



Strengthening Neighbourhoods in the West Bank

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: "It was the best training I ever had. I learned a lot, such as techniques of communication and decision making," said Samire Musaimi, a 26-year-old living in Balata Refugee Camp. Samire, an Arabic language teacher, took part in Austcare's leadership training for young women. She is already sharing the skills and knowledge she gained.

The Occupied Palestinian Territories are home to the world's largest and longest displaced refugee population. Ongoing conflict, which has worsened in recent years, has meant that groups of people who have been uprooted since as early as 1947 have no realistic hope of returning

home, or even of establishing new homes that will provide safety and ensure their most basic needs are met.

In Nablus, in the Northern West Bank, with significant support from the Australian Government Aid Agency, AusAID, Austcare has established a program to reduce vulnerability to poverty and increase self-reliance, particularly among women and young people. As part of this program we have established seven community centres, called 'Neighbourhood Corners' in refugee camps and nearby villages.

In the Neighbourhood Corners, courses including vocational training, 'start your own business,' marketing and

networking, after-school tutoring and youth leadership training have been run by Austcare and The Bisan Center for Research and Development.

In Askar Refugee Camp, Malek Alsarfi took part in leadership training for young men. Malek has a law degree but has not been able to find a job. He enjoyed the diversity of the training and the group discussions.

For Malek, a key benefit of the course was the new contacts he made. "We were able to make friends and build new relationships, and ongoing coordination with other institutions will enable participation in many future activities."

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Austcare's Middle East Representative Nichola Krey finds the children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories joyful and friendly, despite the harsh reality of the situation in which they live.



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The current environment of occupation and restricted movement due to an unresolved political situation has created high unemployment among men who can no longer get to work, and the inability to pay civil servants has led to

a further increase in poverty. This has caused a shift in gender roles in some villages. In a culture where women do not traditionally take paid employment outside the home, they are now seeking jobs.



Following the small business training that was offered to women, Austcare has provided 136 women with micro-credit loans to establish their own businesses. They have established fruit and vegetable stores, livestock projects and convenience stores supplying everyday items such as shampoo and soap which are difficult to obtain in many areas.

Austcare's Middle East Representative, Nichola Krey said that, "Women own many of the businesses and often whole families are involved in running them. In many cases, their businesses are



Micro-credit loans have enabled women to establish businesses including small-scale agricultural businesses and fruit and vegetable stalls.

the only source of income for the family and it's great to see that they're sharing both the responsibility and the workload."

As part of the program, Austcare and Bisan have been working to strengthen the capabilities of local organisations, so the communities will continue to benefit from the Neighbourhood Corners after Austcare's involvement concludes.

Protecting the vulnerable in the world's newest nation

EAST TIMOR: Olivia Wellesley-Cole, an Austcare Protection Officer, has been in Dili since January this year, working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Following the conflict in Timor-Leste last year and ongoing instability, tens of thousands of people fled their homes. They sought refuge in schools, religious institutions and government facilities which became makeshift camps for displaced people.

Today, many people are still living in the camps or are staying with their relatives in nearby districts. "The violence continues on Dili streets," Olivia reported. "Fighting between

gangs armed with darts and other locally-made weapons occurs almost daily and houses are being torched. In recent months there was an upsurge in people fleeing this violence and becoming newly displaced," she said. This created a challenge for maintaining security within the camps.

As part of her duties with UNHCR, Olivia has helped educate UN Police, including Australians. She has helped them to better understand the rights of internally displaced people – for example, the right to vote in the recent election, even if they are still living in the camps – and the need to support and facilitate their safe return home.



UN Police Officers during Olivia's training session.

"As an Austcare Protection Officer, I feel privileged to have been involved in this training and particularly, to be working with Australian police officers. This demonstrates the commitment Australia is making to its close neighbour Timor-Leste as it navigates the sometimes rocky post-conflict phase of nation-building," Olivia said.

Living in Limbo: Protracted Refugee and IDP situations

Currently, there are more than 6 million refugees living in 33 protracted situations. These figures exclude Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and do not account for the growing number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in protracted situations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines protracted refugee situations as populations of “25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years.”

The statistics are shocking, yet they have failed to attract the attention of the world’s media. There is little interest in the growing number of refugees and IDPs who are spending large amounts of their lives in displaced situations. Beneath the statistics lie the realities of living in protracted situations. Lives are put on hold with families unable to plan for their future.

Lives are shattered.

The consequences of having so many human beings in protracted situations increases threats to security and basic human rights.

Exacerbating the problem is the extreme poverty that already exists in so many of the countries hosting refugees. They are unable to sustain the increased population.

In order for the international community to identify practical solutions to protracted refugee and IDP situations, we need to better understand the nature of the problem. While a long-term solution can not rest in the hands of humanitarian agencies alone, we can improve the lives of

refugees in the short-term and work towards solutions.

64% of the world’s refugees are in protracted situations.

Austcare, in partnership with Griffith University, is working on a three-year applied research project entitled *A Place to Call Home*, which aims to make a practical contribution to the understanding of protracted refugee and IDP situations, and make recommendations for policy responses.

Austcare’s Research Officer, Anita Knudsen, has recently returned from Sri Lanka, where the team investigated conflict and displacement issues in the

East of Sri Lanka. According to Anita, “The current atmosphere in Sri Lanka is one of escalating fear. Men are afraid to go out at night. Children are afraid to go to school.”

“Our being there just to hear about their problems helps us better understand their situations and design our projects.”

Thank you to everyone who generously gave to our recent winter appeal. Your gift will help people like the refugees in these stories.



Children in a transit camp in Trincomalee District, Sri Lanka.

Large scale protracted situations happening today

• Bhutanese refugees in Nepal

Over 103,000 Bhutanese refugees have been living in refugee camps in Nepal since 1989.

• Burmese refugees in Thailand

Thailand has the largest protracted refugee situation in East Asia. Since the first camps were established in 1984 it has hosted a steadily growing displaced population. In late 2006 the registered population comprised of more than 165,000 people living in 13 main camps along the border.

• Conflict-induced Internally Displaced People in Sri Lanka

Civil war that has been fought for more than two decades has resulted in massive displacement. More than 300,000 people are displaced within Sri Lanka.



A transition to a better life



BRAVVE's staff feels confident that the training they have received from Austcare has placed them well to continue their programs in Nepal.

NEPAL: For the past ten years, Austcare has been working with the local partner organisation, Bhutanese Refugees Aiding Victims of Violence (BRAVVE), to help the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

As the project nears completion, Austcare is ensuring BRAVVE's staff have the skills and knowledge to continue its work independently.

During the ten year partnership, the organisation has been through a transition, becoming more self-sufficient thanks to the training and support provided by Austcare. Krishna Kharka, a Project Coordinator at BRAVVE, says that with Austcare's training, BRAVVE has been able to "develop its constitution, financial guidelines, and administrative regulations. We have the capacity to prepare proposals, and to monitor and evaluate our training activities. BRAVVE is now functioning at the level of other NGOs."

BRAVVE was established by Bhutanese refugees who, or whose family members, had undergone physical or mental abuse

by the Royal Government of Bhutan. Prior to BRAVVE's inception, there was no system of counselling for these people.

Now a major focus of the organisation is, according to Krishna, "to provide meaningful engagement and the knowledge that there are alternatives for earning an income apart from what we have traditionally done."

Hom Nath Subedi, who is employed as BRAVVE's caretaker, explains that the majority of Bhutanese people depend on agriculture. While most of the refugees living in the camps in Nepal were self-reliant in Bhutan, they had had few chances to develop other practical skills with which they could earn a living.

Hom received training by BRAVVE before being employed and says, "As a former cow herder, I did not have any alternative source to clothe myself and my family. This opportunity was created by BRAVVE and Austcare."

Uma Devi Timsina is 27 years old and works as an accountant for BRAVVE. She is currently studying for a second degree, and is grateful to have a meaningful job that allows her to make use of her education. She feels that

Austcare's involvement has "made great differences to the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, as most of our beneficiaries are female and are able to use the skills they have learnt."

BRAVVE now has an increased organisational capacity, but because it is a refugee organisation, gaining registration or any kind of legal status has so far proved impossible. This restricts the ability to fund-raise and will be one of the biggest challenges for the organisation over the next few years.

However, the employees feel positive about their ability to continue to increase the capabilities of BRAVVE and improve the quality of programs implemented.

Thank you to all of our donors for their support of this program.



Bhutanese refugees in Beldangi Camp, Nepal.

From the field

Rabea Mohammad Ahmad Hamyad



Rabea says "Austcare's training course helped us make a lot of our dreams come true."

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES:

Rabea is one of hundreds of Palestinian children who has spent time in an Israeli prison. Now 21, she was imprisoned from the age of 15 to 20 after attacking an Israeli soldier.

Rabea participated in Austcare's youth leadership training two months after she was released. This program aims to encourage young people to become involved in community affairs, and to increase their confidence and self-reliance.

How has the unresolved political situation affected you?

The limitations imposed by the Israeli occupation have had a huge impact on day-to-day life in Palestine. Children cannot move from place to place freely and are afraid of the fully armed soldiers in their streets, so they stay indoors. As a teenager growing up in this environment, I became so angry about the injustice and oppression of my people, and especially the killing of children by the Israeli occupation.

The Israeli bullets that killed Eman Hijjo – a six month old infant

– inflamed rage within me. At 15, not much more than a child myself, I expressed my anger by trying to stab a soldier with a kitchen knife. I was sentenced to 5 years in prison – whilst the killing of children continued.

This made me determined to work with children to ease the fear and limitations imposed upon them by the occupation. Austcare's training course was an opportunity for me to develop myself and reinforce my self-confidence to be

able to achieve my goals. I have now started studying social work at college to become better qualified to achieve my goal in life to help people, especially children, under these difficult circumstances.

How did you benefit from the training course?

Communications training has had a really big impact on how I can deal with others. After the isolation and psychological and physical suffering I had experienced in an Israeli prison, this was an opportunity for me to merge back into society.

How do you think the participants benefited from the training course?

Austcare's training course helped us make a lot of our dreams come true, by giving us the courage and determination to achieve them.

We have acquired the confidence to change from the inside and we have begun to have a positive influence on the women we deal with, especially the young ones. We became confident we can change negative things into positive things and that we should rely on ourselves to make the change.

The hard facts about refugees and displaced children

- The UN estimates that the number of children uprooted from their homes (either as IDPs or refugees) may be as high as 25 million. This is more than the population of Australia.
- The majority of people flee their homes because of war or conflict. It is estimated that more than two million children have been killed in conflict in the last decade. A further six million are believed to have been wounded and one million orphaned.
- In many refugee camps, there are few schools for children beyond primary school. Where there is access to secondary education, there are not enough places to meet demand. Without education, children are not able to build the foundations for their future.

Thank you



Performers and volunteers launch Landmine Action Week at Martin Place.

Austcare's *Playing Fields Not Minefields* 2007 campaign was a great success, with enough money raised to ensure that over 5,000 square metres of land in a place such as Cambodia are clear of landmines. A special thanks goes to major sponsors Café Express, Darrell Lea Chocolates, The Westin, Tip Top Bakeries, and ANZ; performers Khemera Antkor Dance Troup, The Oscar Jiminez Quartet and Brisas Del Peru; and our many volunteers. For more photos and to see a full list of sponsors, please visit www.austcare.org.au

Austcare is pleased to announce that new Mine Action programs will begin in Afghanistan and Lebanon this year.

World Refugee Day – June 20

World Refugee Day takes place on Wednesday, June 20. This year, help your friends recognise how fortunate their lives are, at the same time as raising money for people less fortunate. You can do this by hosting a boiled rice banquet – serve people boiled rice, highlighting the poor food choices available to refugees, and ask them to donate \$10 to Austcare. For further information, visit www.austcare.org.au, or contact Nadine Torney on 02 9565 9153 or at ntorney@austcare.org.au. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

**Austcare's
new website
has been
launched! Visit
austcare.org.au
today.**

OUR MISSION

To assist refugees overseas, displaced people, returnees and those affected by landmines to rebuild their lives and to reduce poverty through the expert delivery of development programs in partnership with local communities and other agencies.



As a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct, Austcare is committed to high standards in financial reporting, management and ethical practice. Further information on the Code is available at: www.acfid.asn.au

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