

Living a more independent life: Al-Tufula Center's work with Palestinian women with disabilities

In the words of Jovita Pander 2022

People with disabilities face a variety of challenges every day in Israel. The Al-Tufula Center therefore works especially with Palestinian women citizens of Israel with disabilities, providing valuable tools, skills, and knowledge for people with disability and advocating for them.

People with disabilities in Israel - just as in many other countries - represent one of the country's most marginalized groups. They often experience social isolation and discrimination, receive little family support, are excluded from everyday life by a lack of infrastructure in many areas, and experience little support. Thus, for example, the average monthly salary for people with disabilities in Israel is 25% less than the salary that Israelis without disabilities receive, and 18% of Israelis with disabilities feel lonely, while the national average is only 3%. All this often affects people's self-confidence and is extremely reinforced by their dependence on others. Palestinian women with disabilities are considered a particularly marginalized group in Israel, receiving support from very few organizations.

This situation worsened drastically, especially due to political instability and the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the pandemic not only further restricted freedom of movement, but also made it more difficult for family members to provide support due to the ongoing lockdowns. On the other hand, the four rounds of elections led to budget allocations being suspended and government decisions being postponed. This particularly affected marginalized groups such as women with disabilities and worsened their socio-economic status.

Together with the Joint Foundation, the Al-Tufula Center has been addressing issues that affect Palestinian women citizens of Israel with disabilities in particular, advocating for their rights, raising awareness, and providing valuable education since 2007. The Center has continued to advocate for this same marginalized group over the past two years, which have come with a host of unique challenges.

Therefore, a group of Palestinian women with disabilities who have been empowered by Al-Tufula Center are doing valuable outreach work to create awareness, sensitize society to this issue and change social attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the community. In parallel, they work with Palestinian women citizens of Israel with disabilities in various villages and towns in northern Israel, educating them about their rights and sharing valuable information about services and assistive devices.

For example, in 2020, 318 initial contacts with disabled persons and 109 initial home visits to disabled people were conducted, which could provide a first overview of the rights and support options for women with disabilities and create awareness. At the same time, more than 1600 follow-up meetings were held with people with disabilities to provide them with further support, deepen their knowledge of their rights and share valuable information.

Likewise, 30 lectures organized by Al-Tufula Center were held, with a total attendance of more than 1000 people. Half of the lectures were held for organizations, institutions and interested groups who wanted to learn more about the challenges that people with disabilities face on a daily basis. Through this and close contacts with a variety of organizations, the Al-Tufula Center provided valuable networking activities.

Through these activities, Al-Tufula Center has already empowered a large number of women with disabilities, connected them with other people with disabilities, and enabled them to live more

independent lives by informing them of their rights and available support services. One of these success stories is Mrs. Mokaram: The 48-year-old mother of 8 children has been visually impaired since the age of 28. Although she was already exercising some of the rights she was entitled to due to her visual impairment, such as being recognized as having a disability of up to 60% and being granted special support for her, her husband, and her children of up to 50%, the Al-Tufula Center helped her to learn about and exercise the full extent of her rights. Thus, after a multitude of meetings with Al-Tufula Center, medical examinations and paperwork, she not only received 25,000 nis in compensation, but her disability was also recognized as 100% disability, so she receives 100% support for her husband and children.

This is an example of the valuable work that Al-Tufula Center is doing in this area. However, there is still a need for systematic support mechanisms from the Israeli state to help people with disabilities in their daily lives, such as more educational activities that inform people with disabilities about their rights and support services, but also raise awareness among people without disabilities. On the other hand, efforts must be made in the area of accessibility, so that public transportation and downtown areas in particular are easily accessible to people with disabilities. Likewise, financial support is needed, both for people with disabilities and the additional challenges they face on a daily basis, but also for organizations that support, network and empower these people in their everyday lives.

Support the Al-Tufula Center to further their valuable work with Palestinian women citizens of Israel with disabilities.