

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

### Centres for Armenian Handicapped (CAHL)

#### How it all started

Many Armenians fled to Lebanon during the genocide of 1915, in which historians estimate that the Turks massacred over one-and-a-half million Armenians. More Armenians fled their homeland in 1922, following another massacre.

The Armenian Institute for the Blind (as the centres were first known) began soon after this, as a home for visually impaired children and also a home for the elderly. In the 1960s its focus was widened to include children who were hearing impaired. In 1971, a new department was opened for children with learning disabilities. This was the first such educational and vocational training facility for Armenian children in the Middle East and as such, the number of children attending grew rapidly.

#### **Key facts**

Special Classes Founded: 1971

Location: Beirut, Lebanon

First grant received from BibleLands: 1982

BibleLands grant: £10,716 p.a.

#### Current Activities

About 40 boys and girls with learning difficulties attend the six Special Classes at CAHL. Students are allocated to a class according to their academic ability. Many students also have additional emotional, behavioural and social problems.

As well as following the Lebanese curriculum, the students are taught a wide range of additional subjects, incorporating many different aspects of life, such as social skills. The pupils learn three languages (Armenian, Arabic and English), and all are taught about the Bible. Extra-curricular school trips, including outings to the beach or into the countryside, are often organised.

CAHL does not just look after the children's educational and social development but, thanks to a BibleLands' grant, is able to provide a nourishing midday meal to each child, helping to care for their physical wellbeing.

Because the students have found it difficult, if not impossible, to integrate well into mainstream schools, the Special Classes provide them with a high standard of education that they would not otherwise receive.

When the time comes for the students to leave the centre, the staff help them to find suitable employment, perhaps with their families or in local sheltered workshops.

*Left: Rita Shoushan Parmaksizian, the Special Classes' Director*

If CAHL did not exist, the alternative for these children would be to go out to work, as child labourers, to help supplement the family income – an issue which is not uncommon in Lebanon. CAHL therefore provides children not only with an education at an appropriate level, but also with the chance to remain 'children' for longer.

Talar started in the Special Classes at CAHL in October 2006, when she was 9 years old. She has epilepsy, the complications of which have given her learning disabilities, too.



When Talar was 5 years old, whilst her father was cycling to work (he could not afford a car), he was knocked off his bike and killed. With no insurance to provide for the future of his family, they lost not only a loved husband and father but also their financial security.

Three of Talar's 5 siblings have low paid jobs, whilst one cannot find work and Talar's twin is at a mainstream school. Her mother does not have a paid job because she looks after the family. Talar's epilepsy means that she has to take expensive medicines and have regular blood tests. With this additional expense on an overstretched budget, the family are grateful for CAHL's free education. If it were not free, Talar would not be able to attend and would be working, to help raise the family income.

When Talar first came to CAHL, her level of education was very low. However, with the right care and support at the centre, she is growing more confident in her abilities.



Lebanon's recent history has been deeply unsettled. Just as the country was emerging from a 15-year civil war, she was plunged into renewed turmoil by the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005 and war with Israel in 2006. However, successful parliamentary elections in 2009 led to the formation of a coalition government which, it is hoped, will usher in a period of stability, unity and co-operation. The staff at CAHL believe that, regardless of political, economic or social upheaval, it remains the duty of the Christian community to create opportunities for those with special needs.

The latest news, prayer points, and other information are all available from BibleLands.

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