



In celebration of the work ABCD Bethlehem (Action around Bethlehem Children with Disabilities), a humanitarian charity, solely funded by public donations, with the aim of helping to improve the lives of children with disabilities across Palestine. We have been working in the region for 40 years supporting those in need, regardless of faith, race or gender.



Tel: (+44) 07593 546004 • www.abcdbethlehem.org • info@abcdbethlehem.org

✕ @abcd_bethlehem f @abcdbethlehem 📷 @abcd_bethlehem

UK Registered Charity 1097623 • Company Number 04383155



VAL JOURDAN, MBE – A JOURNEY OF COMPASSION AND COMMITMENT



We honour Val Jourdan, MBE, founder of Action around Bethlehem Children with disabilities (ABCD), whose experience and deep compassion led to the creation of a charity that has transformed countless lives in Palestine.

40 years ago, while volunteering as a paediatric physiotherapist in Bethlehem, Val witnessed the overwhelming challenges faced by children with disabilities and their families living under occupation: stigma, trauma, and a devastating lack of services.

"I realised that foreign volunteer help wasn't the solution — but the local Palestinian therapists had enormous potential. If we could equip them with the right skills and support, they could build lasting change."

On returning home, Val knew she couldn't let the progress she'd made with the children vanish. In 1985, alongside a close friend, Georgina Mortimer, and a small group of passionate individuals, she founded ABCD, gaining charitable status in 1986.

Since then, ABCD has gone from strength to strength. Val reflects that the charity's greatest accomplishment has been bringing together *"a brilliant team of passionate, caring Trustees — who have made ABCD what it is today."*

Through a close working relationship with our on-the-ground project lead, Firas, Val and the team walk hand in hand with local partners — funding trusted, community-led solutions that create real, lasting impact.

"My son is reborn again with this opportunity for rehabilitation."

– Ammar's mother

Looking ahead, Val remains hopeful:

"My wish is that, with strength and dignity, our partners will overcome these current setbacks and build a sustainable network that reaches even more refugee camps in need."

From a powerful moment of realisation in Bethlehem to a legacy of hope — Val's vision continues to shape the lives of children across Palestine.

The Board of Trustees, ABCD



FOREWORD BY DANIEL BURTON, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES



It is a joy and privilege for me to offer some words of introduction to ABCD's 40th Anniversary brochure.

Charity anniversaries are peculiar things and some in the

“third sector” question their relevance. We thought carefully about the pros and cons of celebrating an anniversary in the current climate but resolved that it was the right thing to do – precisely because our work is too important not to take every opportunity to publicise it. The theme of the year is very simple: **gratitude for the past; commitment for the future.**

This year gives us a chance to say thank you to Val Jourdan and Georgina Mortimer whose commitment to Palestinian children living with disability gave them a vision for this work and enabled its foundation with partners rooted in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Over four decades, the work has grown from the initial 2 partners in 1986 to a portfolio of 8 partners today – and we are still growing. Of prime importance now is our future strategy. It is apparent to all observers of the region that our work is even more necessary than it was in the 1980s. This is not the place to reflect on the repeated failures to find a path to peace over the past 40 years but it is clear that these have been monumental and catastrophic. For ABCD the result is more children living with trauma and disability; and more projects needing partnership funding.

In 2026 we commit ourselves to staying with our partners for the long haul. We are proud of everything that they achieve each day in the most testing of circumstances – opening their doors, offering life-changing therapies to children living with disability and their families, educating and connecting those who otherwise might suffer in isolation. The work is hidden and often unspectacular – yet there is nothing more important. So thank you to our supporters who make this possible. Please share in the pride; and please stay with us for the future for without you we are nothing.



**THE WORK IS HIDDEN AND OFTEN
UNSPECTACULAR – YET THERE IS
NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT. SO
THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS
WHO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE.
PLEASE SHARE IN THE PRIDE;
AND PLEASE STAY WITH US FOR
THE FUTURE FOR WITHOUT YOU
WE ARE NOTHING.**

ABCD'S EARLY DAYS AND NOW

The Charity grew from a partnership with the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR), one of the two main rehabilitation hospitals in the West Bank.

We continue to support BASR via an outreach programme, as well as providing a grant to the Sheepfold, a children's centre in Beit Sahour. Since 2013, we have also opened seven rehabilitation centres in refugee camps across the West Bank.

Historically, health centre teams have faced numerous challenges including lack of funding, difficulty recruiting and training, and accessibility issues. ABCD works with the centres to help overcome these challenges, developing project plans and renovating spaces, purchasing equipment and building relationships with other local health providers.

Sadly, demand for our support continues to grow, as we respond and adapt to the consequences of growing conflict in the region. This includes an increasing need to provide emergency funding for trauma therapy, delivery of food parcels, and essential medication and nappies for families who have lost their livelihoods.

Our long-term aim is to guide the management of the centres to become self-sufficient.



SADLY, DEMAND FOR OUR SUPPORT CONTINUES TO GROW, AS WE RESPOND AND ADAPT TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF GROWING CONFLICT IN THE REGION.

WE BELIEVE IN CHANGE

Action around Bethlehem Children with disabilities is a UK-based, humanitarian charity. Our main aim is to improve the lives of children with disabilities across Palestine regardless of faith, race or gender.

To achieve our aim, we provide hope and independence through high-quality child-centred care for vulnerable families including physio and speech therapy, cognitive support and the provision of specialist equipment.

We work closely with local partners who provide treatment programmes to empower and educate families to continue rehabilitation at home in a way that makes the most significant impact and improvements.

We can only continue to provide these vital services with your generous donations. Rehabilitation programmes enable children to transition into adulthood with greater confidence and minimal complications, improving their lives for the better.



STAYING STRONG

Our therapists are all trained at different universities in the West Bank: Al Quds University, Beir Zeit University, Al Najeh University and Al Terah UNRWA training college.

We fund a team of highly skilled therapists, who deliver rehabilitation programmes in our Centres for a wide range of cognitive, physical or learning problems from birth or as a result of conflict. This can include children with autism, Down Syndrome and cognitive disabilities as well as children with physical issues such as cerebral palsy.

Identifying disabilities at the earliest possible stage and developing a robust rehabilitation programme is key to achieving positive outcomes. Our centres are open 5 days a week, seeing between 20-25 children per centre, per month.

These therapeutic spaces include up-to-date equipment and facilities such as sensory rooms and gardens, as well as play, speech and language therapy rooms which are a haven for families. ABCD therapists also support outreach programmes and home modifications to families in the community. In some cases, our therapists refer patients for surgery, provide medication and give therapy sessions.

Charity funding also covers essential technical assistance for children with disabilities such as hearing aids, walking frames, wheelchairs, medical boots, made to measure back supports, orthotics, as well as spectacles.

Working with children and their families in their communities enables generational change.



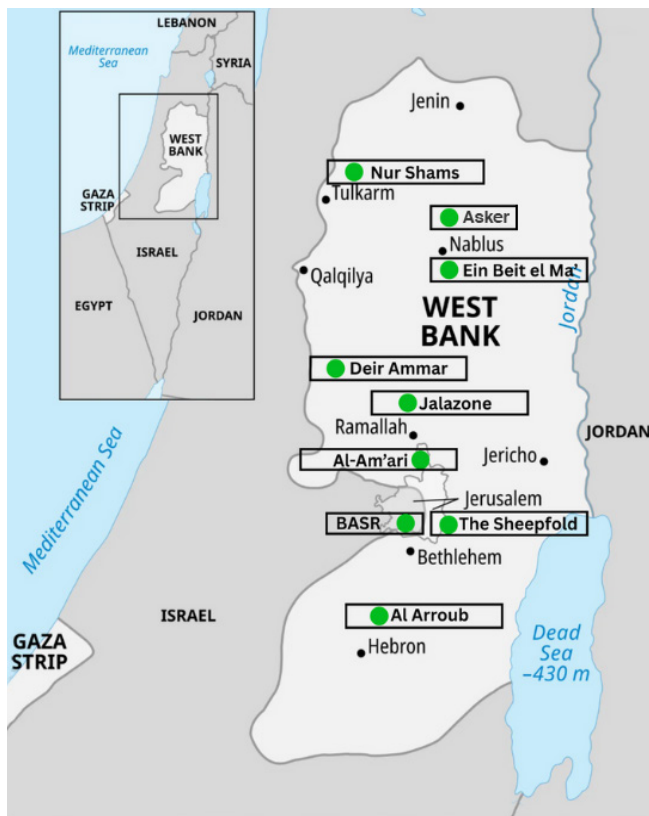
IDENTIFYING DISABILITIES AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE STAGE AND DEVELOPING A ROBUST REHABILITATION PROGRAMME IS KEY TO ACHIEVING POSITIVE OUTCOMES.

HEALTH CENTRES

ABCD works with health centres across the West Bank to ensure they can meet the needs of their community. We deliver child-centred holistic care with family support to fight stigmas still associated with disability and work in seven refugee camps at dedicated centres in the West Bank as well as for Sheepfold for older teenagers and for BASR (Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation), a hospital in Beit Jala near Bethlehem.

REHABILITATION

Success is the sum of the efforts put in by ABCD's trained rehabilitation staff, repeated day-in and day-out with compassion for children with disabilities.



PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

ABCD brings hope to the families helping these vulnerable children find their rightful place in the community

FUNDRAISING

GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING A DONATION – IT IS ABOUT A LIFE-CHANGING OPPORTUNITY FOR MANY YOUNG CHILDREN IN ABCD'S CARE.



OUR CENTRES

There are 19 refugee camps with 912,879 registered refugees living in the West Bank. Over the past 13 years ABCD has helped create, equip, guide and now support rehabilitation centres in seven of these camps.

Our centre managers are:

- **Al Am'Ari:** Iham Abass
- **Nur Shams:** Nehaya Al Joundi
- **Deir Ammar:** Rabab Azmi
- **Ein Beit Al Ma:** Radidea Al Masari
- **Jalazone:** Mozyan Armoush
- **Al Arroub:** Wail Jwabrah
- **Asker:** Mona Abu Kaskik



Firas Sarhan, Val Jourdan and child at a ribbon cutting for a new therapeutic room addition at one of the centres.



ASKER REFUGEE CAMP in Nablus, houses this year's newest of our rehabilitation centres, the seventh centre to receive funding and support from ABCD. Disability within

the camp with a population of 20,000 is a significant and under-addressed humanitarian issue. Research reveals that more than 120 children with disabilities in Asker camp need rehabilitation.

ABCD's aim is to establish a complete and well-structured rehabilitation programme that will offer the following therapies – physiotherapy, occupational and speech and language therapy and education for children with learning difficulties - so that all areas of rehabilitation will be given in one place without the need to travel, thus saving families money on transport and saving time as there won't be any checkpoints to navigate.

This will be achieved by employing both a fully trained physiotherapist and an occupational therapist.

AL AM'ARI CAMP, located east of Ramallah, is one of the smallest camps in the West Bank with 15,315 refugees registered as of



2023 and population density of 161,792 per sq km. In comparison, London, home to 9,089,736 residents has a density of 5,782 people per sq km. The growing population remains a challenge for service provision as well as on the existing infrastructure in the camp, while also contributing to overcrowding and poor living conditions.

The local committee of the ailing rehabilitation centre approached ABCD in early 2024 requesting our help. The lack of resources was dire and the need is overwhelming. The newly established and equipped centre is now providing vital rehabilitation for complex physical and learning disabilities, with autism, Down Syndrome and other cognitive disabilities.

DISABILITY WITHIN THE 20,000 POPULATED CAMP IS A SIGNIFICANT AND UNDER-ADDRESSED HUMANITARIAN ISSUE. RESEARCH REVEALS THAT MORE THAN 120 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN ASKER CAMP NEED REHABILITATION.



AL ARROUB: Home to 10,000 refugees and located in the Southern part of the West Bank, between Bethlehem and Hebron, the centre provides services for 250 children with

disabilities. The Al Arroub rehabilitation centre became a partner of the charity in 2019, when ABCD helped with redecoration and reconstruction to create a more therapeutic space and to fund essential physiotherapy equipment and play materials. A physiotherapist, play therapist and speech therapist are now working at the centre on a voluntary basis.



DEIR AMMAR:

Located in the north of the West Bank, near Ramallah, with 3,682 UN registered refugees, Deir Ammar is one of the most recent of ABCD's rehabilitation

centres. Project Manager Firas Sarhan first visited the refugee camp in March 2023 and found they were in dire need of help with two drab rooms, no equipment and unqualified helpers doing their best. However, the local committee was determined that given financial support, they could make the centre the very core of the community. ABCD worked on a development plan and injected a budget of £15k to establish a functioning centre which is now thriving, including the recent addition of a new garden. Children are now able to learn and play in a safe and nurturing natural environment. The embroidery initiative is to further cultural skills which is done here by mothers of young children for fundraising and by others too.



EIN BEIT AL MA:

Based in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem, ABCD supports this independent centre which provides daycare for the most vulnerable and severely

children with disabilities and young adults. Provision includes special needs classes, development activities, physiotherapy, specialised equipment as well as funding humanitarian aid such as medical expenses for these most needy of children. Families are guided on how best to care for their children at home, as well as knowing they have a safe place to turn to if they need help.



JALAZONE: Opened in 1948 and based near Ramallah, it was originally built for 3,500 displaced families. The Jalazone camp now houses over 15,000 people in two square

kilometres. Life for children in this camp is particularly harsh, water supply is often rationed, with extreme poverty and overcrowding. Unemployment stands at 60%. In dire need of refurbishment and equipment, in 2013 ABCD renovated the space, and continues to provide support such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and social activities.



An early sign for Jalazone centre

NUR SHAMS:

Established in 1952 with a population of 3,000 people, the Nur Shams refugee camp situated close to Tulkarem in the Northwest now houses 10,000 people. The overcrowding is acute, with no outdoor public space, no playground, park area or football ground. Electricity is intermittent and water is rationed during the summer months. Unemployment is around 60% with up to 500 disabled people needing help. Since the unrest in 2023, escalating violence and destruction from raids by the IDF have rendered the centre beyond use at times, due to damage to the infrastructure as well as disruption to access for those with wheelchairs and walking aids. ABCD funded and installed a sensory room for children with disabilities to encourage sensory stimulation, reduction in stress and anxiety, improved focus, emotional regulation and to improve balance, movement and spatial orientation.

In February 2025, Nur Shams's centre was trashed by IDF forces and closed until further notice as part of the enforced evacuation of the UNRWA-run camp. Nur Shams have now signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with a neighbouring rehabilitation centre, the Qaqun Charitable Society for the Deaf and Mute to work collaboratively to support children with mental and physical learning disabilities.



In happier times, staff at Nur Shams, headed by Nehaya Aljondi, head of the centre next to Firas Sarhan, ABCD's Project Manager

The Qaqun centre offers educational classes and a variety of special tools for all ages and levels, including a fully equipped sensory room. This enables them to continue to provide holistic rehabilitation and engage with families to support their children. The centre in Nur Shams is now occupied by IDF soldiers for rest and recreation.

NUR SHAMS REFUGEE CAMP SITUATED CLOSE TO TULKAREM IN THE NORTHWEST NOW HOUSES 10,000 PEOPLE. THE OVERCROWDING IS ACUTE, WITH NO OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACE, NO PLAYGROUND, PARK AREA OR FOOTBALL GROUND. ELECTRICITY IS INTERMITTENT AND WATER IS RATIONED DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS.

DIAGNOSIS OF CHILDREN, INTRODUCED BY FIRAS SARHAN, OUR PROJECT MANAGER AND TRUSTEE:

Firas introduced the British way of assessment: a holistic approach involving both parents. The father must attend the initial consultation. The child is given a diagnosis, and a plan is drawn up for treatment once all has been evaluated, taking into consideration the home life, access to the home and within the home which is also inspected. Doctors refer the children to the centre.



The team at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR)



THE SHEEPFOLD:

Based in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem, ABCD supports this independent centre which provides daycare for the most vulnerable and severely children with disabilities and

young adults. Provision includes special needs classes, development activities, physiotherapy, specialised equipment as well as funding humanitarian aid such as medical expenses for these most needy of children. Families are guided on how best to care for their children at home, as well as knowing they have a safe place to turn to if they need help. Even in the darkest times, holding onto a small glimmer of hope can make a difference.



BASR: We have supported our long-term partner Bethlehem Arab Society for rehabilitation for over 38 years, providing community-based Outreach Services stretching deep into remote rural areas. The outreach programme consists of a multidisciplinary team of professionals and health workers who operate through local community centres, schools and families.

BETHLEHEM ARAB SOCIETY FOR REHABILITATION, BEIT JALA, NEAR BETHLEHEM:

A past visit, by project manager Firas Sarhan and trustees Daniel Burton and Carol Godsmark, to the area to understand at first hand the needs of the community outreach programme.



The past multi-disciplinary Outreach team at BASR

We drive 1 ½ hours from Jifna, our base, to Beit Jala to visit BASR. Due to Firas's status as a Palestinian without permission along the new Israeli roads (allowed to both Israelis and Palestinian permit holders), we take the roads only allowed to Palestinians without the necessary permit, adding a considerable extra time to the journey which includes skirting Jerusalem via the Valley of Hell, a very hilly, dangerous, truck and multi-traffic-laden road. The traffic is unrelenting and we pass Israeli lookout towers and gates, our driver stopped by soldiers at one checkpoint of many checkpoints to examine his pass.

We meet Edmund Shehadeh, BASR's founder, for a short time in his office before meeting the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) team, the community outreach team headed by Mr Iyad Hamdan (Director of Operations) for 10 years. CBR is an internationally recognised approach, which seeks to involve the whole community in understanding and supporting people living with a disability. Iyad introduces us to part of his team which includes social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists in

the field (four days a week, one day in the office) and who assess four to five cases per day, sometimes four children in the same family due to congenital problems. The holistic approach also includes in-depth information-gathering and advising the family, home modifications, surgery referral, talking to schools to raise awareness for teachers to help identify children's possible disabilities and how to include these children into society. The team also communicates with families via mobiles and involve communities to identify and introduce children to CBR, create local services, and help de-stigmatise disability within the community. to identify and introduce children to CBR and to create local services as well as helping to de-stigmatise disability within the community, a grassroots strategy. To date (when this was written), 4,000 children and adults have been identified. Self-help groups are also established and a campaign for accessibility. Visible hearing aids are contentious as the wearing of them by girls may be a barrier to marriage. Finance is difficult (no government funding) as CBR is the sole help available.

OUTREACH HOME VISIT:

We continue with the CBR staff to the centre of Dahryah to visit two teenagers, brother and sister (Ali, then 18, Fatima, then 17) who have congenital brittle bone disease and are unable to walk, Fatima in a wheelchair. They live in an upstairs flat (it is squalid) which is accessed by a narrow passage and steep staircase to the first floor. We pass through the rather spacious area belonging to the 75-year-old grandmother who seems much older but the family of four (parents, father just arrested for a Facebook posting, and absent, mother) live in a very confined slim space of two dark, windowless bedrooms, a tiny, inadequate kitchen and storage area plus a narrow sitting room, possibly an add-on to the building which overlooks the busy street. The grandmother's area seems out of bounds for the family, and

therefore not able to be incorporated within the family of four. Both Ali and Fatima are highly intelligent, cheerful and communicative and go to mainstream school but have difficulty in coming and going via the stairs. They bump down and claw themselves up. CBR has supplied wheelchairs, arranged for surgery to strengthen limbs and leg splints. Again, transport is vital for them both to get to school as there is no public transport at all, only expensive taxis (20 shekels per journey). Occupational Therapist Nichola looks at kitchen improvements for wheelchair use (at present, not possible) and suggests moving the kitchen to part of the second bedroom and the need to find funding for this. A delightful, warm, funny family despite their disabilities and needs and recent arrest of the father.

TRIP SUMMARY:

The fact-finding trip helped us in understanding what ABCD can expand on at the centres. The staff at each centre highlighted many more cases which need expertise. A major push is therefore needed to facilitate these identified children and their families with equipment, transport and other help.

However, we were very heartened by this remarkable fact-finding field trip which has the hallmarks of adding to ABCD's expansion as Daniel and I found the camps' centres, alongside Firas, all changing quickly and efficiently, staff identifying many more cases to include and therefore a major push is needed to facilitate these children and their families via equipment, staffing, transport and other help. In a holistic way, the buzzword of all medical practitioners we met.

Firas organised an excellent agenda and was our guiding light. We had an excellent, stimulating, sobering and eye-opening time. The outstanding hospitality shown to us in the camps was another bonus. We have come home with a renewed vigour to continue to support these very dignified Palestinians who continue against all odds to fashion a strong family and communal life for their children with disabilities – and which benefits the entire family as a result.





ABCD PATRONS:

Amy Mortimer

Daughter of co-founder Georgina Mortimer

Rt Rev'd Dr Michael Langrish

Formerly Bishop of Exeter

The Rt Hon David Lidington

Served in the House of Commons for almost 28 years before retiring. He was also Leader of the House of Commons, Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor, and Minister for the Cabinet Office.



Ambassador Husam Zomlot with ABCD project manager Firas Sarhan at the House of Lords

Ambassador Husam Zomlot

Head of the Palestinian Mission to the UK. Born in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, he previously served as the Palestinian Envoy to the US before the closure of the PLO Office in Washington DC instigated by President Trump in 2018.

ABCD TRUSTEES:



Reverend Canon Daniel Burton Chair of Trustees

Daniel Burton is an Anglican priest, currently serving as Vicar of Oldham in the Diocese of Manchester. In the

mid '80s he worked for two years in a Palestinian Children's Home in Ramallah. For 20 years he was a trustee of the charity "Embrace the Middle East" – formerly known as BibleLands – and led many pilgrimages and visits to the Middle East. He became a trustee of ABCD in 2016 and chair of trustees in 2024, taking over from Val Jourdan.



Firas Sarhan, deputy ABCD director and project manager

was born in Jalazone, a refugee camp in the West Bank. He is Clinical Education Transformation

Lead working at the National Spinal Injury Centre with NHS England developing educational curriculum on spinal cord injury management and rehabilitation. Previously he was the Director and lead academic for the Centre of Excellence for Telehealth and Assisted Living at Barnet Southgate College. Firas was also principal and Senior Lecturer in the School Advanced & Continuing Practice at Buckinghamshire New University. He has more than 30 years' experience in acute rehabilitation and continuing care of people with physical disabilities.



Alastair Harris, Chair of Finance, is a semi-retired risk manager and accountant, having worked for over 30 years in the City of London. He and his wife Deborah, an ABCD supporter too,

live in south-west London and have three grown-up children. Alastair first visited Bethlehem on a pilgrimage in 2001 in connection with ABCD and was delighted to become a trustee in 2016.



Anthony Glaister, Chair of Fundraising, is a mediator and lawyer by background, with a long interest in peacemaking and inter-faith dialogue in Palestine and Israel. He has also worked

as a mentor for high-risk ex-offenders. Anthony has taken part in the Bethlehem Marathon, fundraising for ABCD, and has visited the many day care centres.



Matthew Taylor, was appointed honorary treasurer in 2021. He has a degree in Arabic and a long-standing interest in the Middle East, especially the Holy Land. He first encountered

ABCD whilst serving as a trustee for the ecumenical charity Living Stones. He has visited Israel-Palestine several times, both on pilgrimage and to witness the great work of ABCD's partner health clinics.



Alison Driscoll, was ABCD's administrator for over ten years. Her name is now synonymous with ABCD, having fostered relations with so many church communities and

taken part in many pilgrimages. She is an accredited Methodist preacher and welcomes invitations from churches to talk at Sunday services of worship or to midweek groups.



Carol Godsmark, a past journalist-PR, now a writer, originally from Canada via other countries including Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Denmark and elsewhere, has

written about the Middle East for the media and has been a past and recent visitor to the camps and other ABCD work venues on behalf of the charity. She writes ABCD's newsletters and other publications and has been a trustee for many years.



Katie James, ABCD's Katie James is its administrator, joining the office in autumn 2019. Katie has proved an invaluable, enthusiastic, 'can do' member of the team

and is the sole paid staff member.

ABCD TRUSTEES:



Gina Hill, ABCD's newest trustee, brings extensive experience in strategic communications, brand development, and digital engagement

across sectors

including healthcare and humanitarian charities. Passionate about amplifying underrepresented voices, Gina has led campaigns supporting displaced communities and crisis response. She has led major initiatives such as website developments, multi-channel campaigns, and brand projects – all with a focus on increasing engagement, accessibility, and impact.

Gina writes: “I joined ABCD Bethlehem a year ago, first as a trustee-in-waiting before becoming a full trustee in September 2025.

When I applied to become a trustee, I felt I could bring some of my experience in communications, fundraising, and audience engagement to support the charity as it continues to grow. In particular, I was interested in how ABCD could broaden awareness and connect with younger supporters, while still keeping the strong sense of community that makes it special.

My day job is in marketing and communications, and I've worked across the not-for-profit and charity sectors for several years. Much of my experience has focused on helping organisations communicate clearly, engage supporters, and grow sustainably. I'd also previously worked in the humanitarian sector, particularly during my time at Action Syria, so ABCD's mission immediately resonated with me.

What struck me most was how personal and grounded the charity felt. Unlike some larger organisations, ABCD feels deeply connected to the people it supports. It didn't feel like a charity operating at a distance, but a group of people genuinely listening to families and communities on the ground in Palestine and responding to what they need.

One of the things that has really stood out to me during my first year is how committed the trustees are. Everyone genuinely gives their time, energy, and skills in a very practical way. Whether it's helping at events, supporting campaigns, or working through challenges, there's a real sense of shared responsibility and commitment. Having worked with other charities before, I know that level of engagement isn't always the norm!

I've especially enjoyed getting involved in events like Greenbelt, which gave me the chance to meet supporters and hear directly why the charity means so much to them. It has also deepened my understanding of Palestine and the experiences of the families ABCD supports. Before joining, much of my awareness came through news coverage, but over the past year I've gained a far more personal understanding of the resilience, warmth, and strength of the communities there.

I haven't visited Palestine yet, but I hope to one day. Even without visiting, being part of ABCD has already given me a much deeper connection to the people and the work than I expected when I first joined”.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECT MANAGER FIRAS SARHAN

Firas Sarhan has been and continues to be instrumental in putting in place how staff would work with children with disabilities. He explains:

“ABCD introduces comprehensive rehabilitation centres that the child would come to, for example, to see a physiotherapist, to be reviewed, have a meeting as a team where they can decide and plan the journey of that child, how the child is going to be developing and how they’re going to be taken forward. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reveals that 2.1 percent of the Palestinian population has a disability, amounting to almost 44,500 people in the occupied West Bank.”

“I don’t want to sound harsh, but children with disabilities were and still are being neglected. There is no central system to support them. A child needs a mother to hug, someone to be close to, so they can have that comfort, that support, that integrity as an individual, I feel that is fragmented. These centres are a safe haven for these children and their families, they feel supported, and connected to others. They create a strong network there. Poverty, UNRWA budget cuts and no central health system mean children’s care is “based on aid from external organisations such as ABCD to move things forward for that child.”

The charity works alongside UNRWA together with local partners on a referral system, helping children with disabilities through professional therapists and by offering home adaptations, installing ramps, shower chairs, providing wheelchairs and other equipment which may allow them to become a little more independent.

“Before ABCD they had nothing, they were carrying their children or using inadequate prams. Now we are giving them properly designed wheelchairs and training them on how to manoeuvre them.”



“BEFORE ABCD THEY HAD NOTHING, THEY WERE CARRYING THEIR CHILDREN OR USING INADEQUATE PRAMS. NOW WE ARE GIVING THEM PROPERLY DESIGNED WHEELCHAIRS AND TRAINING THEM ON HOW TO MANOEUVRE THEM.”



“The big chunk of our beneficiaries are children with CP – cerebral palsy – but also many children with genetic disorders, some of which are linked to inter-family marriage, causing both physical and cognitive function disabilities. There are other disabilities related to the conflict too; children with gunshot wounds etc but 99.9 percent of our children are born with disabilities.”

One of the areas the charity had to tackle was people’s mindset where disability is concerned, with some families keeping disabled relatives indoors “because they don’t want to have their family status affected, or their future marriage possibilities affected which will have a huge social impact on the family, this is why we are working urgently with them to change this,” Sarhan explains.

“We managed to successfully alter the taboo about having a wheelchair in the street or having a wheelchair in the house or having a disabled child within the family. The way we’ve done it is through collaborative work with our local partners and with the parents to help push the fact that disability is not a punishment, it is not a taboo, and it is not something to disfigure you as a family or an individual.”

“LIFE IN THE CAMPS, DESPITE THE MISERY, AND DESPITE POVERTY, IT’S A JOY. IT’S A TOGETHERNESS APPROACH TO LIFE. YES, IT IS HEARTBREAKING TO LISTEN TO OTHER PEOPLE’S STORIES, BUT I LOOK AT IT – THE CAMPS – AS ONE BODY; IF YOU HAVE A SORE HEADACHE, THE REST RESPONDS TO THAT. PEOPLE ARE TOGETHER AND STAND BY ONE ANOTHER. PEOPLE ALWAYS WISH GOOD FOR OTHERS; THERE’S A SIMPLICITY OF LIFE.”



Help a Palestinian child hear, learn and play



Hearing loss doesn't just affect the senses. When a child cannot hear the people and the world around them, it affects every part of their life, from learning to talk to parents, to their education, to being able to play and communicate with their friends. These children are doubly disadvantaged living also under the impoverishment of occupation, and unable to access treatment allowing them to hear again. This campaign will benefit hundreds of deaf children in Palestine.

ABCD Bethlehem is a UK charity that has supported children with all sorts of disabilities in Palestine for over 40 years. We have reached out and provided therapeutic care to over 10,000 children and their families. Now we wish to create a centre for deaf children in the Amari refugee camp close to Ramallah which will also serve our other seven centres and children throughout the West Bank extending, we hope, to Gaza in the future. Hearing loss affects many thousands of Palestinian children who have no support, but via this initiative, they will have access to a specialist hearing centre.

The sums raised will help hundreds of children learn, connect, and play better, accessing the childhood they deserve. The sums raised here are part of our Hope through Hearing campaign and will form part of the project costs of £84,000 in setting up and running the audiology centre for the first two years, full details of which you can find on our website www.abcdbethlehem.org

Shukran!



This year, trustee Gina Groom and other trustees took part in ABCD's Palestine Relay Launch, a special event where the team and supporters came together to raise funds and awareness for children with disabilities such as Hope Through Hearing.



Gina Hill, in front, with other trustees and supporters at the Launch in London

"Hope Through Hearing is a really key project we're running at the moment. It's a campaign which is raising money to build an audiology centre in Al Am'ari camp, a project developed in direct response to local need that aims to give children access to hearing services that would otherwise be out of reach. The Palestine Relay is part of this, which brings people together to raise money and awareness by collectively covering the distance from London to Bethlehem," Gina explains. **Find out how you can help the charity reach its goal at www.abcdbethlehem.org/hope-through-hearing/the-palestine-relay/**

PAST TRUSTEES AND LONG TIME SUPPORTERS

Rupert Ridge:

Past chair of ABCD (2002-2005):
his widow Blanche writes: Rupert loved ABCD from the bottom of his heart and believed passionately in its remarkable work.

He felt deeply privileged to be allowed to play a part in the way it brings dignity and hope to so many children's lives, and he always came home from his visits full of stories and inspiration. I feel full of gratitude on his behalf for all it gave him, and through him to the rest of his family, and the way that light and inspiration continue to increase especially in hard times.



Reverend Roger Royle:

Anglican priest and broadcaster:
Let me take you back to Christmas Day 1985 and along with my BBC producers John and Hugh I was sent to Bethlehem to present, live, Radio 2's Good Morning Christmas programme from what was then called, "The Bethlehem Arab Society home for the physically Handicapped".

I arrived early so I could teach the children to say "Happy Christmas". They responded wonderfully. My main

interview was with Dr Edmund Shehadeh who still works with, and is a close friend, of ABCD. This programme opened my eyes to the needs of Palestine's many children with disabilities and the situation now is far worse. So, I am a committed supporter of ABCD and the work it is still doing 40 years on.



Rt Hon Sir David Lidington KCB CBE:

About 25 years ago, when I was MP for Aylesbury, Val Jourdan, whom I'd met at various civic and charitable events in Buckinghamshire, asked me to become a patron of ABCD.

I have never regretted accepting that invitation. What Val, Georgina Mortimer and their team have achieved over the last 40 years is remarkable. I have visited the West Bank and seen the work that the rehabilitation centres funded by ABCD do. The charity has transformed the lives of children in desperate need and brought joy and relief to their families. Sadly, ABCD's work is needed even more today.



How I Got Involved with ABCD Charity:

supporter Bassam Abourdene, Chairman of CTSA Holdings Ltd and of Capital Trust Limited, London.

My connection with ABCD goes back a long way — about 40 years, in fact. It all started when Munib introduced me to Val. At the time, I had no idea that this introduction would turn into a decades-long association with something so meaningful.

Back then, ABCD Bethlehem was just an idea — or at best, something in its very early stages. What I remember most clearly is the sheer determination behind it. Val, along with her best friend Georgina (God rest her soul), really did the heavy lifting to get things off the ground. There was nothing polished or “professional” about it in those early days — just commitment, belief, and a willingness to put in the hard work where it was needed most.

They weren’t chasing recognition or scale. They simply saw a need — supporting children with disabilities in Bethlehem — and got on with doing something about it. A lot of what exists today is built on those early efforts, often carried out quietly and without fuss.

What’s remarkable is seeing how far it has come. Forty years later, ABCD has grown into a professionally run charity, with structure, reach, and real impact.

But at its core, it still carries that same spirit it started with — practical help, genuine care, and a focus on the people who need it most.

For me, being connected to ABCD has never been about a single moment or decision. It’s been more of a steady thread over the years — watching it grow, supporting where I can, and appreciating the people who made it what it is today.

Looking back, it’s quite something to think that it all began with a simple introduction.

Val says: Bassam generously lent us office space in central London for ABCD’s meetings for many years, for which I and the team are very thankful.

**“FORTY YEARS
LATER, ABCD HAS
GROWN INTO A
PROFESSIONALLY
RUN CHARITY, WITH
STRUCTURE, REACH,
AND REAL IMPACT.”**



Georgina Mortimer: by Amy Mortimer

Georgina Mortimer, my dearly missed late mother and co-founder of ABCD, would be deeply saddened by today’s political climate, yet immensely proud that ABCD’s passion and commitment have endured for 40 years. After each visit to the West Bank, she returned with stories of courageous communities and resilient children, speaking of suitcases filled with hearing aids and navigating curfews

to reach and support those who made the charity’s work possible on the ground. Her dedication to the people and communities ABCD served never wavered. Reaching this 40-year milestone is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the organisation’s enduring mission, compassion, and impact — one that I know Mum would have celebrated with enormous pride.

Reflection on experiences with ABCD from supporters Liz and Lesley Palmer:

Our first encounter with ABCD was around 1992 when we met Georgina Mortimer at a school's Activity Day. She spoke of the lives of children living in Bethlehem: our children then drew their homes for the Bethlehem children. The meeting inspired us to fundraise at Sunday school: the children saved money and over the years we collected toys and clothes.



Georgina Mortimer with children at Sunday School



Sunday School children with finished project via Liz and Lesley Palmer's ABCD involvement

Val enabled our visit to BASR and the Sheepfold and in 2023 we joined ABCD to enter the Bethlehem Marathon, later visiting the ABCD centre at Jalazone. We congratulate Val and the Trustees for their work under very difficult circumstances over the past 40 years and hope that their vital work in Palestine will thrive.



Lesley Dawson,
physiotherapist and
field adviser for
ABCD: By the time
I got to Bethlehem in
1988, ABCD existed.
Links between ABCD

and Bethlehem University involved
ABCD funding university fees for phys-
iotherapy and occupational therapy
students from poorer families.

One of my fondest memories involves Val Jourdan and Georgina Mortimer visiting BASR [hospital for disabilities near Bethlehem] and staying with Edmond Shehadeh, the director of the centre. They needed to get to a

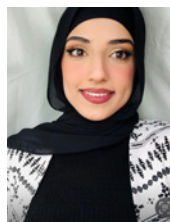
meeting in Jerusalem, and I offered to drive them and to make a detour to the children with disabilities's orphanage to check they were ok.

We found the centre and knocked on the door to find that the house mother had no key to the food cupboard, which was with the Sister who lived in a nearby convent. We argued our way through an Israeli army roadblock, but no-one would let us in the convent. Fortunately, a Brother from the next-door school helped us by whistling towards the Sisters' sitting room window. The window opened, an explanation was made, we took the key up to the orphanage and finally made our way to Jerusalem.

WORKING WITH PALESTINIAN ARTISTS

Thanks to public donations, children with disabilities in Palestine are also learning, exploring and developing their skills through new sensory tools designed in collaboration with Palestinian artist Arooba Amair.

Over the past year, we've introduced Arooba's custom-made sensory tools across all seven of our centres, and children are now benefiting from them in their rehabilitation. Her creations are designed specifically to support children with physical and learning disabilities, including children with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other developmental conditions. They are making a real difference. Children love playing with them, and the bright colours and interactivity make it more fun to learn, helping children practise movement and communication through stimulating visuals, sound, and touch.



The Role of Educational and Entertaining Videos in Supporting Children with Special Needs, created by Hanaa Fanoun.

In recent years, the use of educational and entertaining videos has gained prominence as a valuable tool for supporting children with special needs such as polio, autism, Down Syndrome and other conditions. These YouTube videos cater to various learning styles and provide engaging content that can enhance both education and social interaction, both at ABCD centres and at home.



PALESTINE HISTORY IN CONTEXT:

Beginning with the partition of Palestine in 1947 followed by the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, there has been a lack of full sovereignty of the State of Palestine under international law resulting in the longest-lasting and most politically fateful refugee waves. As a result, most Palestinians (an estimated 5.9 million in the Middle East today) are officially registered as refugees, who may not have official citizenship in any country. About 1.5 million refugees live in recognised camps in the occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank and Gaza) and other host countries, including Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Lebanon.

Thus, Palestinians do not have many of the same rights that other refugees have under the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees due to their designation “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” Consequently, millions of Palestinian refugees rely on humanitarian assistance. Some refugees live in and around the cities and towns across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but many live in official camps. The camps are located on defined plots of land that are permitted by the host government. While the housing is provided at no cost, the refugees do not own the land. The UNRWA for Palestine Refugees is also a major employer of Palestinians in its schools, health care clinics, and other social programs.

The official tourist office Israeli map of Israel ('The Land of Creation') and area shows all major towns and areas in Israel, orange patches denoting Judea and Samaria for the West Bank with very few major Palestinian towns (Jenin, Ramallah, Hebron – read Hevron) marked. The name, West Bank, is not written.



One of the many armed roadblocks with signage.

The road signs, even in Palestinian territory, have the settlement signposts but often not the Palestinian place names. Big red warning signage is often seen warning Israeli drivers that it is forbidden and dangerous for them to take these roads.

A recently constructed highway in the occupied West Bank has been nicknamed by Palestinians as “Apartheid Road”.

On joint roads, when the latest Israeli settlement is reached for turning off, the road is not paved for continuing Palestinian vehicles.



Disclaimer: ABCD is an apolitical registered charity, the following outlining events via the UN website and which seeks to put Palestine and ABCD's work into context:

1897 – First Zionist congress takes place in Basel, Switzerland and the first Zionist organization is founded.

1917 – The Balfour Declaration promises a “national home for the Jewish people in Palestine”.

May 1948 – Great Britain terminates the Mandate over Palestine and Israel declares independence on 15 May. First large-scale displacement of Palestine refugees; 15 May becomes an official day to mark the Palestinian Nakba (“catastrophe”).

The Nakba, which means “catastrophe” in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

Before the Nakba, Palestine was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. However, the conflict between Arabs and Jews intensified in the 1930s with the increase of Jewish immigration, driven by persecution in Europe, and with the Zionist movement aiming to establish a Jewish state in Palestine.

1986: ABCD is founded by Val Jourdan, paediatric physiotherapist, after working for a year in Bethlehem at BASR (Bethlehem Arab Society Rehabilitation) hospital in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem. Georgina Mortimer, long-time friend, joins her to set up the charity.

1988: In July, Jordan renounces claims to the West Bank and recognizes PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”

In November, in Algiers, the Palestinian National Council adopts declaration of independence of the State of Palestine.

In December, PLO Chair Yasser Arafat addresses UN in Geneva; says Palestine National Council accepts UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338.

1991: Middle East peace conference in Madrid brings together all the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

1993: Israel and the PLO sign the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, also known as the Oslo accords. Several “permanent status” issues are deferred for future negotiations.

1994: The Office of the UN Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) is established, and Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen of Norway is appointed as the first UN Special Coordinator.

1995: Israel and the PLO sign the Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (‘Oslo II’).“

1996: Palestinian general elections are held.

1997: Israel and the PLO sign the Hebron Protocol.

1998: Israel and the PLO sign the Wye River Memorandum, which consists of steps to facilitate implementation of previous agreements.

2000: In July, the US President Clinton convenes a Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David which concludes without agreement.

Ariel Sharon's al-Haram al-Sharif visit in September 2000 triggers the Second Palestinian Intifada.

2001: Outgoing US President Clinton proposes the Clinton Parameters for a permanent status agreement to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Shortly afterwards, the Taba Summit is held between Israel and the Palestinian Authority but fails to resolve the “permanent status” issues.

2002: The UN Security Council passes resolution 1397 affirming vision of a two-State solution to the conflict. The Quartet, consisting of the UN, the EU, the US, and Russia is established with a mandate to help mediate Israeli–Palestinian conflict and support Palestinian economic development and institution-building.

During a summit in Beirut, the League of Arab States adopts the Arab Peace Initiative.

2003: Roadmap for Peace is published by the Quartet (see 2002) and is endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515.

2004: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issues Advisory Opinion on the legality of construction of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

2006: In January, Hamas wins Palestinian Legislative Elections; forms Palestinian Authority government. The Quartet responds with Quartet Principles. In July, Israel goes to war with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

2007: Israel imposes a blockade on the Gaza Strip after an armed takeover of Gaza by Hamas.

In November, the Annapolis Conference ends with parties issuing a joint statement committing to immediately implement their respective obligations under the Roadmap and working towards a peace treaty by the end of 2008.

2008: Israel broadens its sanctions and completely seals off the Gaza Strip. Later in the year, Israel launches “Operation Cast Lead”, a 22-day military assault on the Gaza Strip.

2009: Security Council passes resolution 1860 calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. HRC creates the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict to investigate violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Their findings are issued in the “Goldstone Report”.

2012: In November, Israel launches ‘Pillar of Defense’ an 8-day military operation against the Gaza Strip. Later that month, the General Assembly adopts resolution 67/19 granting Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the UN.

2013: Direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine are held following an initiative by US Secretary of State John Kerry to restart the peace process.

2014: Israel launches a large scale military operation codenamed “Protective Edge” on the Gaza Strip.

2016: UN Security Council adopts resolution 2334, stating that Israel’s settlement activity constitutes a “flagrant violation” of international law and has “no legal validity”.

2017: US President Trump announces that the United States would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

2018: US embassy in Israel moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

2020: US President Trump helps mediate Abraham Accords to normalize Israel’s relations with some Arab States and proposes a Peace Plan.

2022: General Assembly adopts resolution A/RES/77/23 requesting the Committee to Commemorate the Nakba for the first time in the history of the UN.

2023: Israel launches “Operation Swords of Iron” against Gaza following Hamas attack. South Africa initiates a genocide case against Israel at the ICJ.

2024: International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion declares the Israeli occupation unlawful. General Assembly demands an end to occupation in 12 months.

2025: From 28 to 30 July 2025, a High-Level International Conference took place in the UN Headquarters which adopted a final outcome document entitled “New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and Implementation of the Two-State Solution.”

- 16 September: the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel issued a new report stating that “Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip”.
- 22 September: the resumed Conference concluded with groundbreaking momentum as Heads of State and Government and other senior officials from 10 countries (Andorra, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Portugal and the United Kingdom) announced their recognition of an independent State of Palestine.

2026: On a positive note, on 25 April, Palestinians seized an important opportunity to exercise their democratic rights by participating in local elections in most of the West Bank and in Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip. The United Nations commends the Palestinian Central Elections Commission for its credible administration of the electoral process given the significant challenges present in the West Bank and the extraordinarily difficult conditions prevailing in Gaza. The United Nations remains committed to supporting and strengthening Palestinian institutions and promoting democratic governance.



**GRATITUDE FOR THE PAST;
COMMITMENT FOR THE
FUTURE.**

BRINGING HOPE TO FAMILIES, HELPING
VULNERABLE CHILDREN FIND THEIR RIGHTFUL
PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY, OFFERING A LIFE-
CHANGING OPPORTUNITY FOR MANY YOUNG
CHILDREN IN OUR CARE.



40TH ANNIVERSARY FILM

ABCD has created a film for our 40th anniversary highlighting the work carried out by our professional staff at all seven rehabilitation centres. Please find it on www.abcdbethlehem.org



Tel: (+44) 07593 546004 • www.abcdbethlehem.org • info@abcdbethlehem.org

✕ @abcd_bethlehem  @abcdbethlehem  @abcd_bethlehem

UK Registered Charity 1097623 • Company Number 04383155