

Gaza's Model of “Leave No One Behind”



By Fidaa
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he Gaza Strip-based Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) began thirty years ago as a small school with 27 students with hearing impairments. With the goal of empowering Palestinians with disabilities, the ASDC's approach has developed new concepts and experiences over the years. Currently, the ASDC's interventions are based on a human rights approach, specifically, the disability inclusion perspective, and they reach over 40,000 people with and without disabilities annually. Driven by the value “Leave No One Behind,” its staff of 140, of whom 84 are deaf or hard-of-hearing, have come together through talent, passion, and commitment.

The human rights-based approach and disability inclusion methodologies ensure that persons with disabilities have access to healthcare, education, employment, and civic intervention. Providing and ensuring such access is the responsibility of both national and international

organizations. In this vein, the ASDC presents a model of an inclusive society in which no one is left behind and where people with disabilities can exercise their full rights.

The ASDC strives to provide persons with disabilities with opportunities for discovering and developing their potential and capabilities. One of the ASDC's models for disability-inclusive development is a shop for traditional Palestinian handicrafts. Here, products are finely crafted by youth with disabilities who have been trained for years in the ASDC's Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) program; these products are sold in local, national, and international markets. The ASDC's shop provides evidence of how the latent abilities of individuals with disabilities can manifest when given the appropriate opportunities.

In 2021, the ASDC received a grant from the German government, through KW Development Bank, for a project titled Strengthening ASDC's Inclusive Rehabilitation Services



“The term “disability” may sound overwhelming and frightening, but it can be transformed into “ability” through a human rights-based approach and development interventions.”





Atfaluna Society. ©UNDP/PAPP photo archive.

Infrastructure, which is part of the Employment Generation Programme (EGP) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The grant financed the construction of a new floor that has provided more space for people with and without disabilities, enabling them to participate jointly in inclusive and accessible activities. This infrastructure upgrade has allowed the ASDC to expand its services and further pursue its mission of creating a society where no one is left behind.

In this new inclusive space, professionals from various sectors equip people with disabilities with employability skills by enrolling them in various TVET courses; they also create inclusive employment opportunities for youth

with disabilities, using various methodologies and placing a particular emphasis on information and communications technology.

Over the past two years, since the inception and implementation of this expansion, the ASDC has trained over 350 professionals in how to integrate inclusive strategies in their interventions that target people with and without disabilities. Moreover, over 1,500 children, women, and men with and without disabilities have received psychosocial resilience-enhancing services.

According to the World Bank Disability Inclusion Report of 2019, more than 90 percent of people with disabilities in Gaza are unemployed due to a number of significant barriers: a lack of planning and of

strategies to include people with disabilities in the labor market; inaccessible infrastructure, such as employment offices that do not provide inclusive employment services to youth with disabilities; the high costs people with disabilities incur in accessing workplace or training opportunities, such as transportation costs and training fees; limited vocational training and economic reintegration programs, with no consideration for the specific obstacles that women with disabilities face in accessing these programs, such as training programs that require overnight stays in close proximity to training centers; and negative attitudes and stereotypes within communities, including those held by employers.



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To address these obstacles, the new KfW-funded location provides people with disabilities with access to innovative employment opportunities and vocational training. As a result, it serves the entire community as a model of how to incorporate people with disabilities into all aspects of life.

This project sheds light on the abilities and accomplishments of people with disabilities. There are numerous examples of those who have transformed their disabilities into creativity and made significant contributions to their communities. According to the ASDC's TVET and Job Creation Impact Report, 47.1 percent of the ASDC's TVET graduates with disabilities were able to secure part-time or full-time employment, and 70 percent of them



We can all play a role in creating an inclusive society – as long as we have the will to do so..

were able to build freelance careers in fields such as graphic design, digital marketing, video animation, voice-over, and more.

Even though the Gaza Strip endures recurrent crises, its citizens continue to create life and present success models to the rest of the world. The ASDC's valuable work exemplifies how we can achieve an inclusive and equitable society for all. This is reflected in the 2022 TAKREEM Award that the ASDC received for its civic and humanitarian efforts.

As we believe in the adage "Where there's a will, there's a way," we hold that everyone can participate in the creation of an inclusive society for all. It is everyone's responsibility to translate rights into actual practices.

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