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

Recommendations and Key Outcomes of

The Creative Arts for Children's Mental Health Conference

This report summarises the conference's key recommendations, challenges, and main messages.

The Creative Arts for Children's Mental Health Conference was held on 29 July 2026

at A.M. Qattan Foundation in Ramallah.

Summary

The outcomes of the **Creative Arts for Children's Mental Health Conference** reaffirmed that creative arts are a powerful and effective approach to promoting children's mental health and psychosocial well-being. By providing safe spaces for self-expression, fostering resilience, and strengthening social inclusion, creative arts can make a meaningful contribution to the well-being of all children, including children with disabilities and those affected by crises. The discussions also highlighted that maximising the impact of these programmes requires a shift from isolated initiatives and short-term projects towards a coordinated, sustainable national approach that places children at the centre of all interventions.

The three discussion groups identified a shared set of strategic priorities that provide a roadmap for advancing the field:

- **Integrate creative arts into national policies and strategies** related to mental health, education, and child protection, recognising them as an essential component of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services for children.
- **Strengthen coordination and collaboration** among government institutions, civil society organisations, international partners, and the health and education sectors to ensure integrated and sustainable service delivery.
- **Ensure equitable access to creative arts programmes** for all children, including children with disabilities, by creating inclusive environments, removing physical and financial barriers, and designing programmes that respond to diverse needs.
- **Invest in strengthening the capacities of artists, educators, and mental health professionals,** while developing professional standards and practical guidance for the effective use of creative arts in MHPSS.
- **Engage children and their families as active partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmes** to ensure that interventions are responsive to their needs and experiences.
- **Promote the sustainability of programmes** through diversified funding, strengthened national institutional capacities, and long-term cross-sector partnerships.
- **Develop robust monitoring, evaluation, and documentation systems** to measure the impact of creative arts on children's mental health, document good practices, and generate evidence to inform advocacy and policy development.

Participants emphasised that implementing these recommendations requires a collective commitment from government institutions, civil society organisations, donors, the health and education sectors, and local communities. Through sustained collaboration and shared responsibility, creative arts can become an integral part of mental health and psychosocial support services for children in Palestine.

For more details on the discussion groups and their outcomes, please read the detailed report below.

Introduction

RED NOSES International-Palestine held the Creative Arts for Children's Mental Health Conference on 29 July 2026 in Ramallah, in partnership with six leading Palestinian arts and cultural organisations: The Palestinian Circus, The Freedom Theatre, Art to Heart, The Visual Arts Forum, Al Kamandjati Association, and the Palestinian Performing Arts Network. The conference brought together artists, cultural organisations, mental health professionals, donors, and local and international partners to explore the role of creative arts in promoting children's mental health. Through theatre, circus, music, healthcare clowning, and visual arts, participants explored how creative arts help children express themselves, build resilience, strengthen social connections, and foster hope.

The conference featured inspiring artistic performances, an exhibition of children's artwork, success stories, four speakers, and three discussion sessions aimed at developing practical recommendations to strengthen this vital field.

The conference recommendations and outcomes were developed through three interactive discussion groups, bringing together representatives from arts and cultural institutions, civil society organisations, and mental health experts. The discussions aimed to identify key challenges and develop practical, actionable recommendations.

Four leading cultural and arts organisations also presented their experiences: RED NOSES Palestine, Art to Heart, Al Kamandjati Association, and The Freedom Theatre. They shared their experiences of using the arts to support children's mental health, as well as the challenges they encountered in implementing these programmes.

The conference was held as part of the "Humour gives hope: Strengthening the mental health of vulnerable children & adolescents in Palestine through health clowning" project, funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMASGPK), and also under the project "Clowning for prosperity II: Unleashing joy, fuelling growth", and in partnership with Drosos Foundation.

Conference Objectives

- To explore the challenges faced by children with disabilities in accessing creative arts programmes in Palestine.
- To examine how creative arts-including healthcare clowning, music, performing arts, and visual arts- can support children's mental health by providing opportunities for emotional expression, reducing psychological distress, and creating safe spaces where children can express themselves freely.
- To discuss opportunities for collaboration among key stakeholders, including civil society organisations, government institutions, local communities, and donors, to develop sustainable programmes that support children's mental health in Palestine.
- To explore practical approaches for integrating creative arts into therapeutic and healthcare settings, with the aim of strengthening the quality of mental health and psychosocial support services provided to children.

RED NOSES Palestine

Al Kamandjati Association

The Freedom Theatre

The Palestinian Circus

The Palestinian Circus

The Visual Arts Forum

Art to Heart

Conference Outcomes

This report presents the key challenges, recommendations, and main messages that emerged from each of the conference discussion groups.

Discussion Group 1: Addressing Challenges and Advancing Inclusive Practices.

Facilitator: Mohannad Al-Shafie – Disability Inclusion Specialist.

The first discussion group was based on an interactive exercise that simulated the journey of a child with a disability-from leaving home, travelling to the targeted organisations, participating in an activity, and returning home. This exercise enabled participants to identify the barriers that children with disabilities may encounter at each stage of their journey and to develop practical recommendations for improving their access to creative arts programmes that support mental health.

The group brought together representatives from a wide range of organisations, including institutions working directly with children with disabilities, fostering a rich exchange of experiences and perspectives on inclusive practice.

The table below summarises the key challenges and recommendations identified under each thematic area.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
Accessibility	1. Improve the accessibility of the targeted organisations and the infrastructures leading to them, taking into account the needs of children with disabilities.	The location of the targeted organisations is not accessible, making them difficult for children with disabilities to reach.
	2. Provide transportation funds or financial support to remove financial barriers to the participation of children with disabilities.	The cost of participation and transportation is too high.
	3. Coordinate with local organisations to provide safe and accessible transportation.	Accessible transportation is unavailable.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
Inclusive Environment	4. Create inclusive environments by providing ramps, elevators, clear signage, Braille maps, and visual and auditory guidance to suit all kinds of disabilities.	Facilities and infrastructure are not accessible or inclusive.
	5. Involve children with disabilities and their families in the design and evaluation of arts programmes.	Activities are designed without consulting children.
	6. Ensure that inclusion is genuine, consistent, and embedded as an integral part of institutional practice.	Children with disabilities are not meaningfully included alongside other children.
Community Awareness and Engagement	7. Conduct awareness campaigns and integrate concepts of inclusion and the rights of children with disabilities into educational curricula and community activities.	Limited community awareness of the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities.
	8. Organise awareness sessions for parents on the role of creative arts in supporting children's mental health and development.	Limited parental involvement or lack of awareness of the value of the arts.
Workforce and Empowerment	9. Recruit and engage persons with disabilities within artistic, administrative, and training teams, to benefit from their knowledge and experience in dealing with children with disabilities.	Limited participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market and cultural sector.
	10. Provide specialised training on disability inclusion and communication with children with disabilities, preferably led by trainers with disabilities.	Limited capacity among staff working in the targeted organisations.
Safety and Risk Management	11. Establish emergency procedures and first aid measures that address the needs of children with disabilities.	Emergency procedures and first aid measures are not adapted to the needs of children with disabilities.
Programmes and Services	12. Develop arts materials and tools that are accessible to children with visual, hearing, physical, and intellectual disabilities.	Activities and materials are not suitable for all types of disabilities.
	13. Design inclusive arts programmes and projects from the planning stage to ensure they are accessible to all children without discrimination.	Inclusive arts projects are limited.
Sustainability	14. Integrate creative arts into sustainable programmes within schools and community organisations.	Projects are short-term and lack sustainability.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
	15. Strengthen partnerships among cultural, educational, health, and organisations of persons with disabilities.	Weak collaboration among organisations.
Monitoring and Evaluation	16. Develop tools to measure the impact of arts programmes on children's mental health and social inclusion.	Limited documentation of the impact of creative arts programmes.

Key Messages

The first discussion group concluded that ensuring equitable access to creative arts for children with disabilities extends beyond making buildings physically accessible. It requires systemic changes in policies, strengthened workforce capacity, meaningful engagement of children and their families, and enhanced collaboration across sectors.

Main Recommendations from Discussion Group 1

- Ensure that children with disabilities can access creative arts in the targeted organisations and programmes.
- Design inclusive arts programmes from the planning stage.
- Invest in capacity building and training for professionals and practitioners.
- Engage persons with disabilities and their families in the design and implementation of programmes.
- Strengthen partnerships and collaboration across different sectors.

Discussion Group 2: Creative Arts in Action

Facilitator: *Mohammad Abu Sakha*, Training of Trainers Programme Coordinator, The Palestinian Circus.

The second discussion group focused on the practical implementation of creative arts programmes that support children's mental health. Discussions explored the key challenges faced by organisations throughout the different stages of programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

The session provided participants with an opportunity to exchange experiences on the role of creative arts-including visual arts, music, theatre, circus, and healthcare clowning- in promoting children's mental health and psychosocial well-being. Participants also explored ways to strengthen existing arts-based interventions, enhance their effectiveness and sustainability, and integrate creative arts into therapeutic services, schools, and community centres.

The group brought together representatives from cultural and arts organisations, mental health and child protection organisations, and institutions providing services for children with disabilities. This multidisciplinary composition fostered a rich exchange of perspectives and reflected the diversity of expertise and needs across the sector.

The discussion resulted in a set of key challenges and recommendations, classified according to the different stages of programme design, implementation, and evaluation, as presented below.

Phases	Recommendations	Challenges
Planning Phase	1. Develop specialised training programmes for artists on mental health, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and child protection principles.	Limited knowledge among artists of the fundamental concepts of mental health and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).
	2. Develop continuous capacity-building plans for trainers and staff involved in arts programmes.	Lack of clear plans for the professional development of trainers.
	3. Develop national guidelines or professional standards for good practice in using creative arts to support children's mental health.	Absence of guidelines or standardised frameworks for implementing arts-based mental health interventions.

Phases	Recommendations	Challenges
	4. Strengthen networking and partnerships among arts organisations, mental health organisations, universities, government ministries, and donors to facilitate knowledge exchange, programme development, and sustainability.	Limited coordination among organisations.
	5. Establish a national database of organisations and practitioners working in creative arts and mental health to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing.	Lack of a national database of organisations and professionals working in the field.
	6. Promote teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities within organisations to ensure programme sustainability.	Some organisations rely heavily on individual efforts.
	7. Adopt an inclusive approach that ensures the participation of all children, including children with disabilities.	The need to ensure diversity and inclusion.
	8. Strengthen documentation and media coverage to highlight the role of creative arts in supporting children's mental health.	Limited documentation and media coverage of the results and impact of creative arts programmes.
Implementation Phase	9. Develop flexible contingency plans to ensure programme continuity during emergencies and crises.	The impact of the Israeli occupation on the continuity of activities and access to children.
	10. Strengthen partnerships with schools and the Ministry of Education to integrate creative arts into educational activities and programmes.	Limited coordination with schools and integration of creative arts into educational settings.
	11. Conduct awareness campaigns targeting families and local communities to promote understanding of the role of creative arts in supporting children's mental health.	Limited recognition among some community members of the value of the arts.
	12. Strengthen the meaningful participation of organisations, families, and local communities in the design and implementation of activities.	Limited engagement of partners in programme implementation.
	13. Define short, medium, and long-term objectives and link programme activities to clear outcome indicators.	Lack of clearly defined short, medium, and long-term objectives.
	14. Increase investment in creative arts programmes and integrate them into donor priorities as well as national mental health policies and strategies.	Limited funding allocated to creative arts programmes.

Phases	Recommendations	Challenges
	15. Develop sustainability plans through diversified funding, workforce capacity building, and stronger partnerships.	Limited sustainability of some programmes.
	16. Provide continuous practical training on the effective use of artistic materials tailored to the needs of children and target groups.	Variations in trainers' experience in using artistic tools and materials.
	17. Clarify professional roles and boundaries, and establish clear referral pathways for cases requiring specialised mental health care.	Confusion between the concepts of psychosocial support and psychological therapy.
	18. Ensure multidisciplinary teams that include artists, mental health professionals, and child protection specialists whenever needed.	Variation in the professional backgrounds of programme implementers.
Monitoring and Evaluation Phase	19. Develop evaluation tools that combine observation, artistic expression, and feedback from children and caregivers with quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure psychosocial outcomes.	Limited use of systematic evaluation tools to measure programme impact.
	20. Establish regular mechanisms for documenting good practices, challenges, and lessons learned to inform future programme development.	Limited documentation of lessons learned.
	21. Adopt a participatory approach that actively engages children in designing activities that reflect their needs and interests.	Limited involvement of children in designing programmes and activities.
	22. Conduct follow-up evaluations after programme completion to assess the sustainability of outcomes for children.	Limited measurement of the long-term impact of programmes.

Key Messages

The second discussion group concluded that creative arts are an effective tool for supporting children's mental health. However, maximising their impact requires integrated programme planning, continuous capacity building for practitioners, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and sustainable approaches to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Main Recommendations from Discussion Group 2

- Strengthen workforce capacity by providing integrated training for artists and mental health professionals on the combined use of creative arts and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) approaches.
- Enhance networking and partnerships among arts organisations, mental health organisations, universities, and government institutions to facilitate knowledge exchange and the development of joint programmes.
- Integrate creative arts into schools, community centres, and mental health and psychosocial support programmes, while ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Develop systematic impact assessment tools to measure the contribution of creative arts to improving children's mental health and psychosocial well-being.
- Promote the sustainability of programmes and community awareness through long-term planning, documentation of good practices, and advocacy highlighting the role of creative arts in supporting children's mental health.

Discussion Group 3: Building Sustainable Programmes and Strengthening Collaboration among Civil Society Organisations, Government Institutions, and Donors

Facilitator: Omayma Abdelrazeq, Case Management Specialist, Save the Children.

The third group focused on exploring the factors that contribute to the sustainability of creative arts-based mental health and psychosocial support programmes for children, through an interactive exercise titled **"The Sustainability Structure."**

Participants were divided into four groups representing the key stakeholders within the sustainability system: government institutions, medical institutions, donors, and national and international organisations and the local community. Each group discussed the role of the stakeholder it represented, the challenges it faces, and the actions needed to strengthen cooperation and coordination and ensure the sustainability of creative arts programmes supporting children's mental health, particularly in the most vulnerable settings. Each group then expressed the outcomes of its discussion by contributing to a shared creative visual structure that reflected the key elements needed to sustain these programmes.

The group included representatives from cultural and arts organisations, institutions working in mental health and child protection, as well as organisations providing services to children with disabilities. This enabled a multidisciplinary discussion that reflected the diversity of experiences and needs.

The discussion resulted in a set of key challenges and recommendations, organised under the main thematic areas presented below.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
Governance and Policy	1. Develop sustainable coordination and collaboration mechanisms among government institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations, the health sector, the education sector, and local communities to ensure integrated service delivery.	Lack of coordination and integration among sectors providing services for children.
	2. Develop national policies that recognise creative arts as an integral component of the	Absence of national policies supporting the

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
	mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) system and promote their integration into government programmes and services.	integration of creative arts into children's mental health programmes.
Supportive Environment and Child Protection	3. Support health and educational institutions in creating safe and child-friendly environments by strengthening their capacity to identify children at risk or with specific needs and to provide safe and appropriate referrals through established referral pathways.	Limited availability of supportive, child-friendly environments within health and educational institutions.
	4. Strengthen the capacity of organisations' staff through collaboration with specialized national and international organisations, thereby improving the quality of child protection and support services provided to children and their families.	Limited capacity of staff in health and educational institutions to identify children at risk or with specific needs and make safe and appropriate referrals.
	5. Ensure the provision of safe spaces for children and the implementation of child safeguarding policies across all mental health and creative arts programmes and institutions.	Limited availability of safe spaces and child safeguarding policies.
	6. Strengthen the capacity of healthcare workers as the first line of response by expanding partnerships with specialised national and international organisations and delivering specialised training programmes, such as mhGAP (Mental Health Gap Action Programme), and other recognised approaches, to equip non-specialized staff with the knowledge and skills needed to identify mental health conditions, provide appropriate initial interventions, and make safe and effective referrals to specialised services when required.	Limited knowledge and skills among non-specialised healthcare workers to identify and respond to mental health needs and provide appropriate psychological first aid.
Child and Community Participation	7. Adopt a participatory approach that actively engages children in identifying their needs, selecting activities, and evaluating programmes, recognising them as partners in designing interventions rather than passive recipients of services.	Limited participation of children in programme design.
Institutional Sustainability and Financing	8. Diversify funding sources and promote long-term investment in community-based creative arts programmes.	Many programmes rely on short-term funding.

Thematic Area	Recommendations	Challenges
	9. Invest in capacity strengthening and knowledge transfer for local organisations and practitioners to ensure programme sustainability beyond project funding.	Insufficient investment in strengthening the capacities of local organisations and professionals.
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Advocacy	10. Develop monitoring and evaluation systems and document success stories and programme impact to strengthen advocacy efforts and mobilise sustainable funding.	Limited documentation of programme impact and use of evidence for advocacy.
Emergency Preparedness and Sustainability	11. Develop flexible emergency preparedness and response plans to ensure the continuity of mental health and psychosocial support services during emergencies and crises.	Crises and the ongoing occupation disrupt the continuity of services.

Key Messages

The third discussion group concluded that the sustainability of creative arts programmes supporting children's mental health is a shared responsibility that extends beyond funding alone. It requires coordinated action among government institutions, civil society organisations, national and international organisations, donors, the health and education sectors, and local communities to establish supportive policies, safe environments, and integrated services that place children at the centre of programme planning, implementation, and evaluation as active partners.

Main Recommendations from Discussion Group 3

- Strengthen coordination and collaboration among government institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations, the health and education sectors, and local communities to ensure the sustainability of programmes.
- Integrate creative arts into national policies and strategies related to mental health, education, and child protection.
- Provide safe environments and implement child safeguarding policies across health, education, and community settings to promote children's well-being.
- Invest in strengthening the capacities of local professionals and supporting national institutions to ensure the sustainability of services beyond project funding.
- Engage children and their families as active partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmes, ensuring that interventions are responsive to their needs.

Acknowledgements

RED NOSES International – Palestine extends its sincere gratitude and appreciation to all partner institutions and organisations, experts, facilitators, and participants who contributed their time, expertise, and commitment to the success of this conference and to enriching its outcomes. Their diverse participation from the arts and cultural, health, community, and humanitarian sectors provided an important foundation for a multidisciplinary dialogue on the role of creative arts in supporting children's mental health and psychosocial well-being.

We highly value the contributions of the institutions that shared their experiences and practices, as well as the constructive discussions that contributed to identifying key challenges and opportunities and developing practical recommendations aimed at strengthening integration and collaboration across sectors. These outcomes represent an important step towards developing a more sustainable and coordinated approach to integrating creative arts into mental health and psychosocial support programmes for children.

As we conclude this report, we look forward to continuing this dialogue and translating the recommendations and outcomes into concrete pathways for action and meaningful partnerships that contribute to the development of sustainable programmes and enhance children's access to supportive services and practices, placing their mental health, well-being, and right to expression and creativity at the heart of our collective efforts.