

Partnership programme

L'Arche Egypt's partnership programme to support the inclusion of children with disabilities and their families in five villages.

In 2019 L'Arche Egypt led a group of five grassroots "village NGOs" in the Al Minia district to respond to the intense distress of children with disabilities and their families. The project, which combined education and health care, while building a sense of belonging for the children and their families, has made a significant difference to the lives of 100 children with disabilities and their mothers and impacted of the lives of circa 1,400 hundred people.

"I love you so much, you gave me hope and strengths; God sent you to me at the perfect time; I am comfortable now, thanks for everything."



Context

“He has improved so much you would hardly recognize him as the same boy.”

Al Minia is one of the poorest areas of Egypt, with a population of more than 4 million people. There are high rates of unemployment and illiteracy, and deep tensions between Christians and Muslims. UNICEF estimates approximately 10% of the Egyptian population experiences some type of disability. The numbers of people with intellectual disabilities tends to be particularly high in villages where conditions can be hard, with higher levels of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, marriage between relatives, and a lack of awareness about disability.

The society at large still considers having a child with a disability something to be terribly ashamed of. This means that many families try to hide their children from public view. This leaves families, especially mothers, feeling very alone and isolated.

This context creates situations of extreme suffering for children with intellectual disabilities. The 5 villages in the project had people committed to bringing about deep change. They had already formed small “village NGOs,” but needed the leadership of L’Arche and investment in their staff, in order for their work to be effective.

Project Objectives

The project provided extensive “hands on” training to the staff of local village NGOs to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in five villages. It provided rehabilitation, healthcare and education services. At the same time, it educated families, especially mothers, about other services available to them, including early detection and early intervention, encouraging them not just to use existing services but to speak out for better ones. All of this work was underpinned by work to assist children with disabilities to integrate into family life and social activities in the villages.



Project accomplishments



The programme has led to significant improved health, education and inclusion levels in the villages. The children's self esteem, their families expectation of what they can do, the villages understanding of what children with disabilities can contribute to village life; all have improved radically.

"Before I heard of the NGO we had no hopes that Judy would ever be able to talk. When I brought her (to the programme) she wasn't speaking at all she wasn't even calling me 'mama'."

- **Twelve village coordinators were trained.**
- **100 children with intellectual disabilities** received significant education and health support.
- **100 mothers** were supported through 1150 home visits from the coordinators.
- **314 children** among the villages were discovered and noted to have an intellectual disability.
- **1200 people in the villages**, who otherwise could not afford health care, were reached through 6 medical convoys and other one on one consultations.
- **1400 individuals** from across the five villages were impacted through the medical services and the awareness building activities conducted in the villages, encouraging the participation of children with disabilities in village life, such as a march on International Day of People with Disabilities which drew children, families, volunteers, and other organizations and a "peace maker" camp that mixed children with and without disabilities.

Project accomplishments



"They give me love, power and make me discover new things about myself... I changed because of them, because of their love."

Playing together

One of the villages held the class for children with disabilities in the same daycare centre as the other children from the village. At first, the other children were afraid and wanted to keep their distance but with the coordinators intervention they overcame their fears and now they play all together.

The coordinators are changed too

The coordinator for the village of Bardanoha thought she was coming to this position to help the children, "but actually they are helping me." She reports that she now

finds herself very attached to the children in the program. "They give me love, power and make me discover new things about myself... I changed because of them, because of their love."

Long term impact

In December 2019, long term supporters and friends of L'Arche International, who visited L'Arche Egypt 13 years ago, wrote describing their recent visit:

"We return [from our visit] amazed by the work accomplished in 13 years in Samalut. We frankly did not expect such a work with results totally beyond what we could have

imagined, not to mention the current work in the villages."

"The emotion was there at every moment when we met these [mothers] who had regained the hope, joy and even more the smile of seeing their disabled child finally 'rehabilitated' in the eyes of their families and village communities. It was only happiness!!!!... Their testimony was a great moment of sincere expression, thanks and love. Yes, interreligious dialogue requires such initiatives. And all this reinforces in us the desire to support your initiatives in this field more strongly."