

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

Shams el Birr

How it all started

In 1989, Dr Morcos Boulos realised that there was a huge lack of services in Egypt for blind people, particularly girls. Because of their disability, they could not go to school, and without an education they were unable to get jobs. In addition, it was difficult for them to get married, as their disability was seen as a burden. So, Shams El Birr (which means 'Sun of Righteousness') began in a small flat, with 5 blind girls.

Within a few years there were almost 50 residents in 10 flats, and in 2001 the centre outgrew its buildings and moved to a purpose built centre, where there are now about 60 residents, both boys and girls. As the centre has grown, it has widened its focus to include children with other disabilities. The students come from villages and cities across Egypt, as there are no other such centres or schools where they can be educated. By giving them an education, and by helping them to integrate within the community, the centre prepares each child to be independent in the future.



Left: Martha's parents are cousins and she was born with several congenital disabilities. When she came to the centre she could not stand or speak and was in poor health. At the centre she soon learnt to walk and became much healthier. After intensive speech therapy, she has also begun to talk.



Right: The Director, Dr Morcos, has made Shams el Birr his life's work

Current Activities

The centre runs 3 programmes: education; vocational training; and rehabilitation.

It has a boarding section, where many of the students stay during term time, returning home for the holidays.

Key facts

Founded: 1989

Location: Cairo, Egypt

First Grant from BibleLands: 1989

BibleLands' grant: £10,200 p.a.

Education: Boarding students of school age, who are blind, go to a local special school for the blind, where they are educated with their peers. After school, they return to the centre, where they do their homework and participate in other activities. Most of these children continue their education through to secondary school, and sometimes beyond.

Children over school age and those with learning and other disabilities are taught the national curriculum at the centre. At the end of the year, if they are able, they go to the local special school to sit the exams with the other pupils.

Vocational Training: Shams el Birr gives education and literacy to adults who are blind or who are disabled in other ways. In addition, they are offered vocational training, and can choose from knitting, sewing, weaving, cane and bamboo work or shoe making. The items made in these workshops are then sold to give the students an income. Once they have finished their vocational training courses, the centre helps each student to find a job.

Rehabilitation programmes: There is a very negative attitude towards disabled people in Egypt and the centre aims to help families overcome this. Therefore, work with students' families is an essential part of the centre's work.

The centre also runs Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes within the children's local communities. For rehabilitation to be successful, members of the community must recognise and accept those with disabilities, which often requires a significant change in attitude.



The centre's computer teacher is completely blind, but does not let that limit his ambitions. Role models like him help to give the children a hope for their own future.

Special activities: The centre does not just provide academic education for those who attend, but also teaches valuable life skills. Self-care programmes teach skills such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and ironing. These are important for the students, who are often prevented from learning important daily skills during their childhood, as it helps to give them independence upon leaving the centre.

One of the main subjects taught to the students of all ages and all abilities, is music and the centre is proud of its music group in which all the students are blind. None of them could play a musical instrument before they came to Shams El Birr, but now they are good musicians.

Shams El Birr also holds Bible studies and meetings for its adult students, and a Sunday School for the children, where they learn about Jesus' love for them.

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Many of the children arrive at Shams el Birr withdrawn and uncommunicative, because of the lack of stimulation they have received during their short lives. However, within a short time, they often begin to learn to communicate with other people. The centre provides all its services free of charge, so that those who most need it can receive its help.

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