

## Positive Practices in Disability Inclusion

### “It starts with building trust”: From outreach to the community center

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Lebanon and its partners are currently expanding the network of refugee outreach volunteers (ROVs) and community centers to support delivery of services and community empowerment activities to the growing and widespread refugee population in Lebanon. These community-based approaches offer a unique opportunity to promote inclusion and access for persons with disabilities and their families.

Outreach and awareness-raising with families of persons with disabilities is a critical first step to promoting inclusion in community center activities. At a community center in Qab Elias, INTERSOS runs recreational, educational and psychosocial support activities targeting children, adolescents and women. Children and young people with disabilities are regularly attending these activities, often with brothers, sisters and other family members. Most children with disabilities and their families learned about the center from INTERSOS staff and refugee volunteers conducting protection monitoring and community mobilization near their homes. Group discussions and home visits are used to share information about what is available at the community center and to discuss the different support that might be needed for persons with disabilities to attend.

“In Arabic culture,” explains an ROV, “persons with disabilities should be isolated, so we have to put extra effort to convince [the family] to come to the center. This means meeting them and talking with them more than once—building a relationship.”

For some young people with physical disabilities, the distance from home to center can be a barrier. Outreach

workers and volunteers are looking for people who are isolated in their homes, and engaging families and communities in finding solutions to these barriers. Many persons with disabilities have siblings and other family members who also want to attend the center and can travel together either by pushing their wheelchair or in a vehicle.

Trust building continues at the center as social workers spend time discussing with individuals and their families what activities they are interested in and any adaptations necessary for their participation. Children and adolescents with disabilities may need time to observe the activities and other children before feeling confident enough to join in.

“We discuss what classes they want to try and support them throughout this activity,” explains an INTERSOS staff member. “Ayman\* [a boy who is deaf] used to sit on the side—each time he would say no, and then finally he said yes—now he is really enjoying the classes.”



Non-formal education program at the INTERSOS community center in Qab Elias, where children and youth with and without disabilities receive English, Arabic, Math and Science classes.

INTERSOS staff highlight that their role is to work with individuals and their families so that children and adolescents with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate alongside their peers in activities. This requires very little in the way of disability-specific approaches or equipment, but rather time, relationship building and creating a space for individuals to demonstrate and nurture their abilities.

Inaam\* has an intellectual disability. At first she didn't want to participate in activities, so the center staff asked her for suggestions. One day, she said that she would like to make beaded jewelry. Staff report that now other girls in the center are also interested in this activity. This makes Inaam feel accepted by others and welcome. She explains, "It's a beautiful place. A lovely place and people are friendly. There is sewing, knitting and beads."

Although many children with disabilities have not yet enrolled in formal educational programs in Lebanon, they are able to access ongoing opportunities for learning at this center. Ayman may communicate using sign language, but he has many different strategies for learning in the classes at the center. He uses observation, reading, writing and sometimes calls on other family members to sign pieces of information. Ayman's mother says, "My son learned how to read and write and has now started communicating with his father in Syria by phone." Likewise, 17-year-old Dima, who is blind, is learning to speak English from listening and exchanging with other girls in her class. "It is nice and very good [at the center]," she says. "They have studies here and it is fun. I have a goal. I want to learn and teach others like me. I like to prove myself to others."

## Key messages

- **Build trust with families of persons with disabilities through regular visits in the community and make explicit that persons with disabilities are welcome in the activities.**
- **Children with disabilities can participate in the same classes as their peers.** They can learn new skills and knowledge through observation, listening, speaking, reading, writing and, of course, practice.

- **Inclusion is a process, not a one-time event.** Take time to get to know the child and for him or her to get to know the center, the activities and the other children. This will help you to plan together any adaptations that are needed.
- **Use peer networks that are established at the center to promote a protection in the community and facilitate access for those with physical disabilities** (e.g., encourage young people to form groups that can travel together to the center).

## Additional Resources

UNHCR (2011) *Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement*. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4e6072b22.pdf>

Women's Refugee Commission (2013) *Disability Inclusion in the Syrian Refugee Response in Lebanon*. <http://wrc.ms/1qCJypy>

Women's Refugee Commission (2014) *Disability Inclusion: Translating Policy into Practice in Humanitarian Action*. <http://wrc.ms/DisabilityInclusion>

*The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) has been partnering with UNHCR Lebanon on disability inclusion since 2013, conducting field visits to identify strategies to promote access and inclusion for persons with disabilities in humanitarian assistance. These positive practices were identified in the WRC's third field visit to Lebanon in May/June 2014. More information is available online at: [http://wrc.ms/disab\\_inc\\_Leb](http://wrc.ms/disab_inc_Leb).*

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## Note

1 Minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action (2012) Child Protection working Group (CPWG)

*\*Names changed for anonymity.*

