RED NOSES
In Laughter there is Hope
مؤسسة الأنوف الحمراء الدولية–فلسطين

RED NOSES Palestine: A Human Story That Grows with Every Encounter

Since its establishment in Palestine, RED NOSES Palestine (RNPS) has been creating spaces where art and humanity meet, where caring for people goes beyond providing a service and becomes a relationship built on respect, creativity, and genuine human connection.

Not every story worth telling is linked to a major achievement or an extraordinary event. Some stories begin with a simple encounter, with a moment when someone discovers that they are seen and cared for, or with a small space that allows a person to express themselves in their own way. These small details form the story of RNPS, an organisation that chose to make art a part of everyday life and bring artistic and human centered experiences to people and communities who may not always have access to them.

In Palestine, where everyday life intersects with a range of social, humanitarian, and economic challenges, this mission takes on particular significance. Art is not a luxury detached from reality; it can be a means of communication, a window for self-expression, an opportunity to discover abilities, and a way to build new connections. In this sense, the story of RNPS goes beyond artistic performance to become a story about people and their right to participate, express themselves, and belong.

From an International Vision to a Palestinian Presence

RNPS is part of the international RED NOSES group, which was founded in Austria in 1994 and uses specialised artistic practices to reach people who need opportunities for joy and human connection. RNPS was established in 2010 and registered in 2012 as a branch of the RED NOSES international.

Since then, the organisation has continued to strengthen its presence within Palestinian society, drawing on the artistic expertise and training resources of the international network while remaining attentive to the particularities of the Palestinian context and the needs of the communities it serves.

Humanitarian organisations cannot simply transfer their experiences from one place to another without adaptation. They must understand the local environment, respect its culture, and listen to the people they aim to reach. What works in one context may need to be adapted in another, because genuine communication is not about delivering a ready-made experience; it is about creating a shared experience which reaches the heart of the people.

This is where the importance of RNPS' local work becomes clear: being an active part of the community, developing through collaboration with local institutions, and using art to reach people in different settings while maintaining the artistic and professional standards that underpin its work.

The Numbers Behind the Story

Behind every humanitarian organisation are people, encounters, and experiences. Numbers, however, also help us understand the scale and reach of its work.

RNPS reaches 28 institutions including governmental hospitals, elderly care homes, and rehabilitation centers that are visited regularly, with approximately 27,500 children and older adults benefiting from its programmes each year. Its team includes 26 trained healthcare clowns (males and females) who contribute to delivering these programmes through approximately 1,000 visits annually across 10 Palestinian governorates including cities, villages, and refugee camps. These figures reflect a journey spanning 16 years of experience, during which the organisation has worked to strengthen its community presence, expand access to the arts for different groups, and create human-centred spaces built on communication, creativity, and participation.

These figures offer a picture of the scale and diversity of the organisation's work, but they cannot fully capture its value. Numbers tell us how many visits take place, how many people are reached, and how many locations are involved. The human stories, however, lie in the

details of each encounter, the relationships that develop between people, and the opportunities these interactions create for participation and self-expression.

These indicators also remind us that artistic and humanitarian work requires a sustainable organisational structure, a trained team, strong relationships with local institutions, and careful planning to ensure that programmes reach diverse communities.

Art as a Space for Participation and Belonging

Art is sometimes viewed as an activity reserved for people with a particular talent or for those who have opportunities to take part in performances and cultural events. Community-based artistic practice offers a different perspective: art can be a space in which anyone can participate without needing to be a professional artist, possess a specific skill, or respond in a way that others expect.

Within this framework, RNPS seeks to bring artistic experiences closer to people and to treat participation as a fundamental value. Not everyone is expected to sing, move, speak, or show enthusiasm in the same way. One person may choose to participate actively, another may prefer to observe from a distance, while someone else may need more time to feel comfortable. At the same time, RNPS seeks to build partnerships that align with its vision, support its ongoing development, and reflect its commitment to professionalism and high standards.

These differences do not make one person's experience less valuable than another's. Rather, they remind us that people have different needs and ways of communicating, and that a meaningful human space is one that can accommodate these differences.

RNPS healthcare clown Dr Kishek Abu Laban, reflecting on his visit to the paediatric department at Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah, describes one such encounter:

“During my visit, I met Noor, a blind young girl, and it was a deeply moving encounter. We tried to connect with her through her senses, using touch, bubbles, music, and conversation at close range. Her happiness at meeting us was clear. Over time, her mother's interaction with us became more natural and warm. She began initiating play and picking up the little toys herself. This simple human interaction greatly supported our work and made our presence in the room feel warmer and closer.”

From this perspective, art becomes an opportunity to broaden our understanding of participation, challenge assumptions about who can take part and how, and create environments that are more open to diverse experiences and abilities.

When Difference Becomes Part of the Picture

The inclusion of people with disabilities is one of the areas reflected in RNPS' programmes. Inclusion should not be limited to making attendance possible or organising a suitable activity. It also raises deeper questions: Can each person find a genuine place within the experience? Are they given the opportunity to choose, participate, and express themselves without being defined solely by their disability or support needs?

A human rights-based approach to working with people with disabilities begins by recognising them as individuals with different personalities, interests, abilities, and preferences. Designing activities that take these differences into account, offering diverse ways to participate, and collaborating with specialised institutions are all important steps towards building more inclusive environments.

Art takes on additional value when it allows people to become active participants in an experience rather than simply receiving it. Participation creates room for choice, opens opportunities for self-expression, and helps build relationships that are not defined by differences or stereotypes.

RNPS healthcare clown Arida Al-Khafifa reflects on her visit to Star Mountain Rehabilitation Centre in Ramallah:

"In one of the autism classes, we worked with the children to create a full musical band. We distributed the instruments, played together, and sang three songs. For me, that was the most beautiful part: the children were not simply participants; they were genuinely part of the experience."

Through its programmes and initiatives, RNPS works towards this vision, guided by the belief that access to art, culture, and community participation should not be a privilege reserved for some groups while excluded from others.

From Artistic Skill to Professional Responsibility

The figure of the clown may be associated with spontaneity and improvisation, but specialised artistic work in healthcare and social settings requires much more than the ability to make people laugh. It calls for continuous training, awareness of the context, strong communication skills, teamwork, and the ability to respond to changing situations with respect and responsibility.

RNPS' commitment to training and capacity-building reflects an understanding of these requirements. Artists working in healthcare or social settings need to know how to interact with different people, when to take the initiative and when to wait, how to respect personal boundaries, and how to collaborate with the staff of the institutions they visit.

RNPS healthcare clown Dr Marzouq Abu Zanqa describes an experience from his visit to the paediatric department at Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah:

"In one room, a little girl with a neurological condition was crying. We completely changed our approach: we moved away from comedy and improvisation and used gentle singing until she calmed down and fell asleep. There was also a child in an isolation room whom we could not enter, so we held a little party for him from the doorway. His laughter was the most beautiful response in that moment."

Reflecting on what he learned from the visit, Dr Marzouq adds:

"A healthcare clown does not have just one way of interacting. Sometimes the role is to bring laughter into a room; sometimes it is to calm a child; and sometimes it is to connect with a person before their tears fall. In this context, comedy was not the goal itself; it was a way of reaching the person."

In this context, 2026 marked an important milestone in training. On June, the organisation announced the graduation of eight healthcare clowns who had completed 476 hours of training as part of the RED NOSES curriculum, which consists of eleventh specialised learning and training modules. According to that announcement, the total number of healthcare clown graduates reached 14 out of 26 clowns.

This milestone demonstrates that team development involves more than recruiting talented individuals. It requires a structured educational pathway, time, training, and the fulfilment of professional requirements. It also highlights the importance of investing in artists themselves, as the quality of fieldwork depends on their readiness to work in different environments and their ability to continue learning and developing.

Capacity-building is not separate from the organisation's mission. It is an essential part of ensuring the continuity and quality of its work and developing a team capable of responding to the needs of the communities it serves.

Partnership as a Path to Greater Impact

No single organisation can meet all the cultural, social, and humanitarian needs of a community. Every institution has its own expertise, every partner has a role to play, and every community has its own priorities. Partnerships are therefore an important element of community-based work, enabling organisations to exchange expertise, coordinate efforts, and reach different groups and settings.

For RNPS, partnerships with healthcare, social, cultural, and educational institutions create opportunities to develop programmes that respond to local contexts and expand access to art for people who may have limited opportunities to participate in cultural activities.

Partnerships also help build a shared understanding of the importance of the arts in community life, allowing institutions to learn from one another rather than working in isolation.

The value of these relationships goes beyond delivering an activity or organising a visit. Sustained collaboration can build trust, facilitate knowledge-sharing, and support initiatives that respond more effectively to people's actual needs. When partnerships are based on mutual respect and shared planning, artistic work has a greater opportunity to become a lasting part of cultural and social life.

In Palestine, Culture Is Part of Everyday Life

Community-based artistic initiatives in Palestine derive their meaning from their connection to people's lives and their ability to reach places where the arts may not be regularly accessible. Culture is not confined to theatres, halls, or major events. It can also exist in community institutions, educational settings, and places where people come together and share experiences.

This perspective invites us to reconsider the role of art in society: not only as a cultural product presented to an audience, but also as a practice that encourages participation and gives people opportunities to express themselves and interact with others. In addition, RNPS is committed to participating in

humanitarian activities and interventions in displacement areas, despite the challenges and difficulties healthcare clowns face in reaching these locations. Recognising the urgent need for such interventions, RNPS strives to reach as many communities as possible, while making the safety of its clowns its top priority. These efforts have also helped expand the organisation's network of partnerships in recent years and strengthen its presence in communities most in need.

At the same time, it is important not to expect art to do more than it can. Art alone cannot solve social or economic problems, replace essential services, or erase the effects of difficult circumstances. However, it can add a human dimension to everyday life and create opportunities for connection, expression, and shared experience.

The presence of organisations such as RNPS helps broaden the discussion about the place of the arts in society, the importance of making them accessible to different groups, and the need to recognise them as part of human and cultural life rather than as an optional activity that can always be set aside.

An Impact That Numbers Alone Cannot Measure

When we talk about an organisation that reaches thousands of people each year, it is easy to make numbers the focus of the story. Yet every number represents individuals with different experiences, needs, and ways of interacting with the world.

For this reason, the number of visits alone should not be the only measure of success. Other questions deserve attention: Do participants feel respected? Are they given genuine opportunities to participate? Are the activities suited to their needs? Does the organisation listen to their feedback? And are its programmes evolving in response to what it learns from experience?

These questions help shift the focus from measuring the scale of activity to understanding its quality, and from simply recording what has been delivered to considering how the work can be improved in the future.

Documenting experiences, listening to participants, staff, and partners, and learning from different situations are all practices that help organisations understand their impact more comprehensively. Human impact cannot always be measured by a single indicator; it requires attention to the nature of the experience, the relationships formed, and the extent to which the work responds to people's needs.

In this sense, every visit becomes an opportunity to learn, every partnership a space for development, and every new experience part of the organisation's ongoing journey to improve its work and extend its reach.

A Future Built Through Collaboration

Sustaining artistic and humanitarian work requires a clear vision, a team capable of growth, partners who believe in the value of the mission, and a community that recognises culture and the arts as part of its essential needs.

Looking ahead, RNPS has opportunities to strengthen collaboration with local institutions, develop artistic capacities, expand access for different groups and communities, and continue creating more inclusive spaces for participation. Currently, RNPS has built around 38 partnerships with local and international organisations, and the number is increasing every month.

Investing in new generations of artists, developing training and learning opportunities, and strengthening the exchange of expertise locally and internationally can all contribute to sustaining and developing this work.

Growth does not necessarily mean increasing numbers alone. It can also mean improving programme quality, refining working methods, listening more closely to communities, and building stronger, more sustainable relationships with partners.

An organisation that looks towards the future does not focus only on what it has achieved. It continues to ask what it can learn, which people it has not yet reached, and how it can make its work more responsive and diverse.

The Red Nose Is a Symbol; People Are the Story

Ultimately, the story of RNPS is not defined by the colour red alone, nor by the number of visits, cities, or institutions it reaches. It is rooted in the idea behind the work: that art can be close to people, that participation is a right rather than a privilege, that difference should not lead to exclusion, and that building human relationships requires time, care, and respect.

Sixteen years of experience represent more than a period of time. They reflect a journey in which experiences, skills, and relationships have accumulated, while continuous learning and development have become integral to the organisation's work.

The most important part of the story is the one that continues to unfold with every new encounter, every partnership built, and every space that allows someone to participate, express themselves, and find a place among others.

RNPS is more than a red nose or an artistic performance. It is an experience that places people at the heart of its work and believes that art can open doors to communication, bring culture closer to everyday life, and create new opportunities for communities to come together, express themselves, and participate.

Between the figures that document the scale of the work and the encounters that give it meaning, the story continues: the story of a Palestinian organisation that uses art as a language of connection, collaboration as a path towards sustainability, and respect for people as the starting point of every encounter.

RED NOSES Palestine — because art is for everyone, and every human encounter holds the possibility of a new story.