

.....Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

The Deaf Unit

How it all started

In the late 1970s, Clair Malik, the Founder and Director of the Deaf Unit, had a chance meeting with the late Father Andeweg, a Dutch Anglican clergyman who had established a school for deaf people in Lebanon. She was inspired to begin a similar school for deaf children in Egypt, and so, in 1982, with four students and a staff of two to help her, Clair set up the Deaf School. From these small beginnings, the Deaf Unit grew and expanded, adding a Deaf Club in 1984 and a Vocational Training Centre in 1998.

Key facts

Founded: 1982
 Location: Cairo
 BibleLands' First Grant: 1987
 BibleLands' Grant: £8,232 p.a.



George, left, came to the school when he was aged 7. He had no previous education and unable to communicate with anyone. Because of this, he was a very frustrated child. He started in the youngest class, but he learnt so quickly that he soon moved into the class for his age group.

The School

About 60 students with a hearing-impairment, aged between 4 – 16 years, study at the school. Most of the pupils come from poor families in the area surrounding Cairo, where schools that are able to support and educate them are almost non-existent. Most of the children board at the school during the week and return to their families at the weekends. All of the children come from Christian families.

Because community prejudice is high and parental awareness is low, most children arrive at the school with little or no language, either sign or Arabic, and are therefore unable to communicate with anyone. The school teaches its pupils Egyptian sign language and spoken Arabic, followed by with lip-reading and speech therapy. Parents are also taught sign language, allowing them to communicate meaningfully with their children, often for the first time. Parents are also given support and advice in caring for their children's specific needs.

Many children come to the school having previously had little of their world explained to them. The school starts with the basics in education but, by the time the children leave, most of them are on an academic level equivalent to their hearing peers.

Thanks to a BibleLands' grant, the school has computers with speech therapy software that is specially designed for those with hearing impediments.

The school offers teacher training to those interested in working with hearing-impaired children, including training courses and conferences for teachers from other schools, both in Cairo and further afield.



The Vocational Training Centre

Opening its workshops in 1998, the Vocational Training Centre's aim is to provide quality trade skills to young, hearing-impaired adults. Carpentry, sewing, metalwork (*see photos below*) and business management are amongst the skills taught at the centre. Since hearing-impairment presents few obstacles to skills training and workmanship in these trades, trainees have every opportunity to become experts in their field.

The Vocational Training Centre is run mainly by deaf people for deaf people. The products made during the training are a source of income for the trainees and for the centre, increasing the centre's independence as it is less reliant on donations.



The Deaf Club

The aims of the Deaf Club are social interaction and the spiritual welfare of hearing-impaired adults. The Club meets twice a week and provides a place where families can meet together and help one another. For some, it might be the place where they learn more about hearing impairments and how best to support their child. For others, it might be the place where they can socialise and pray with other people, in sign-language.

Each summer, a camp is held in Alexandria to enable families to have a holiday together by the beach. This is usually the only family holiday most of the participants can afford. Whilst the children play together, the adults are offered a teaching programme with subjects that include marriage guidance, spiritual matters, and family life.

Religion is central to the Egyptian way of life and every Sunday evening a sign-language service is held, including worship, teaching and prayer. This also helps those with a hearing impairment to become better integrated into the wider religious community. The Deaf Club has pioneered sign language worship in the Arab world (*left, signing the Lord's Prayer*).



As well as each of the above activities, the Deaf Unit produces books, videos and other educational material for the hearing-impaired in Egypt. With BibleLands' support, the Deaf Unit created the first Egyptian Arab speaking sign-language CD in 2006, which is now being used internationally. Thank you for your support of this incredibly worthwhile organisation.

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