

..... Overseas Partner Fact Sheet

The Zvartnotz Centre

How it all started

The Zvartnotz Centre, whose name means 'Angels', is a small day care centre for children and young adults with special needs, some of whom also have physical disabilities. It offers physical, spiritual and mental care, in a family-like atmosphere.

In 1987, the Armenian Union of Social Workers realised that there was a need for a centre for children with severe special needs, in Beirut. Under their initiative, the Zvartnotz Centre was opened in a flat owned by an Armenian Evangelical Church in Beirut, with just 8 children. Over the years the work has grown and now up to 35 beneficiaries, between the ages of 3–35 years, can come to learn educational and vocational skills, at an appropriate level.

Key facts

Founded: 1987

Director: Mrs Araxy Dabaghian

Location: Beirut, Lebanon

BibleLands' Grant: £2,796 p.a.



Current Activities

The main aim of the centre is to enable each student to become as self-sufficient as possible: to be able to sit, walk, eat, or to dress themselves. All students follow their own personalised programme of learning, with regular assessments. This encourages them to overcome their individual difficulties, to express themselves in their own way and to achieve their potential.

Many of the children come to the centre with little or no education, and most of them have never been to school before. All of the beneficiaries have an IQ of less than 60, whilst some have an IQ of less than 35, and several are multiply-disabled. The Director, Araxy Dabaghian, runs the centre with eight teachers trained in Special Education and a social worker. Specialists in psychology, psychiatry, physiotherapy and speech therapy attend on a part-time basis. The staff are all devoted to their work and to the care of the children.

Whenever possible, work related skills, such as using a knitting machine, or carpentry, are taught to the older students and some, especially those with Down syndrome, are helped to find employment in their local community. However, some of the students are unable to take part in any of the vocational training, and therefore will never have a job. The centre continues to take care of these students into their adult life.



As well as giving the children an education, medical care and work-related skills, Zvartnotz also provides the students with a midday meal, further ensuring that their health needs are met.

The centre provides support for each student's family. Parents are shown the best ways of caring for their child and are given advice about medical and government benefits. The centre also provides help to those parents who may be suffering from feelings of loneliness or guilt.

Unfortunately, disabled people are still not fully accepted in Lebanese society, and are often ignored or mistreated, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. The centre therefore campaigns, at both local and governmental levels, for the favourable recognition of disabled people in the Lebanese community.

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Zvartnotz celebrated its 20th Anniversary in 2007. The centre's staff give thanks to all those who have enabled them to provide love, care, support, and development opportunities to many children and young adults over the years, who would not otherwise have been able to live such a happy and fulfilled life.

Right: Antoni, who has Down syndrome, learns to play the keyboard. This is especially good for teaching him motor control of his fingers. Each finger has a number written on it, so that he knows in which order to play the notes.



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.

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Contact us:

BibleLands

PO Box 50, High Wycombe, Bucks HP15 7QU

phone: 01494 897950 fax: 01494 897951

email: info@biblelands.org.uk

www.biblelands.org.uk