



Asmae - Association Sœur Emmanuelle
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LEBANON: National Symposium on the mistreatment of children

Last May 7 and 8, our partner the AFEL (Lebanese Child Home Association) organized a national conference for childhood professionals on the theme of child abuse. This event allowed the AFEL to share and transmit its knowledge and knowhow, as they are recognized as experts in this domain. Long-time partner of ASMAE – Association soeur Emmanuelle, the organization has been working for more than thirty years in the service of children in difficulty and their families.

Dialogue on the mistreatment of children

Organized in collaboration with the Global Fund for Children, the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and Asmae, the conference had as its theme: “child abuse: between social protection and legal protection.” Three subjects were treated: social policies, legal protection and the methodology of psychosocial and educative intervention with the goals of preventing, detecting, reporting and treating abuse. The *Guide to the Mistreatment of Children, Prevention and Treatment*, produced in close collaboration by the AFEL and Asmae for child protection professionals, was presented on this occasion.



On the platform, from left to right: the former director of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Director-General of the High Council for Childhood, the UNICEF representative for child protection and the director of Save the Children Sweden in Lebanon.

An unquestionable success

Produced under the auspices of Madame Wafaa Michel Sleiman, the First Lady of Lebanon, in collaboration with the High Council for Childhood and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the conference had a very favorable response in Lebanese society, with more than 250 participants. The Ministers of Education, Health, Labor and the Interior were present. The Lebanese Union for Childhood Protection, the federation for the rights of children and international organizations also attended the event.

Numerous Lebanese and international NGO professionals were in attendance, some of whom were invited as speakers and who brought their expertise and shared their

experience. The presence of Government and NGO professionals from Jordan and Dubai extended the impact of the event at the regional level.



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The AFEL, a recognized professional organization

The AFEL is an NGO in service to children in difficulty and their families. It has existed since 1976 and welcomes children from 4 to 14 years old from disadvantaged classes. Children may be accommodated as boarders, if they no longer have family or if their family situation needs to be stabilized, or as day students, which offers structure and protection for children at risk of delinquency. The AFEL also provides remedial learning activities for children not in school or having learning difficulties. It also comes to the aid of families in the home, thanks to a service of social intervention.

The mistreatment of children: a key topic

Ninety percent of the 500 children from the AFEL come from needy families who live in the northern suburbs of Beirut: Nabaa, Sin El fil and Bourj Hammoud. In these disadvantaged and overpopulated suburbs, families must confront financial problems due to unemployment but also to various problems that can result from it: health, education, drug addiction, alcoholism, violence and child abuse. Although the latter is a difficult taboo to broach, it is the object in Lebanon of increased awareness in society and the family sphere. Numerous actions are led by civil society and the High Council for Childhood to sensitize families to the destructive effects of abuse. Work at the government level is underway to develop the legal handling of situations of abuse. This step is necessary for the social handling of these situations, still too often the only way of confronting the phenomenon of abuse.

Confirming the competence of the AFEL

Now recognized in Lebanon as an organization for the prevention of delinquency and abuse, the AFEL wishes to round out its capacity to intervene in questions of abuse, to detect it and to prevent it. To do this, as of 2007, Asmae has been sending a clinical psychologist to work with the AFEL. Catherine Daubrege specializes in issues of abuse and assists the organization in developing its expertise. The symposium on child abuse is the culmination of nearly two years of collaboration among Catherine, Asmae and the AFEL.

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