

Giving a voice to young disabled people

'We thank the Lord that through many days which were uncertain, we've now reached 22 years of the Zvartnotz Centre!'



Get Involved!

- Zvartnotz is part of BibleLands' Sponsorship scheme. To find out more about supporting a student there, contact the Sponsorship Team on **01494 897955/56** or **sponsors@biblelands.org.uk**.
- Why not sign up for our monthly email newsletter with the latest prayer requests and information about BibleLands' overseas partners? Email **editor@biblelands.org.uk** with 'Newsletter' in the subject line.

Araxi Dabaghian, the Principal of the Zvartnotz Centre in Beirut, leads a small team of energetic and committed staff. They provide education and training to young people with learning disabilities, and campaign for the rights of disabled people in Lebanese society.

The Zvartnotz Centre (meaning 'Angels') was opened in 1987 in response to a need for facilities for children with learning disabilities in Beirut. The staff includes eight teachers trained in special education, and a social worker. Where possible, the older students receive work-related training and are assisted in finding employment in their local community.

The centre supports the physical, social and mental development of children and young adults from 3-35 years old. Ongoing training is essential for staff to keep up to date with the latest progress in special education, and two of Zvartnotz's staff have recently graduated from an in-depth three-year programme focusing on early intervention for children with autism.

Such early support is often denied to toddlers in Lebanon - the signs of autism can go unrecognised until the child is of school age. Zvartnotz also assists older

children and young adults who have never had the opportunity to receive an education.

When Adnan, now 20, was a baby, his autism was not diagnosed and he did not receive the early intervention that would have helped him to progress. Later he got a place at a school for autistic children but financial problems caused the school to close. Adnan came to Zvartnotz at the age of 19 and received a full assessment of his needs. Adnan has a keen interest in music, painting and drawing so the centre has developed a special programme of music and art therapy, which addresses his behavioural difficulties and nurtures his developing talent.

The centre has strong links with the Armenian Evangelical Church but welcomes people of all faiths and nationalities. Recently they have introduced monthly prayer and praise events for students, parents and staff who wish to attend, and these have proved a popular way of strengthening relationships and giving everyone encouragement.

For the staff, raising awareness of the rights of disabled people can be a challenge, but they are determined to continue with this important part of

their work. The centre has links with another of BibleLands' partners, Al-Kafaàt (see page 15) so that they can share knowledge and be encouraged that they are not working in isolation. As Araxi Dabaghian told us:

'We face challenging situations every day but we meet them in a positive way, enjoying our Lord's promises of blessing. Zvartnotz succeeds in moving forward in the education and care of its 33 pupils.' ■

Prayer Points

Please pray:

- for children and young people like Adnan as they receive education and training tailored to their needs
- for the ongoing success of the prayer and praise meetings
- for the Zvartnotz staff as they continue to campaign for disability rights, and their ongoing commitment to overcoming the challenges they face
- for disabled people in Lebanon who want support but do not yet receive it.