

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

Spafford Children's Centre

How it all started

On Christmas Eve in 1925, a woman named Bertha Spafford Vester met a couple in Jerusalem with a tiny newborn baby, seeking medical care. As it was Christmas Eve, all the hospital outpatients departments were closed. Bertha took action and the woman was admitted to the hospital. The following day the man came to her house to say that his wife had died. He begged Bertha to take care of the baby, as he lived in a cave and feared that the child would die if he returned home with him. She accepted the child, a little boy whom she named Noël, and that was the start of the Spafford Baby Hospital.



Right: Noël, the first Spafford baby, helps to care for another baby at the centre in the late 1920s.

From these small beginnings, the centre grew, adapting to the continually-changing political situation across the Palestinian territory, and the needs of the local population.

It still continues to develop its programmes to meet new situations as they arise: for example, the events of the last few years, including the Intifada, have left many children psychologically traumatised and so the centre offers these children counselling.

Key facts

Founded: 1925

Location: Jerusalem

First Grant from BibleLands: 1992

BibleLands' Grant: £21,000 p.a.



Current Activities

The centre provides health care to thousands of disadvantaged children in Jerusalem, offering an integrated range of services that are grouped within different departments.

Medical Department: Babies and children receive a full range of vaccinations (*see photo, left*) and their growth is carefully monitored, in the Infant Welfare Section. The experienced staff advise mothers on nutrition and the general care of their child.

Children with problems are referred to the paediatric clinic, where a paediatrician and nurse are available every day to examine and treat children up to 18 years, or to the centre's other departments where they can receive appropriate care. The centre has a small dispensary, which gives medicines and supplementary food supplies to those who need them.

As access to Jerusalem gets harder for families from the West Bank, the centre has opened a clinic in Bethany, and runs a weekly medical outreach clinic in another village north of Jerusalem.

Psychosocial Department: Here children are assessed and treated, or referred to other appropriate sections. Early detection and treatment is important, as results are usually better when the child is young, and therefore special play therapy courses are designed for pre-school children, in the Play Therapy Section. In recent years many of these children have come to the centre because they have been traumatised by the conflict around them.

The *Social Section* offers individual and group counselling for teenagers. These sessions are mainly given in local schools, but deal with subjects outside the normal school curriculum. The centre also offers similar courses for women and therapeutic sessions help relieve post-traumatic stress syndromes resulting from the current conflict. In addition, practical support is given to people in need.

Education Department: This department helps children with learning difficulties, and runs parallel to the usual school curriculum. Children are taught individually, or in groups according to age, and come to the department from schools across Jerusalem, some of which are also BibleLands' Overseas Partners.

Children with a speech problem can come to the *Speech Therapy Section*. Speech and language difficulties are often linked to learning or psychological disabilities and so the centre uses a multi-disciplinary approach across its departments.

Below: A young girl enjoys her weekly play therapy session at the centre



The Cultural Department: Established in 1998, this department is like a community club for children, teenagers and even mothers. It offers a range of activities, from art and music to dancing, theatre, or sports, helping the children to develop talents and skills. Taking part in these activities compliments other treatments the children receive at the centre.



Above: The Cultural Department arranges summer camps for different age groups. These give children and teenagers from the West Bank and Jerusalem the opportunity to meet and spend time together in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

Over the years, the Spafford Children's Centre has earned widespread trust and respect. It is highly professional and forward-looking, and has pioneered the use of new techniques. It is also unusual in having been run by women for the last 25 years and, in an area of so much sectarian conflict, in having Muslims, Jews and Christians among its staff. As such the Centre is a powerful witness, modelling reconciliation to the community around it.

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