



## DSPR JCC & MECC

# *On a Visit to Lebanon*

On a visit to Lebanon between July 22 to July 29, 2019 I had the opportunity to explore the work done by the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, JCC, and to visit the Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut.

Most impressive were the visits to the Palestinian Sabra and Dbayeh Refugee Camps. The first, in the southern part of Beirut, is a cramped high-density camp where 'houses' stood across each other with barely space for people to walk between them. For me it was one of the most difficult camps that I had visited throughout my field visits to DSPR areas, including those in the Gaza Strip. The conditions in the public space of the camp point clearly to absence of care and to precarious hygienic conditions especially for children. While on the visit to Sabra, my spirits were uplifted when I saw children from the camp having some fun engaging in handicrafts and enjoying kids' togetherness with self-made eye covers that were full of color and improvised creativity. This activity was part of the summer special program that encouraged children of the camp to come to the Sabra Center of DSPR in order to have some constructive time together. They apparently enjoyed the time together and had some relaxing time from the crowded and non-hygienic streets of the camp. In another activity designed to kids that have some problems with their cognitive skills, Sabra Center staff engaged them in activities designed to overcome the restrictions that their conditions imposed on them. The purpose was to let them enjoy themselves as kids and to learn how to successfully manage their limitations. I loved both groups of children and felt that the summer program activities offered by DSPR Lebanon were needed to give these children some respite from the pressures of an unhealthy camp environment and the absence of a public space where they can enjoy themselves during the hot and humid summer days.

In Dbayeh camp to the East of Beirut and that gives on a beautiful view on the Mediterranean, I felt that the camp resembled a village and it was clearly a better environment than that of Sabra refugee camp. There I met Mohammed, barely six years or so, who was engaged in the community center set up by DSPR Lebanon. He was fully engaged in some coloring activity together with his peers and they loved it. I felt that I would like to sit next to them and draw with them. It was an active summer program with other children dancing together, playing traditional Palestinian games of Dar and Dar 'Home and Home' and enjoying a variety of activities with laughs, giggles and clearly happy times. I visited some of the classrooms in the community center and detected that there was need for windows, circulation of air to counter the feeling of being in a rather claustrophobic room. The children quickly adapt but even with this it would be more fun for them to learn and to engage in the various activities while there is a feeling of openness to the wider environment.

DSPR Lebanon is doing a good job during the summer months, as these are lazy months throughout the region with its hot and humid weather. What I saw were specimen of activities geared to make children use their summer time in pursuits that are mostly denied them and the majority of the camps' children whether at Sabra or Dbayeh itself. The children of the camps made me determined that I would want to go back to Lebanon when the activities are in full swing during fall, winter and spring. When I left Lebanon, I was thinking of these children and wishing them all the best as they were growing up under conditions unsuitable for children, to say the least.

*Damaris*



Children from the Sabra Camp engaging in handicrafts



In Sabra Camp the houses stand so close to each other that there is hardly any light in the area.



Mohammed, 6 years old, painting in Dbayeh Summer Center