

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

Jesuit Brothers' Association

How it all started

The town of El Minya lies about 150 miles south of Cairo, on the River Nile. It is also known as the 'Bride of Upper Egypt' because of its pleasant surroundings. Unfortunately, El Minya suffers from economic difficulties, and its population of around one million has the highest rate of unemployment in Upper (Southern) Egypt.

The first Jesuits came to El Minya in 1886. They bought some land on which they built a church and house. In the 1970s, the Jesuit Brothers decided to develop the land, to make it useful to the poorer people of the city. They built workshops and a library, and the rest of the land became public playing fields. Soon after this, they added a school for children and young adults with a learning difficulties, along with a residential Vocational Training Centre for those with a disability. It is this latter centre that BibleLands supports.



Current Activities

In the rural communities surrounding El Minya, disabled people can become very isolated from society and many have been excluded from the government education system because of their disability. The Vocational Training Centre helps disabled adolescents to become active members of their communities through its rehabilitation programme.

The centre teaches vocational skills such as woodworking, gardening, sewing (*above right*) and shoe making (*above left*), and also has a literacy programme for those students who did not receive even a basic schooling. The courses last for two years, after which, following their graduation (*above centre*), each student is helped to find a job relating to their studies.

The centre accommodates up to 40 students, aged between 16-25 years, on a residential basis from Monday to Thursday. Because of their disabilities, it is easier for the students to stay at the centre during the week than to return home each evening.

The Jesuit Brothers' Association works in close co-operation with another organisation: the 6th October Centre. This centre operates a social outreach and assistance programme for the disabled community in the surrounding villages. The programme incorporates a revolving loan scheme, allowing disabled people to start their own business and therefore earn a living; and adapts clients' houses to accommodate their disability, supplying mobility aids as well as ensuring that basic needs, such as supplies of electricity and water, are met.

The 6th October Centre is responsible for the assessment, development and referral of individuals with a physical disability for training (for example, to the Jesuit Brothers' Association), education or medical assistance. In the 200 villages around El Minya, it is estimated that there are 900 physically disabled people, who often live without hope. Since the 6th October Centre opened in 1995, almost 100 people have benefited from its services.



One of the students who has benefited from both centres, is Safa'. When she enrolled at the Vocational Training Centre, Safa' was confined to a wheelchair and had been largely housebound. She underwent three operations, which the centres paid for, and is now able to walk with the aid of crutches. She studied sewing and dressmaking and, when she graduated, she was given a sewing machine to work at home. Thriving on her enormous personal capabilities and determination, she now runs a successful business, employing two able-bodied women to help her meet customer demand. As thanks for all the help that she received in the past, she also teaches her skills to the next generation of students at the Vocational Training Centre.

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Today the Jesuit Brothers' Association runs a variety of projects. As well as the special needs school and the Vocational Training Centre, these include: a mainstream school; a day-care centre; a health care centre; adult training centres; literacy classes; and outreach programmes for families in the surrounding villages.

Thank you for your support of these disabled young people in Upper Egypt; a community which has long been disadvantaged.

Key facts

Founded: mid-1980s

Location: El Minya, Upper Egypt

First Grant from BibleLands: 2003

BibleLands' Grant: £10,000 p.a.

Contact us:

BibleLands

24 London Road West, Amersham, Bucks HP7 0EZ

phone: 01494 897950 fax: 01494 897951

email: info@biblelands.org.uk

www.biblelands.org.uk