

When wounds are healed

The latest round of conflict in Gaza ended on May 21, but the deep wounds the violence opened remain ever fresh.

This was the case for 12-year-old, Dalal* from Gaza, whose psychological condition deteriorated following the recent onslaught on the enclave and lowered her educational level to unprecedented levels.

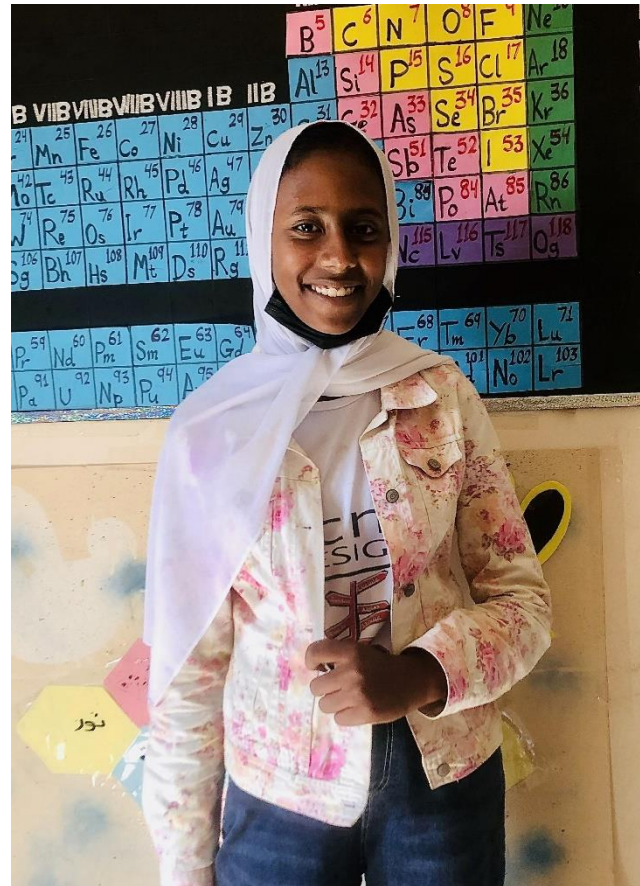
"Dalal barely ate, if at all, during the war. She withdrew into herself and was in a state of extreme panic and became afraid of loud sounds. After the war ended, Dalal always covered her ears with her hands for fear of hearing any sounds similar to the sound of bombing and warplanes, which planted in her mind the fear of death and destruction," said Dalal's mother, Rouhia.

The war was not the only thing keeping Dalal away from school. Like the rest of the world, Covid-19 hit the Gaza Strip badly and forced authorities to start using online learning. For Gazans, distance or online learning cannot be easily implemented because of frequent electricity cuts and lack of technological spread. Dalal's academic level declined and her performance worsened when she stopped attending school. The 12-year-old lives in a family whose financial situation is dire, and could never follow up on her lessons in a house where the entire family shares one phone.

Dalal was nominated by her school to register in a program implemented by Save the Children and Tamer Institute, and funded by the EU Humanitarian Aid that provides children like Dalal with remedial education courses and MHPSS support. Both Dalal and her mother were thrilled as it meant they once again, had a chance to pick up where she left off before the latest trauma. Dalal says she truly desires to become a doctor to treat the victims of the war and to save lives in a place as devastated as Gaza. "I want to become a doctor when I grow up. Through this profession, I will fulfill my dream of helping Palestinian children who are subjected to the heavy bombardment every second of the day", says Dalal.

Stories start at a word and end at another.

"I love writing and reading, I love poetry and literature, and I have a strong desire to write. I will write about all the unheard voices in Palestine, and talk about all the oppression I and other children from my age are exposed to. I will convey our daily suffering with the siege, the deteriorating living conditions, and the poor infrastructure because of which I cannot go to school on rainy days. I once wrote a story about the violations that took place in Sheikh Jarrah and about the displacement of its people. The story won the admiration of my family, my teachers at school, and my teachers at the centre, which increased my self-confidence and encouraged me to write more." Said Dalal.





Dalal's facilitator says she is a good example of how trauma can destroy the lives of children if not treated properly. She added however, that Dalal has made noticeably improvements after a few months in the program.

"When Dalal was chosen for for this project, she was very shy and her mental health was deteriorating because of the feeling of helplessness she had after seeing her academic performance steadily decline, and the fear of instability the war left in her. We worked on raising her educational level, and we wanted to rebuild peace in her, as she was very irritable and hated participating in classes because her colleagues made fun of her stuttering" the facilitator says.

Dalal herself is aware of how much she changed after the program and says she almost hated the person she was before then. "When I came to the institution, they all helped me realize things can change. I decided to start a new page in my life, and the program helped me forget the horrors of war. I began to feel a real change in myself, in my performance at school, and my perspective on life in general; I started to feel there is hope for a better future."

War destroys everything:

When Dalal and others joined the program in April 2021, the facilitators saw positive changes in the psychological and educational level of the students. But then once the escalation started on May 10th, it caused a severe regression for all of the students in a blink of an eye. Dalal's facilitators said they had to start over from scratch which was a significant challenge for them, but Dalal's willingness to learn and improve was a key reason for why the program was a success.

By learning we transcend:

Dalal expressed her strong desire to complete her education, saying: "every child in Gaza must hold on to their dreams and ambitions, and strive to achieve them through education, and their families must help them too".

Gaza's children live under challenging and tough conditions, which often require a remarkable effort to help children overcome the trauma and access to their full right to education. Dalal, her family, and her facilitators believe she has made significant progress, and they will continue to work together until all her dreams are fulfilled.

Save the Children Support:

Save the Children implemented a 16-month project aimed at reducing barriers to quality and protective education services for at risk and out of school girls and boys in the Gaza Strip. The project focused on enhancing children's access and retention to quality and safe education opportunities through remedial education, education material support combined with referral pathways to service providers, to children



and families exhibiting extreme vulnerabilities. This project was implemented in partnership with Tamer Institute for Community Education and Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, with funding from the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid.