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Wednesday, April 10, 2013

IY Spotlight: West Bank (Part 2)

Hello Cheri,

As you may remember, we recently sent you Part One of our Spotlight on Dr. Webster-Stratton's trip to the West Bank and her experience with the Holy Child Program, which is implementing Incredible Years Child and Parent groups. We now bring you Part Two, which focuses on the Incredible Years Parent Groups and the work that is being done with mothers in Palestine.



One of the mothers in the parent group



Carolyn, Diane, and group of foster parents

Incredible Years Parent Groups

On both days at the school I attended Incredible Years parent groups. The first group was led by three group leaders including Diane, Suzanne, a Palestinian and school academic administrator, and Hanni, a Swiss nurse married to a Palestinian and fluent in Arabic. On this day there were 9 foster parents (typically there are 12) and I learned that each of them cared for 10 foster children in their homes. These women are employed by



Two mothers in group



Two foster parents



Parent Group Leaders

an organization called Save Our Children (SOS). They called themselves *Number One Mothers Group in the Middle East* and wore a crown sticker as the symbol of their group. They all wore hijabs (scarfs) and one wore a full burka and she pushed up the veil once she was in the privacy of the room. At this session they easily shared their experiences using Time Out for aggressive behavior. One mother talks about her difficulty with a child refusing to go to Time Out. Diane shows them 2 of the IY vignettes, one of a boy back talking to his father and refusing to go to Time Out and another of a girl refusing to turn off the computer. The group seems completely engaged in watching the video even though it was in English. Diane pauses the vignette frequently for translation and to explore the women's ideas of how to handle this disrespectful behavior. They practice the strategy of adding on time and warning about privilege removal and consequences and seem to love these role-play practices. They also seem to understand the difference between punishment and effective discipline and the value of a proactive approach. There is much laughter, sharing and replay of how to respond to misbehavior. Diane and Suzanne help them talk about how to stay calm, be patient and avoid attention to misbehavior and emphasize the importance of returning to the base of the parenting pyramid. I am so impressed with these parents' understanding of the theory behind these methods especially when they began to talk about how important it was that they keep trying to build strong relationships with these children who had previously experienced trauma, abandonment and neglect. The foster parents seem relaxed with each other and proud of their successes using the IY principles. The 3 group leaders are collaborative, caring, enthusiastic and continually prompt the parents' problem solving ability by testing their understanding of which parenting tools are best to use for particular situations. I learn that this group had been meeting together for 2 hours weekly for 3 years and had recently increased their meetings to twice a week! They talk about not wanting the group to end ~ and it is clear they are clearly a support group for each other. I can't imagine the stress involved in caring for 10 children with special needs alone ~ this support seems more than essential.

The second day John goes with me to the school and is given a tour of Bethlehem while I met the 2nd group who call themselves the *Butterflies*. They consist of 5 parents who have children in the Holy Child School.



Two mothers in "Butterfly" group

Three of the women are Palestinian; one a Bedouin and one a woman previously from Texas who had married a Palestinian man. They have been meeting for 18 months. On this day they began by discussing their experience using the "Ignore" parenting strategy. Four of the women tell stories of their successes and seem delighted and proud to share how they have used this parenting tool. One woman says her children are argumentative with each other and she finds this difficult to ignore. This results in a role play practice where the mother practices the ignore and distract strategy, an idea she has learned from one of the other mother's stories of her successful ignore experience. In this practice I am her angel whispering in her ear positive self-talk while Hanni and Diane argue with each other. Afterwards the mother says she feels confident enough to try this at home. These parents attend regularly and rarely miss a session and are clearly supportive to each other. They have moved through the program material faster than the first group and will likely finish in this 2nd year. One mother talks about wanting to train other day care providers in these ideas. Diane tells me that other parents in the community who have heard about the parenting program have been requesting to participate. It seems there may be some potential future local group leaders who will emerge from this group ~ that is exciting in terms of future sustainability. Watching this group was an amazing experience, the parents seemed to have mastered the basic principles of behavior management and relationship building and were praising each other's efforts. The group leaders clearly are doing



Butterfly Group Practice

incredible work.

On the 2nd day I also got to see the dinosaur ceremony where the children who have completed their dinosaur homework get their Triceratops badges for completing the Triceratops feeling unit. They are excited to receive these awards and Dina Dinosaur and I have the special privilege of leading them in a feeling song at the end of the ceremony. Of course I wish I (or Dina) could speak Arabic. This is clearly one of the highlights of my life to see these children tell me about feeling proud, happy, excited as well as frustrated and angry at times. Afterwards the teacher and staff prepare a lunch for John and me. The salad comes from the school garden that the children help tend and we have a delicious chicken with rice, coffee and fruit dessert. Yes I must be in heaven ~ not believing what I am seeing and experiencing. This school has incredible teamwork bridging the connections between home, school and community and I wish I could come back here to work with them. Not only that but this is the story of what one charismatic person ~ that is, Diane ~ has been able to accomplish by partnering with a small group of committed professionals and parents to sow the seeds of hope for future peace.



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Incredible Years
1411 8th Avenue West
Seattle, Washington 98119
US

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