

# BibleLands

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

### Helen Keller Centre

#### How it all started

An English missionary named Mary Lovell opened Palestine's first home for blind girls in the late 1890s. She also devised the Arabic Braille system that is now used across the Middle East, and transcribed the Bible into Arabic Braille. When she died in 1932, some of her pupils continued her work, opening the Lovell Homes for the Blind in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

During World War II, a British soldier named Bob Clothier was stationed in Jerusalem, and became involved in the support of these Homes. On his return to England, he founded the Lovell Society, raising funds and awareness for the work. He contacted the Bible Lands Missions Aid Society (as BibleLands was then known) who, through the Lovell Society, began supporting the Homes. By the late 1940s, the BLMAS had incorporated the Lovell Society into its work and, within a few years of his return to England, Bob Clothier was the Secretary of the BLMAS, remaining so until 1985. To this day, the centre remains under the auspices of BibleLands.

Dr Helen Keller visited the school during a trip to Israel in 1952, when she was so impressed with the work that she gladly agreed to her name being used. The Helen Keller House in Jerusalem was opened by BibleLands in 1960, and has been almost wholly funded by BibleLands ever since. More recently, the centre has been renamed as the Helen Keller Centre for the Visually Impaired, to reflect the variety of work that it does.



*Right: Some of the visually impaired girls at Mary Lovell's original Home.*

#### **Key facts**

Founded: 1890s

Location: Jerusalem

Grant from BibleLands:  
£370,000 p.a.



*The Principal, Mrs Suad Younan*

#### Current Activities

The centre is nationally recognised for its excellence in teaching visually impaired children, providing a holistic education that cares for students' medical, psychological, social and educational needs.

*Education:* Up to 70 children, aged from 3–13 years, are given primary level education at the centre. The classes are small, allowing the teachers to spend more time with each child. The centre teaches all the usual curriculum subjects, with the addition of Arabic Braille. Mobility training is also provided, giving the children greater freedom and independence.

*Mainstreaming:* When students reach the age of 13 years, they are encouraged to join a mainstream secondary school. They continue to receive help from the centre's staff, who also work closely with the student's new school, showing the teachers ways to include these children in their classes' everyday activities, and providing resources where needed. About 15 children are helped in this way by the centre's staff.

*Computer literacy:* The centre has special computers that can talk and print in Braille, as well as talking calculators and typewriters. New computer equipment also allows them to access the internet. Without any computer skills, it would prove harder for students to get a job when they leave full-time education.

*Residential section:* Up to 20 children board at the centre. Some of these children live a long way from the centre, whilst others are unable to travel there each day because of travel restrictions, such as checkpoints or the Israeli Security Wall. These children return home during the school holidays.

*Additional Programmes:* The centre has a training programme for university students studying Social Work and Special Education. It also runs summer camps each year, providing visually impaired children with the opportunity to meet and get to know sighted children from the local area.

*Working with the families:* The centre provides counselling for the students' families and teaches them how to accept and cope with their child's disability. Very few organisations provide this service for families of visually impaired children in the West Bank.



Not all the children are able to reach the same academic standards and some students have additional physical and mental disabilities, which limit their progress. To assist with the needs of these particular students, the centre regularly co-operates with specialist diagnostic and rehabilitation centres in Jerusalem, many of whom are also Overseas Partners of BibleLands.

## ...Christian Love in Action in the Middle East...

The Helen Keller Centre faces a number of challenges, due to the current situation in Jerusalem. An Israeli military checkpoint is located directly outside the centre's main entrance, making access to the centre for all the children, workers, parents and visitors very difficult. A new electric gate was constructed in a different part of the centre grounds to help alleviate this problem. The Israeli Security Wall is currently being built down the main road outside the centre, which, when complete, will make access to the centre from villages in the West Bank almost impossible.

However, despite these difficulties, the dedication of the staff remains high, and the care and education of the children is second to none. Thank you for your support of this centre, enabling its vital work to continue.

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