

.....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: £14,292 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 educational 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 Director of the
Special Classes*

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 who are unable to learn in a mainstream environment not only with an education at an appropriate level, but also the chance to remain children for longer.

Talar (not her real name) 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, her father was cycling to work (he could not afford a car) and 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 the family's 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. Because of her epilepsy, Talar 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.



Following its 15-year civil war, from 1975 – 1990, Lebanon was beginning to rebuild itself and there was an optimism for the future, despite huge international debts and high unemployment. However, the war with Israel in 2006 left the country unstable once again. Levels of unemployment and poverty have risen and many people fear a second civil war.

The staff at CAHL believe that, despite the other problems in their country, it remains the duty of the Christian community to create opportunities for those with special needs. Because of the increasing levels of poverty in Lebanon, sponsorship of children at CAHL is therefore even more appreciated by the children and the staff, who give grateful thanks to all BibleLands' supporters who encourage and support them in their work.

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