

# Spafford Centre helps **West Bank children cope with trauma**

Earlier this year, the Spafford Centre played a vital role in helping children in the West Bank to recover from a frightening incident.



## Prayer Points

Please pray:

- for the staff in the Spafford Centre's four departments – medical, psychological, cultural and administration – all with different but important roles
- for the families receiving counselling, advice and healthcare from the Centre
- for the Spafford mobile clinics that take health services to remote villages
- for children of all faiths and nationalities caught up in the conflict in the Holy Land.

**I**t started as an ordinary school day – the children of Silwan, East Jerusalem, went to their lessons at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) School, close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The school provides elementary education to Palestinian refugee girls.

There had already been some structural damage as a result of the Israeli archaeological excavations nearby, but during the fifth lesson of the day, a classroom floor collapsed and 17 girls were injured when they and their desks and chairs fell more than a metre into a ditch that opened up below.

Fortunately, there were no major casualties and the girls were soon allowed home from hospital, but for all the school's pupils and teachers, the psychological trauma remained.

The Spafford Children's Centre stepped in with the offer of an Expressive Arts Therapy session to diffuse the tension and address their fears. This was something very new to the school and no one knew what to expect.

A few weeks after the incident, 140 children and their teachers went to the Spafford Centre in the Old City of

Jerusalem to participate in an outdoor interactive performance. The centre's drama teacher introduced some magic tricks while discussing the traumatic event and the children's fears. He stressed the importance of them continuing to go to school whatever happened – even if it had to be in a tent. With the realisation that their experience was somehow special they joined in enthusiastically, and the performers helped them to laugh together.

After the performance, Spafford social workers and trained practitioners from other organisations, all experienced in guiding children through the expression of different emotions, led a series of exercises that required first control and then unrestrained anger release. This certainly helped to diffuse the tension and everyone was delighted at the success of the venture. The day finished with everyone joining in a sing-song, tucking into cake and drinking lemonade. The whole exercise changed the children's perception of what had happened to them, and helped them look forward to continuing their education.

The Spafford Centre went on to run a separate workshop with the children's mothers – again, this was a great success in helping them come to terms with the accident.



As well as responding to specific incidents like the school collapse, the Centre's Psychology and Cultural Departments run ongoing programmes for families affected by life in a land of conflict. Dr Jantien Dajani, the Spafford Centre's Director, recently told us:

*'The Spafford Centre is busier than ever with many active projects for children and women; particularly on Fridays when some 250 children and youth are engaged in different activities. Many of our programmes may appear to be just fun and games but there is a serious side and therapeutic benefit to all of them.'*

***'We need your support more than ever now so that we can continue this valuable work and give these disadvantaged children a real sense of purpose.'*** ■

## Get Involved!

If you would like to make a regular contribution to the Spafford Centre, why not find out more about our CareSharer scheme? Visit [www.biblelands.org.uk](http://www.biblelands.org.uk) or contact the CareSharer Team on 01494 897955/56, email: [caresharers@biblelands.org.uk](mailto:caresharers@biblelands.org.uk)