

“I Scored!”

The Biggest BALL Project in Jerusalem’s Old City

Courtesy of Burj al-Luqluq Social Center Society

Ibrahim Hindiyye begins every basketball training session for children with disabilities with friendly enthusiasm and a warm smile that is contagious and affects everyone around him. Ibrahim moves at a remarkable speed from one end of the court to the other on his wheelchair, all the time keeping the orange basketball in his hands. He doesn’t give up until he lands the ball in the basket, chanting “I scored!” afterward. Ibrahim is one of 700 beneficiaries of the Learn & Play project, implemented by Burj al-Luqluq (BALL) Social Center Society.

A girls’ football team from the Talented Football Academy in Jerusalem with Coach Tamer.
 One of the teams supported by Burj al-Luqluq through UNICEF.



Al-Ansar Club in the Silwan area during a training session with Coach Ahmed Al-Razem.
 The team is also supported by Burj al-Luqluq through UNICEF.

The project serves five areas in Jerusalem that lack adequate programs for children and youth: It provides for Issawiya, Shu’fat Refugee Camp, Silwan, Jabal Mukaber, and the Old City of Jerusalem and seeks to bolster children and youth’s right to play in the challenging contexts they face in these areas every day.

The project offers sports training, which includes basketball and football, for more than 700 children, as well as remedial education in Arabic, English, and mathematics. Furthermore, the project empowers youth by increasing their awareness of their rights. Its shining achievement, however, is the basketball team for children with disabilities, the first of its kind in Jerusalem.

Alaa Ghrab, the project’s coordinator, notes, “I am confident in saying that the Learn & Play project is the only space where these children can relax and truly breathe. There are no other centers for them, and even if private centers existed, many families couldn’t afford to send their children there. But our project offers all this training free of charge. Our primary goal is to provide Jerusalem’s children and youth with a safe space. It is their natural right to play and learn – just like any other child – and we are here for them.”



Learn & Play project targets children who need fun and games. It also supports the first basketball team on wheelchairs for children with disabilities in Jerusalem.



■ Educational session at the Jabal al-Mokabber Club; an activity of the Play and Learn Project administered by Burj al-Luqluq.

For the past two years, these weekly games have been rolled out without any disruption, despite the challenges these communities face. In cooperation with ten other clubs from the five Jerusalem areas which the project serves, youth have received uninterrupted training, remedial courses, and legal support and been able to access a place to unstress and develop their skills and resilience. This project and the collaboration with BALL supports these local club's sustainability and resilience; it helps them remain competitive by providing them with sports supplies, training courses for coaches, and funding to support the needs of the children during competitions.

Rajab Obaid, 12 years old and from Issawiya village, is thrilled to be part of Isawiyya Club's football team, one of BALL's partners in Learn & Play. "I wish to become a famous and international football player and participate in international championships and hold up the name of my country."

Sirin Awad, 16 years old from Shu'fat Refugee Camp, recently joined the project's fifth phase, playing basketball. "I am very proud that I was able to register in this project and am learning to play basketball. I hope to become a trainer in the future and help as many girls from the camp as possible."

Perhaps one of the most notable success stories of Learn & Play is the establishment last year of the first basketball team on wheelchairs in Jerusalem. It trains under the supervision of coach Ahmad Jaber. Seven children with disabilities have joined the team so far! And the project is looking to expand the team to include more children with disabilities from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

Coach Ahmad notes, "The happiness and progress we notice after every training session gives us great motivation to continue and progress further. Basketball also has a significant positive impact on developing the skills of our team members, honing their ability to integrate into social settings, and heightening their social awareness. It's a fun group sport that fosters a unified team at its core. No other club in Jerusalem provides this kind of training to children in wheelchairs!"



Ibrahim is a team member who aspires to be a coach one day! He agrees with coach Ahmad and adds, "Thanks to this project, I can play a sport! It's the only one I can take part in! I really enjoy it; it releases tensions and my negative energy. This game has increased my confidence and introduced me to new people. Today, I can aspire to achieve any goal I set for myself."

"Every time a mother tells me how happy her child is after training, I trust the value and importance of the work we do," project coordinator Alaa says. He concludes, "I also believe that we need to make extra efforts to develop the team and provide it with all the support needed in this field."

■ Basketball training for Children with Disabilities (CWD); the only such projects for people with special needs in Jerusalem. This is 18-year-old Ibrahim Hindiya from Wadi Al-Joz.

Apart from serving children, Learn & Play offers some seventy job opportunities for 35 trainers, 18 teachers, nine coordinators, and administrative staff who are responsible for logistics. These opportunities go far in a community with a high unemployment rate, where many live in difficult economic circumstances.

Alaa proudly concludes by stressing that it is vital to have such a project in Jerusalem. Even the COVID-19 pandemic did not interrupt Learn & Play endeavors; on the contrary, it found alternative ways to implement its activities. Thus, it provided several technology training sessions for trainers, produced the story “Sallum Is Stronger than Corona” that was translated into several

languages, and carried out five virtual open days during the quarantine period, receiving thousands of views on social media.

“When anyone working on this project feels the footprint we leave behind and sees the positive effects we have on the children we serve, such as their academic progress or behavioral changes, we feel great pride. We have a great responsibility towards the children of Jerusalem and are proud that these quality activities have emerged from the heart of the Old City. We aspire to continue to serve as many people as we can,” Alaa assures.

■ Educational support in Jabal al-Mokabber School; 120 boys and girls benefit from sports, education, and legal-awareness classes.



Mohammad Sabbah at football practice at Al-Ansar Club in Silwan. Mohammad is 11 years old.