

## Lebanon: Turning Struggles into Resilience

Wiebke Eden-Fleig



At Just.Childhood, storytelling plays a vital role in our work. At these difficult times it serves as a tool, which allows us to share the voices and experiences of those most affected by the current conflict. We want to give you a glimpse into the lives of some of our colleagues who have faced unimaginable challenges yet continue to serve children and families amidst the ongoing violence.

One of Just.Childhood's emergency pedagogues, Inass, had never imagined that such an event would happen to them. After being initially displaced due to the bombing in Dahye, she had sought safety for her children and eventually returned to their normal daily lives. However, one day, while she was heading home from work, the strikes began again. What normally took 15 minutes by car turned into a two-hour journey filled with chaos and destruction. She recalled praying only to reach her children, as the fear had been overwhelming, but the thought of her kids had kept her from breaking down.

When she finally arrived home, she held her children tightly and cried. Although she was relieved to be with them, the trauma lingered. They had relocated to what seemed like a safer area, but being displaced for a second time had left her unable to sleep, haunted by the sounds of sirens and explosions.

The air is filled with the terrifying buzz of drones and the deafening roar of warplanes, as Israeli attacks on Lebanon have left devastation in their wake. Our lively, safe center in Sabra hosting our kindergarten, the emergency pedagogical activities and the educational sessions as part of the Skateboarding program has not been damaged yet. However, the Palestinians Camps such as Sabra and Shatila, once home to 20,000 people packed into just a square kilometer, have become one of the epicenters of suffering in Lebanon.

The recent escalation of violence has caused untold damage, killing thousands and displacing over a million people, with Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians all caught in the crossfire. Our team at Just.Childhood has been at the forefront of this humanitarian crisis, both as caregivers and as individuals personally affected by the war.

Our second center in Karantina had been a place of safety and healing for mostly Lebanese and Syrian children for the past two years. Now, in an unexpected turn, it has also become a refuge for our staff, many of whom have found themselves displaced, grappling with the same fear and uncertainty that the children we serve are enduring.

Zeina, our music therapists working in the Emergency Pedagogy Program, captured this sentiment when she reflected on her experience: *"For the past two years, I've worked at our center, filling every corner with love and safety for the children. Now, that same center has become my refuge. All the love I had poured out for the children came back to hold me when I needed it most."* Despite the emotional storm inside her, Zeina found solace in the very place she had built to protect others, and she now dreams of returning to the children with a deeper empathy for their experiences.

One of the kindergarten educators, Zakiya, similarly found strength in the face of overwhelming fear. *"When my son asked if the Israelis had gone to refuel their planes so they could return to bomb us again, something inside me shifted,"* she shared. *"His fear became my strength. I had to find the courage to guide him through this nightmare, to make him feel safe despite the chaos around us."* For Zakiya, this moment became a turning point, one that solidified her determination to stay strong, not just for her own family, but for the children in our programs who would one day need her to help them find hope again.

The war has spared no one, with Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities all suffering its effects. In the midst of this tragedy, Just.Childhood wants to be a lifeline for those who feel lost and forgotten. Maha, another educator within the Emergency Pedagogy Program, had been eagerly preparing to help the displaced, not realizing that she herself would soon be one of them. *"I was excited to start the plan we had created to help the displaced, but now I am the one who has been displaced. My children collapse in fear at the sound of strikes, and I am terrified for them. I think constantly about the children in Sabra and Karantina. Are they safe? Are they scared?"* The burden of fear is shared by everyone, no matter where they are from.

Our team's strength lies in their ability to turn their own struggles into resilience and empathy for others. Our kindergarten educator Zahia, who now finds herself caring for her small daughter during this war, reflected on the deep psychological impact this conflict has had. *"I've lived*

*through wars before, but this time I'm responsible for my daughter, who doesn't feel safe unless I'm beside her. We hear the explosions, see the smoke, and inhale the toxins. Yet the center in Karantina, which has given me shelter, offers some safety in this chaotic world."*

As the war drags on, our colleagues' thoughts are never far from the children they care for. Samah, a kindergarten educator who has been with Just.Childhood since its inception, expressed the fear and anxiety that has become a constant companion: *"Every sound outside—cars, footsteps—feels like a bomb ready to explode. I check on my son constantly. My family visits to support me, but the fear is always there. I wonder if I will be here to tell the story of this war or if I will just become a memory."*

The crisis in Lebanon is not confined to one group or one area. It touches the lives of Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians alike. Lebanon has long been a fragile home for more than a million Syrian refugees, who are now displaced once again, alongside Palestinians who have lived in refugee camps for generations. In this mix of communities, Just.Childhood has played a crucial role in fostering unity, inclusion, and resilience. Despite the fear and chaos, our staff continue to hold the space for healing, even as they themselves navigate the same traumatic experiences as the children they serve.

As Maha so poignantly put it: *"We who provide psychosocial support now find ourselves in need of it."* Yet, even in the face of their own fear and displacement, our team remains committed to the children and families they support. Their unwavering dedication shows the true spirit of Just.Childhood—an organization built on love, compassion, and resilience.

We know that rebuilding will not just involve brick and mortar, but healing hearts and souls. We remain hopeful and determined, ready to return to our work with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing that the community we've built will carry us through this crisis. To our partners, supporters, and friends, your solidarity during these times is invaluable. Together, we can continue to provide safe havens for the children and families of Lebanon, Syrian refugees, and Palestinian communities alike.



About [Just. Childhood](#) - We Colour our Lives with Education

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*Just.Childhood was founded to ease the often-difficult start to their education for Palestinian and Syrian refugee children and children from socially disadvantaged families in Lebanon. Just.Childhood's first project is the Waldorf Early Childhood Education based Bait al-Shams in the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila in Beirut/Lebanon. The organisation has a German and a Lebanese branch. The main tasks of the German NGO are to find sponsors in Germany and to issue donation receipts for European supporters. The Lebanese NGO is responsible for the operation of the Bait al-Shams kindergarten.*



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*The founder, Wiebke Eden-Fleig, has a degree in political science and Middle Eastern studies and has worked for several years as a programme coordinator in a German foundation in Beirut. The founding members of both NGOs are highly qualified and motivated former colleagues and education experts who are committed to realising the project in order to offer children and their parents a better future.*

*If you would like to make a donation to Just.Childhood, please visit the IASWECE website page <https://iaswece.org/how-you-can-help/>*