.

## 3. MECI Empowers Women through Employment Opportunities and Digital Training

MECI is the second largest employer in the village after the municipality. Thirty women are employed to implement the MECI afterschool program including facilitators, counselors, program assistant and admin assistant. Additionally through its partnership with the local Women's Association in Deir Ghassaneh, MECI has created employment opportunities for almost two dozen women in the area that help prepare the healthy meals distributed to MECI children in the afterschool program. The women have expressed great satisfaction with the opportunity to support their families through their work with MECI. Association. Mufida Shoaibi started with MECI 15 years ago, as a facilitator and is now MECI program assistant. She is a mother of 5 and more recently a grandmother. She is the breadwinner of her family. She mentions that her biggest achievement in life was to support her children education: "I have worked with MECI for 15 years. It was the main income for my family. I was able to support my four daughters by sending them to university and helping them build a brighter future."

We are inspired by her perseverance, loyalty and fortitude.

Additionally, the internet café [MECI established in 2021] welcomes women interested in attending IT computer classes. This year, two groups of participants will engage in the coursework. Many of them have never had any previous experience with computers. We begin by teaching them the fundamentals of operating a computer, from the very basics to creating an email and working with programs like Word and Excel.

#### 4. MECI Advances University Scholarship and Volunteering Program

This June, MECI proudly celebrates the graduation of four scholars who overcame challenges to achieve their academic dreams.

We congratulate the following graduates for their degrees: Gahram (Accounting), Aseel (Accounting) Rasha (Computer Science) and Osama (Computer Science). Not only have they secured a brighter future for themselves, but they are inspiring role models for the children and community.

This year, we granted three more MECI scholarships to students specializing in Computer Engineering: Bilal (M), Jenin (F) and Ayham (M). The rigorous selection process was based on the following criteria: Enrolled in the MECI afterschool program for at least three years, Established socio-economic need, Proficiency in spoken and written English, Favorable recommendations from teachers and facilitators and 90+ grade on Tawjihi.

All three students come from disadvantaged families, with Bilal's father currently in prison and Jenin and Ayham having lost their fathers.

A requirement of the MECI scholarship is for our scholars to volunteer back in the MECI afterschool program or Summer Peace Camp. Ossama, our fourth-year medical scholar, conducted a workshop to promote health awareness among MECI children. He said: *"You would never imagine the joy I felt when I was able to share what I learned from the university to these students. The experience has significantly transformed me from within, instilling a newfound sense of self-confidence and pride. I vividly recall being a young student in one of these camps, aspiring to become a doctor. Now, as I stand halfway through medical school and teach these children, I realize how far I have come."*

### WHAT'S AHEAD

Our vision for the coming years is to catalyze on MECI's achievements and using the collective learning outcomes from 15 years of transformational experience to set up the first Education Innovation Training Hub in rural Palestine. MECI will be piloting innovative programs designed to foster the development of a hopeful, resilient and empowered society.

**New Partnerships:** In-line with our vision, we are partnering with YGA-Twin to launch unique STEM activities for our students. The latest technology STEM kits are being delivered to MECI and the plan is to train MECI facilitators this summer to be able to execute the program.

**Expansion:** MECI upcoming Summer Peace Camp, is scheduled to start in July. In response to community and Ministry of Education (MoE) requests, we are planning to host one camp outside of Beit Rima. We are currently in discussions with the MoE to finalize the location, and this expansion confirms MECI's impact in the region.



## VOICES FROM BEIT RIMA

**Mr. Yazan - Mayor of Beit Rima** - MECI plays a major role in the daily life of almost every family in Beit Rima. Thank you for supporting our children and thank you for all the support MECI provides to our community and families in need.

**Imad - Parent Council** - Beit Rima is quite forgotten. MECI is there to fill many gaps by supporting our schools, our children through the afterschool program and by supporting our poor families through the scholarships.

**Om Sami - Mother** - My child brings everything he learns in MECI activities to home... He practices with his siblings and even with me [in reference to the digital breathing intervention].

**Insaf Shoaibi - Women's Association** - We are very proud to be partners with MECI which managed to support and even advocate for our needs. With the support of MECI, we have managed to build a strong network within the community of Beit Rima.

