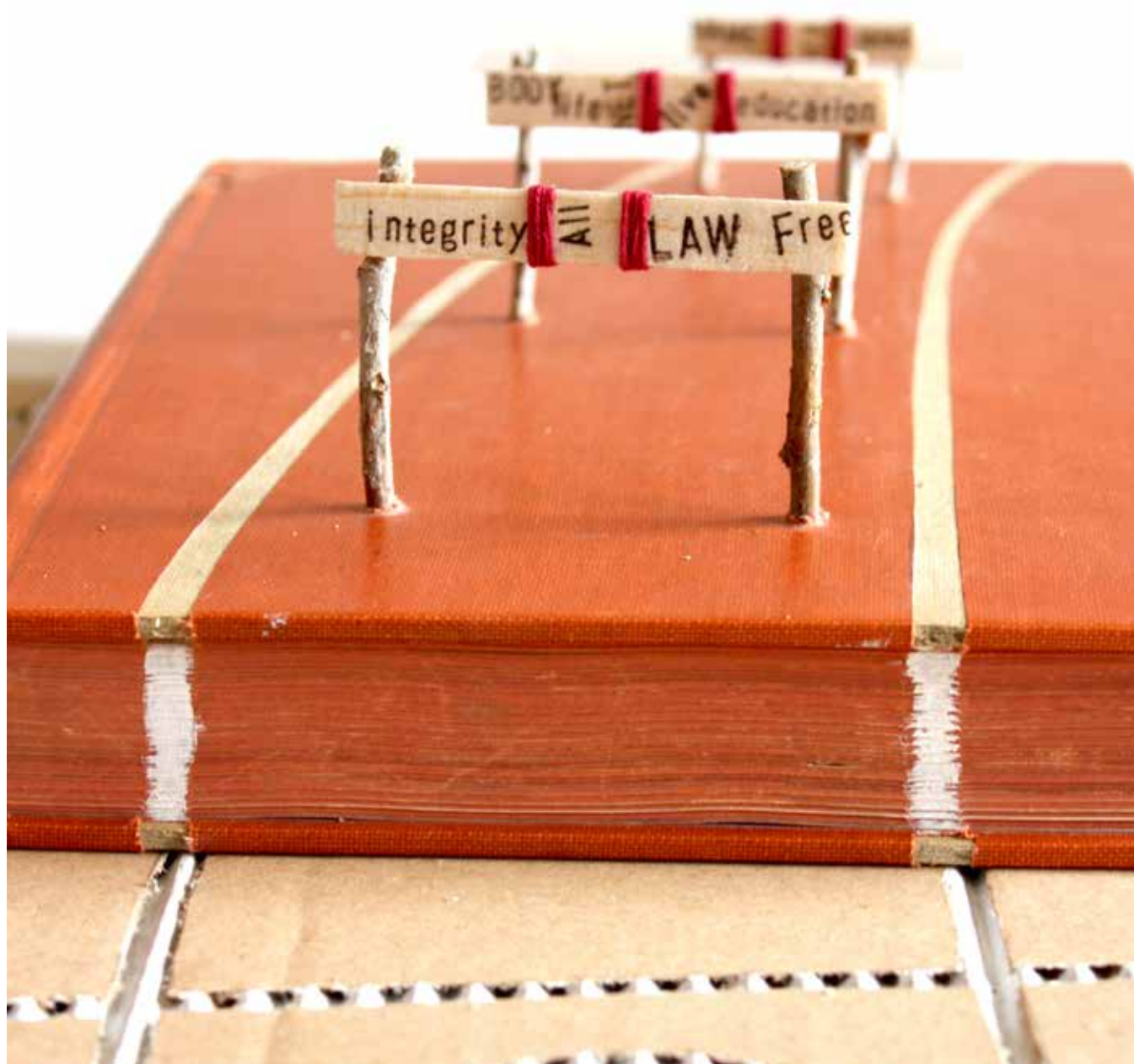


# CASE STUDY: PROVIDING LEGAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT TO REFUGEE CHILDREN IN BETHLEHEM



### **Acknowledgements**

CRIN would like to thank Shorug for their support in producing this case study.

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Shorug Organisation (Shorug) was founded in 2012 in Dheisheh Refugee Camp and is run by and for refugees. Shorug's vision, mission and objectives and programmes are geared towards political, social, cultural and economic prosperity and a dignified life for all refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the diaspora. We work with refugees in shaping a just solution and a better future for themselves and their children.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

In September 2014, Shoruiq Organisation, with the support of CRIN, opened a legal clinic in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in the Bethlehem Governorate of the West Bank. The clinic aims to provide comprehensive support to refugee children involved in the criminal justice system of the Palestinian Authority, from legal advice and representation in police stations and court rooms, to counselling and follow-up in schools and in the community.

Initially, discussion focused on providing these services to children in conflict with the law, but as the development of the project progressed, three distinct groups of clients emerged:

- Children accused of a criminal offence and in need of legal advice or representation;
- Children complaining that they had been the victim of a rights violation in connection with the criminal justice system;
- Children who had been the victim or witness of a criminal offence and in need of information, advice or support in dealing with the criminal process.

At the outset of the project, CRIN and Shoruiq decided to document the pilot phase and to publish the results. By frankly recording the process of establishing the clinic, the problems faced and the way they were overcome, we hope to help other organisations seeking to launch legal clinic projects to protect and promote children's rights.

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## PART II

# SETTING UP THE CLINIC

## 1. Background

Shorug was established in 2012 in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem and works with children through a range of arts, educational, training and legal programmes. In 2013, in response to a clear need among children living in the camp, Shorug began exploring, whether it would be able to extend its work to support children in conflict with the law. Alongside CRIN, the organisation arranged informal meetings with local professionals to talk through the idea and gauge interest and support. The response was overwhelmingly positive, so Shorug undertook a needs assessment study with CRIN to develop the evidence necessary to plan the project.<sup>1</sup>

The research had a broad focus, to try to gain a full picture of how refugee children experience the criminal justice system, focusing on five main questions:

1. Is the right of refugee children to legal assistance respected in the Bethlehem Governorate?
2. What is the perspective of refugee children in conflict with the law with regard to the services provided to them?
3. What are the legal needs of refugee children in conflict with the law in Bethlehem Governorate?
4. What psychological, social and educational services are provided to refugee children in conflict with the law? How are these services evaluated?
5. Are any rehabilitation programmes operating for refugee children in conflict with the law? If so, how effective are they? How do the children themselves experience these programmes?

The outcome of the study was clear: there was a void in the provision of legal, social and psychological services available to refugee children in conflict with the law in Bethlehem. Inadequate legislation existed to protect the rights of children combined with insufficient services and a shortage of skilled professionals. In particular, there was a marked shortage in services for children under the Palestinian Authority's justice system. Several NGOs have established programmes to provide legal assistance to children in conflict with the Israeli military justice system but there was a disproportionate shortage of services available to children in the Palestinian justice system.

It also became clear during the research that there was a need to link legal services for children with social, psychological and rehabilitative services. The study repeatedly found poor communication and coordination between the various organisations, agencies and professionals that work with children in conflict with the law, but particularly for refugee children for whom service delivery is even more complicated than for the general public. In response to this, it was clear that any programme aiming to effectively address the problems refugee children experience in the justice system would have to be able to provide not only legal assistance, but follow-up with the various other bodies that come into contact - or should come into contact - with these children. It was this finding that convinced Shorug of the need to include a social worker within the clinic alongside legal staff.

### Life in the camps

The refugee camps in Bethlehem are cramped. Families live in close proximity with limited space outside for children to play. Schools too are oversubscribed, with as many as 40 to 50 children in a class and for many families finances are extremely limited. These are the conditions that can easily lead children into conflict with the authorities, whether for the group of children who came to the clinic accused of criminal damage after playing with a football near someone's car or the children who drawn into criminal activity through boredom. These children's legal needs are closely tied to the social circumstances they experience.

## 2. From research to reality

The needs assessment study made it clear that what Shorug had noticed anecdotally was a systematic reality. The rights of refugee children were being ignored in the Palestinian justice system and children and their families were being forced to navigate the system without the support they needed. But as well as clarifying the needs of children and enabling Shorug to plan its programmes accordingly, the study provided the evidence necessary to establish the organisation's credentials and to approach potential funders. Shorug had worked with pro-bono lawyers in the past on ad-hoc work, but this would be the first time that it would be launching a project to systematically provide legal services to children in conflict with the law.

In many respects, Shorug benefited from good timing in trying to secure funding for the project. The United

<sup>1</sup> The needs assessment study was later edited and redrafted into the joint CRIN and Shorug report, Refugee children in conflict with the law in Bethlehem, February 2015. Available in English at [www.crin.org/node/41079](http://www.crin.org/node/41079) and Arabic at [www.crin.org/41081](http://www.crin.org/41081).

Nations Development Programme has made a substantial commitment to supporting the development of rule of law and access to justice projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including promoting free legal services to children in the justice system.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the funding has targeted community based organisations, making it a particularly good fit for the kind of legal clinic Shorug was trying to establish. After the completion of the formal funding application process, UNDP agreed to fund the clinic for the initial six-month period covered by this case study.

It took around a year to progress from informal discussions about the possibility of a project to provide legal services to children to the establishment of the clinic and six months from the start of the needs assessment study to the clinic opening its doors.

### 3. Policy

Shorug already had in place the kinds of child protection policies that any organisation needs when it works directly with children, but in setting up a legal clinic for children it was important to make sure there were further formal arrangements in place to protect the children who came into contact with the clinic.

It was a fundamental aim of the clinic that its work should be based on children's rights, both in terms of its aims and the way it operated. This meant that in all its actions, the clinic aimed to place the best interests of the child at the heart of its work and to make sure that the child understood and was able to participate in what was happening as well as striving for outcomes that treated the child in a way that meets human rights standards.

As part of this policy, the clinic also adopted the motto that "we will never turn away a child in need". Obviously cases will arise where the staff are not able to help a child themselves - perhaps because of a conflict of interests, because too many cases are underway or because of a lack of expertise - but for such situations, the clinic has developed relationships with other organisations and lawyers so that the clinic would be able to refer children to receive services elsewhere or act as an intermediary to secure the child the services that he or she needs.

Absolutely vital among the more detailed policies was the issue of confidentiality. International human rights and professional standards could not be clearer on the importance of confidentiality and privacy for children in conflict with the law, to avoid stigma, promote children's rehabilitation and to respect the desires of children for privacy as an end in itself.

To this end, the clinic adopted some very straightforward rules and procedures to protect the privacy of its clients. The general principle running through the clinic's privacy policy is that staff should only have access to personal information about clients insofar as it is necessary to carry out their work and benefits the child. All electronic information is password protected, physical records are kept in locked filing cabinets in a locked office and all legally privileged information is retained solely by the clinic's lawyer. The last point is particularly important, as while all information held by the lawyer is protected by legal privilege, and so cannot be given as evidence without the consent of the accused, members of staff who are not lawyers are not protected by this guarantee and so could theoretically be required to give evidence about what they knew about an alleged offence. This situation would create a serious conflict of interests for staff who would want to maintain confidentiality for the child but could be under a legal obligation to give evidence and could face penalties if they refused to do so.

The close nature of the community was undeniably a problem for the clinic with regards to protecting privacy. The clinic is based within the offices of Shorug, which runs various programmes and classes during the day and is often busy with local people. Though clinic staff would never breach their confidentiality rules, there is a high chance that a person visiting the clinic would be recognised by someone present in Shorug's offices. The staff hope that they will be able to set up an office with separate access as it develops to help provide clients with greater privacy.

Dealing with conflicts of interest also arose as a potential concern in the clinic. Dheisheh is a small community and Shorug's legal clinic is the only NGO based in the camp that provides legal services. As such, where an alleged offence takes place in the camp, it is not implausible that both a victim and alleged perpetrator would approach the clinic in relation to that offence. The situation did actually arise during the pilot project, leading the clinic to clarify its policy:

The clinic would only be able to provide legal advice or representation to either a defendant or a complainant. This is a clear and straightforward application of legal professional ethics and so presented no challenge. Where a defendant has

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see UNDP, Supporting Rule of Law and Access to Justice for Palestinian People, available at: [http://www.ps.undp.org/content/papp/en/home/operations/projects/democratic\\_governance/supporting-rule-of-law-and-access-to-justice-for-the-palestinian.html](http://www.ps.undp.org/content/papp/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/supporting-rule-of-law-and-access-to-justice-for-the-palestinian.html).





been accepted as a client, the lawyer would not be able to provide services to the complainant, but would refer the child on for advice elsewhere.

Where both a defendant and victim approached the clinic for legal advice simultaneously (or at least prior to either client being taken on by the lawyer) the clinic would accept the child with the greatest need. In practice, this principle would usually lead to the clinic taking the case of the defendant, as the potential harm caused through inadequate representation of a child accused of an offence is likely to be higher.

However, the appropriate response would have to take into account the specific situations of the children involved and the clinic would always try to ensure that the child received the necessary advice and support elsewhere.

The social worker within the clinic may be able to work with a defendant and complainant in a single case if this were appropriate - taking into account the best interests of the children foremost, the desire for reconciliation between child victims and alleged perpetrators and whether the children were willing for the social worker to do so. Confidentiality would, of course, be of utmost importance.

#### 4. The staff

Upon securing funding for the project, Shoruq hired three new members of staff: a lawyer, a social worker and a secretary. Shoruq also extended the hours of its accountant to provide financial and administrative support for the new project.

**Mahmoud** was recruited to handle the clinic's legal work. He is a qualified lawyer who had previously been employed by a private law firm working on juvenile justice cases in the Bethlehem Governorate. He had also volunteered with Shoruq in the past and was keen to get more involved in working from a children's rights perspective.

**Saida** is the clinic's social worker. She previously worked with a children's NGO and had experience of providing social support to children facing political and social violence.

**Ayat** was hired as a secretary to act as first contact for clients and to support the administrative needs of the project.

**Mohammad** has worked with Shoruq since 2013 and dedicated one day per week throughout the pilot project to maintain accounts and provide financial support as required.

Staff were recruited through an open application procedure and a large number of qualified people applied. A total of 24

applicants were interviewed before the appointments were made.

#### 5. Training the staff

The staff recruited to work in the clinic included a qualified lawyer with experience working with children in the justice system and a social worker specialised in working with children and so staff already came to the project with a solid background in the field. But as part of the ongoing training and development for clinic staff, Shoruq arranged training sessions on children's rights issues. Part of the purpose of these sessions was to situate the work of the clinic within broader developments on children's rights, including international standards, national juvenile justice issues and developing policy and debate on juvenile justice. Sessions involved experienced staff from a range of professional backgrounds, including social work and children's rights advocacy, to bring a range of different perspectives to issues being discussed.

#### 6. Evaluation and monitoring

The clinic was a new development for Shoruq and took the organisation's work in a new direction. With this in mind, the organisation took evaluation and monitoring very seriously from the start.

The way that NGOs collect information about the way they operate has to be responsive to the requirements of funders, and the clinic was no exception. For example, the reporting guidelines required detailed information on the types of case the clinic dealt with, outcomes of cases and specific categorisation of cases, so internal records had to be filed in a way that allowed this information to be easily extracted. Similarly, financial records had to be filed in a way that would satisfy the funder's financial reporting requirements.

Beyond these necessities, though, the clinic was keen to be self critical and learn all it could from the pilot project. This involved a schedule of weekly meetings to discuss progress and problems related to cases, monthly reports from staff on progress and the involvement of experienced staff from other organisations in working out how to resolve difficulties that arose in the planning phase and during the clinic's work. The project also included an independent review at the end of the pilot phase to evaluate the clinic's activities and progress in addition to the reporting requirements of the funder. In some ways this case study is also an opportunity to look back over the pilot period with a critical eye.

It was also important for the clinic to receive honest feedback from the clients of the clinic. The clinic developed an anonymous feedback questionnaire that was routinely given to clients that addressed simple background issues such as how the child came into contact with the clinic and what his or her needs were, to the child's opinion of the services provided and comments or suggestions for improvement. During the pilot project, about half of the clients returned questionnaires providing overwhelmingly positive feedback.

## PART III

# RUNNING THE CLINIC

## 1. Outreach and referral

In September 2014, the clinic recruited staff and opened its doors. Bethlehem is a closely knit community, once the clinic was up and running and children and families had had positive experiences of the clinic, word of mouth spread quickly, but at the moment the clinic started its work it was necessary to build trust with potential clients, but also the various other organisations working with children in the justice system.

The available options to reach potential clients directly are limited, and to a certain extent obvious, but they were also straightforward and effective. The clinic produced a radio advert that ran for a month after the clinic had recruited staff and a T.V. advert on a satellite news station. The clinic also produced leaflets with contact details and information on the services it could provide to be handed out through the clinic itself and other organisations who might be in a position to refer children in need of support. Shoruq Organisation more broadly runs a range of programmes with children in the local community, so staff who came in contact with children or families who expressed a need for support could also give out details of the clinic.

The needs assessment study had mapped community based organisations and through the research process, Shoruq's staff had met with many of the relevant staff, but it was important for the newly recruited staff of the clinic to develop working relationships with these organisations. The clinic needed to establish a two-way referral system: the clinic's social worker needed to be able to refer children for the specialist support of organisations providing rehabilitation and counselling services for children, while the clinic needed to make other organisations aware that it existed and what services it provided so that other organisations could refer clients in need of legal support to the clinic. During the meetings, the social worker met with the person responsible for accepting clients so that, should the need arise to refer a child to that organisation, arrangements could be made directly.

The clinic also joined several organisations to integrate within the community and so that it could get involved with cases at as early a stage as possible, including by joining Dheisheh Camp's Family Protection Unit (FPU) and making contact with the units in Bethlehem's other camps. The FPU is a multidisciplinary group that meets to discuss child protection issues arising in the camp. Joining this group served as a way for the clinic staff to become directly involved in one of the mechanisms already working with children as well as to influence the way these children are treated at an early stage.

### The clinic's first six-months: facts and figures

#### Number of children who received legal services: 35

- 28 children accused of a criminal offence
- 6 children complaining of a violation of their rights
- 1 witness

**Types of case.** The legal work of the clinic has revolved around a relatively small number of offences, namely:

- Theft (39 per cent),
- Damage to property (36 per cent),
- Assault (14 per cent),
- "Threatening general security" (7 per cent) and
- Possession of explosives (4 per cent).

**Ages of the clients:** children who came into contact with the clinic were aged between 9 and 18.

#### Number of children received social or psychological support: 28

- 10 children attended for multiple sessions with the clinic's social worker
- 2 children referred for specialist treatment

**Number of staff:** 4 part time (lawyer, social worker, secretary, accountant).

**Funder:** United Nations Development Programme, "Strengthening the rule of law in the occupied Palestinian territory: Justice and security for the Palestinian people (2014-2017)."

**Client feedback:** the results of the anonymous feedback forms filled in by clients were overwhelmingly positive. All respondents rated the quality of the services they received from the lawyer, social worker and receptionist as "good" or "excellent". All clients agreed or strongly agreed that the clinic was easily accessible and friends and family were by far the most common sources of recommendations to contact the clinic.

As an organisation providing legal services to children, the clinic also needed to develop a working relationship with the relevant government ministries, in particular the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is responsible for providing a range of state services to children, including probation and legal representation. In many respects, the Ministry - particularly the Minister - was an excellent partner and was keen to establish a mechanism to refer clients to the clinic. This arrangement would be by far the most efficient way of reaching children in need of legal support, as law enforcement authorities are required to notify the Ministry when they arrest a child. However, it is sound advice to never underestimate bureaucracy, and as might be expected it took several months to formally implement a formal referral agreement with the Ministry.

## 2. The clients

The majority of the clinic's legal work was accounted for by providing advice and representation to children accused of a criminal offence. This was hardly surprising given the research that preceded the establishment of the clinic. Despite legal rights to counsel and representation under Palestinian law, there is no developed legal aid system and of the 40 children who participated in the needs assessment study, less than half had been represented by a lawyer at trial. Children facing criminal charges without legal assistance are among the most vulnerable in the justice system, so the focus of the clinic in this direction was an obvious choice. The choice was also a direct response to the needs of children in the community: the clinic did not turn clients away and it was children accused of offences that approached the clinic in the largest numbers.

Of the offences that children were accused of, many were to be expected. Theft, assault and damage to property are among the more common offences for which children are arrested in the Bethlehem Governorate and accounted for the majority of the clinic's work.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of legal practice, these cases are relatively routine, but in seeking to work with children in a way that respects their rights, they required more of the clinic's staff. The Palestinian juvenile justice system is not child-friendly: detention is often a first resort, cases can take years to progress from arrest to sentencing and courts rarely consider what is in the best interests of the child. The necessary rules, standards and procedures are not in place to combat these kinds of abuses - there is serious need to institute reforms in this regard - but the clinic was able to take informal steps

within the justice system as it stands to limit abuses of children's rights.

### The Palestinian criminal justice system

The Palestinian population of the West Bank is governed by two systems of law. In areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (known as Area A) Palestinian civilian law is applied. In areas under the exclusive jurisdiction of Israel (known as Area C) Israeli military law is applied. In Area B, Israeli military law extends to security issues, while Palestinian civilian law can also be applied. The clinic's work specifically focuses on children involved in the criminal justice system of the Palestinian Authority.

### Delay, diversion and the rule of law

Chronic delay in the Palestinian justice system cannot be overestimated. In preparing for the project, researchers came across cases that had been ongoing for up to three years and the International Legal Foundation, an organisation representing children in conflict with the law in the West Bank, estimates that its criminal cases last an average of 284 days.<sup>2</sup> This kind of delay can clearly be disastrous for children in the justice system, increasing periods of pretrial detention, disrupting education and causing stress for the child and defeating any positive rehabilitative aims that can come from addressing offending quickly and effectively.

Once a case enters the formal legal system, good case management can limit delays, but the justice system will rarely be rapid. With this in mind, the clinic adopted the approach that where it was possible to mediate a case without the formal justice system being launched, then this would be by far the best option. This kind of diversion has yet to become standard practice in Palestine - there are few formal procedures for law enforcement officials to systematically avoid criminal proceedings - but community justice mechanisms create options when lawyers are able to act quickly. Where the victim and alleged offender are able to reach an agreement outside the formal justice system, it is possible to avoid formal prosecution.

Obviously, informal systems like this could be ripe for misuse, whether through the extortion of alleged offenders or the intimidation of victims, but used well and with appropriate safeguards, they can act as a form of restorative justice, encouraging reconciliation between victims and offenders and avoiding the lengthy and often punitive criminal justice system.

<sup>1</sup> For detailed figures on arrests of children in the Governorate, see CRIN and Shorouq, Refugee children in conflict with the law in Bethlehem, March 2015, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> International Legal Foundation, Juvenile Justice in the West Bank: Analysis and recommendations for reform, 2014, p. 10. Available at: <http://theilf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Juvenile-Justice-in-the-West-Bank.pdf>.

**Case A: swift mediation**

Nine children were playing football in their local neighbourhood. Their ball hit a car, the owner filed a complaint with the police about the incident and the police issued the boys with summonses to attend the police station. The children may have acted thoughtlessly towards someone else's property, but clearly nothing happened here for which detention of any kind would be appropriate. However, when children are brought before the police, detention is standard practice regardless of the severity of the offence and so was a very real possibility.

Fortunately the clinic was alerted to the situation before the children attended the police station and was able to mediate the case before the formal justice system swung into action. The clinic's lawyer was able to rapidly arrange a meeting between the complainant and the families of the children through a community mediation procedure and the owner of the car agreed to withdraw his complaint with the police upon the children signing an agreement not to repeat the offence.

When the formal justice system is already in action, it has to be expected that the criminal process is going to take time and that this time will create problems for the child caught up in it. The clinic did, however, find some success in working within the justice system to try to limit the impact that lengthy criminal cases have on the lives of children involved.

**Case B: scheduling**

A child approached the clinic for legal support. He had already been brought before the court on three occasions and each time was absent from school. Delay in the justice system being as common as it is, it was clear that if hearings progressed in this way, the boy was going to miss much more school time. When the clinic took over the case, it was able to negotiate the scheduling of future hearings outside of school hours to limit the impact on the child's education.

One of the most serious problems that the clinic found was the weakness of the rule of law. In some cases it was not a problem to achieve the judgment that was sought - whether an order for detention to take place in a facility for children or for the release of the child from detention - but ensuring that these orders were actually carried out could be much more difficult.

**Case C: the problem of enforcing judgments**

A child was arrested alongside adults and accused of a security offence. The court decided to detain him pending the trial and in response to the clinic's petition, agreed that this detention should take place in a juvenile justice facility. Intelligence services refused to respect this court order and continued to detain the boy in their own facilities. Two weeks later, the boy was brought before the court again as the security services sought court authorisation to extend the detention period. The court again authorised additional detention on the condition that the boy be detained in a juvenile facility and again this order was not respected. Finally, the court ordered the release of the child on bail pending a full hearing, but the security services who held the child refused to release the child for a further eight days, during which the boy was held in violation of an explicit court order for his release. The child was eventually released in response to persistent and joint advocacy between several children's rights organisations and professionals.

These kinds of cases present a serious challenge, in that there are limited mechanisms in place to hold security forces to account for alleged illegal detention where they refuse to implement a court order. These cases also risk backlash from security services that could endanger the child involved or his or her family. There is no simple answer to this problem. Independent legal assistance, close collaboration and joint advocacy can help to achieve the release of children who are illegally detained, but in the absence of an effective means to hold those responsible to account for the detention, there is no guarantee that the problem won't continue.

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### From service delivery to advocacy

These kinds of simple practices were pragmatic ways of dealing with the shortfalls of the justice system in individual cases, but the clinic staff were very aware that they leave the broader injustices in tact. The clinic faced similar cases time and again that highlighted the need for broader reform and demonstrated the need to extend the clinic's work past service delivery into advocacy.

Persistent violations form a pattern or policy that needs to be challenged as a whole to protect children. For example, the use of detention as a first recourse in cases involving children, the failure to take into account the negative impact on school attendance that cases can have or the use of violence by law enforcement officials. In individual cases, the clinic has always tried to mitigate the damage caused to children by these kinds of practices, but as wider and persistent problems, they are the kinds of issues that might form the basis of future strategic litigation or legal campaigns.

### Matching legal with psychosocial services

The decision to recruit a social worker for the clinic was a direct response to the failure of legal, social, psychological and other rehabilitative services to work together on cases involving children in the justice system. Of the children who received legal services from the clinic, about 80 per cent also took part in at least one session with the social worker, while a little over a third of these children had follow-up sessions of some kind within the clinic. Two children were referred on to specialist services either for educational support or for specialist counselling.

Sessions varied from simply talking through the issue that had brought the child to the clinic, to mediated meetings involving children and their families to address how to deal with a problem that had arisen or art therapy as a way of a child victim of an offence to deal with what he or she had experienced.

### Case D: working with child victims

A boy had been working in a shop when he was robbed at knifepoint by three older teenagers. He came to the clinic for advice about how to deal with the court process. In the Palestinian criminal justice system, victims are able to be represented during the trial process and the clinic's lawyer agreed to represent the boy during the trial. The boy was also suffering from nightmares and symptoms of shock following the crime which had kept him away from school. He agreed to meet with the social worker for an initial meeting to discuss what had happened and whether the clinic could help him beyond the legal advice and representation. The initial meeting developed into a series of individual and group sessions with the clinic's social worker drawing on expressive and art therapy to help him deal with what had happened and to help him develop techniques to deal with the ongoing stress he was experiencing.

The initial plan for the social worker was that she would meet with children who came to the clinic as a way of evaluating what social, educational or psychological services that they might benefit from and referring the children on to specialised organisations. As the project progressed, this aim shifted slightly in response to the needs of the children who came to the clinic. Many of the organisations providing these kinds of services to children are based some distance from the refugee camps and many clients living near the clinic preferred to receive follow-up sessions with the social worker within Dheisheh rather than to be referred elsewhere. Feedback seemed to suggest that this was partly a matter of convenience, but also a matter of building trust with clients.

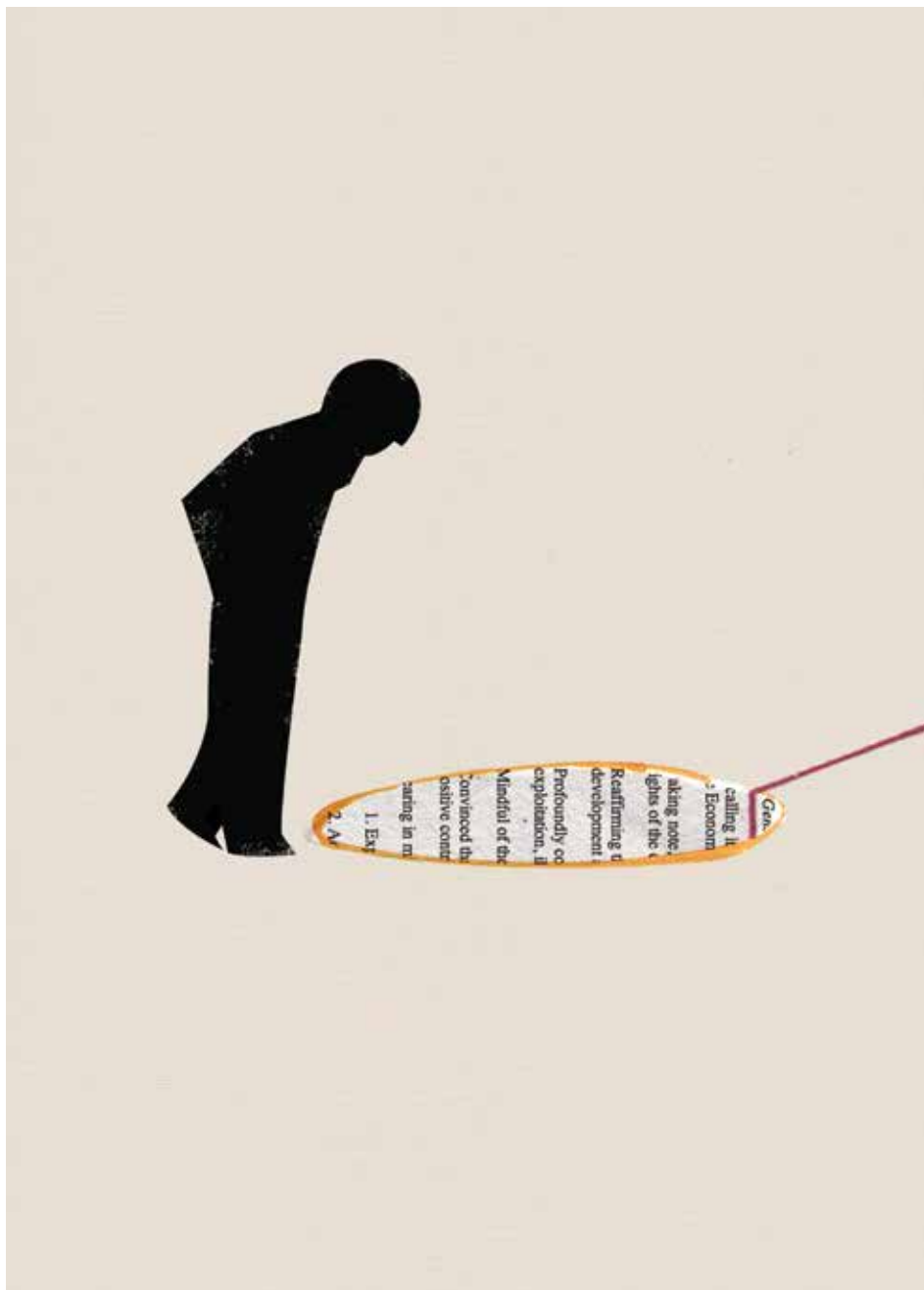
PART IV

THE FUTURE

In March 2015, the clinic's pilot phase of the project came to an end and the clinic began to look at how it might progress. Any project working with children in the Palestinian justice system requires a long-term commitment, in part because the length of the legal process requires a long-term commitment of staff to individual cases but also because it takes time for an organisation to become a trusted part of the community. The first major challenge for the clinic, therefore, is securing medium to long-term funding to ensure that it is able to continue the work it has begun. Demand for services within the legal clinic was higher than expected and there is clearly also scope for the clinic to develop its social work programme.

As became clear in working on cases that came through the clinic, there is also a need to challenge broader children's rights issues that underlie the justice system. The clinic wants to become more involved in challenging persistent violations in the juvenile justice system and advocating for changes that take account of the vulnerabilities of refugee children and improve the situation they face.

The programme is also limited to working within the Bethlehem Governorate, but there are children living in refugee camps across the West Bank that do not have access to specialised services. It is hoped that in the future, all refugee children will be able to access the combined legal and social support they need, whether through this legal clinic, a partner organisation, or an effective legal aid system. The clinic is part of Shorug's broader plan to protect the rights of refugees and so this pilot project is only a beginning.



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