



# IMPROVING CHILDREN'S WELLBEING: AN EVALUATION OF NRC'S BETTER LEARNING PROGRAMME IN PALESTINE

EVALUATION REPORT



**NRC**

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**IMPROVING CHILDREN'S WELLBEING:  
An evaluation of NRC's Better Learning Programme in Palestine**

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# 1

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The *Better Learning Programme* (BLP) aims to improve learning conditions for children and adolescents exposed to war and conflict in Palestine. The Better Learning Programme consists of two components: BLP 1 reaches out to all pupils and provides psycho-education and coping skills, while BLP 2 is a specialised intervention for those with chronic symptoms of traumatic stress. Both components combine a psychosocial and trauma-focussed approach.**

BLP focuses on improving pupils' learning capacity by empowering the school community, integrating coping techniques into daily teaching and learning, and encouraging pupils' natural recovery. The psychosocial support offered in both components aims: (1) to establish a sense of stability and safety; (2) to promote calming and a capacity for self-regulation; (3) to increase community and self-efficacy, including where to find support and how to give and receive support; and (4) to promote mastery and hope. Additionally, BLP works to strengthen collaboration between teachers, counsellors, and parents on supporting students' wellbeing and building resilience in the school community.

NRC Palestine introduced BLP as a pilot project in 2011 to address the acute psycho-educational needs of children affected by conflict-induced trauma in the Gaza Strip, but has since evolved significantly. It is now an approach that spans both acute emergency and more protracted crises situations across Palestine, with the expansion of BLP in 2014 to the West Bank. This evaluation:

❶ **RETROSPECTIVELY** examines what NRC has been able to accomplish to date in supporting and sustaining protective, inclusive, enabling learning environments through BLP's focus on psycho-educational support to learners affected by a combination of protracted and acute crises in Palestine; and

❷ **PROSPECTIVELY** help NRC strategize on how it can leverage on the successes and shortcomings of BLP's approach to date to ensure that institutional duty bearers in Palestine and other emergency settings can better support student wellbeing and learning outcomes through school-based psycho-educational support.

The evaluation was carried out in late 2016 by Dr. Ritesh Shah from the University of Auckland, using a range of methodologies, including secondary quantitative analysis of programme monitoring data, an extensive review of programme documentation, the collection of Most Significant Change (MSC) stories from beneficiaries, interviews with key stakeholders within and outside of NRC Palestine, and a series of validation workshops and discussions at the conclusion of the field work. Based on this, the evaluation reaches several key conclusions listed below:

- ➔ BLP has clear and demonstrable impacts when it comes to improving the wellbeing of participating children, by equipping them with skills for coping with the fear, stress, and anxiety of living in a context of continual conflict.
- ➔ BLP supports conditions for children to better succeed in school, by improving their ability to



focus/concentrate in class, strengthen connections between them/their parents and school actors, improve their ability to complete homework, and increase their overall enjoyment of school. That stated, the actual contribution it makes to learning outcomes – as measured by academic achievement or attendance – is difficult to measure, and existing data does not support such linkages.

- BLP also strengthens the home and school environment for students by improving the capacity of these duty bearers to acknowledge, respond to and address the symptoms of traumatic stress. That stated, BLP on its own, may not fully address the critical need for children to be protected at and on their way to/from school.
- Importantly, BLP also equips these duty bearers with skills of self-care, healing and support, which are vitally important in the context of Palestine.
- BLP appears to fill an important niche in the realm of PSS activities in Gaza and West Bank and several aspects of BLP are well aligned with international best practice.

- NRC has a clear and consistent approach for identifying target schools for BLP, based on prioritising the most vulnerable schools and communities.
- While there is a clear rationale and process for the targeting of beneficiaries within BLP 2 in participating schools, the degree to which this process is followed systematically varies.
- There remains a significant unmet need within the existing schools that NRC has targeted to date, suggesting a clear impetus for NRC to remain engaged in each of its schools for longer than it currently does within BLP.
- While BLP’s period of implementation is typically one solar year (12 months), this timeframe does not fully meet the needs of project beneficiaries, due to its misalignment with the academic year in Palestine, which spans August until June.
- To date, BLP is only partially institutionalised with its key partners (UNRWA and MoEHE) and it is unlikely that the programme in its full extent would be sustained at present independent of NRC’s continued engagement/ involvement with BLP.

Out of these conclusions come several key recommendations for NRC to consider:

- 1 The Theory of Change for BLP needs to be revisited and should inform the subsequent revision of BLP related M&E tools and approach, to ensure appropriate alignment and to maintain a clear and consistent evidence-base on both quality of implementation and outcomes observed.
- 2 NRC needs to refocus attention and priority on BLP 1 as its primary intervention and impact focus.
- 3 NRC should continue to strengthen BLP's complementary links to other initiatives (such as Improved Education and ICLA initiatives) aimed at improving the protection of children and educational institutions/actors in line with the INEE Minimum Standards.
- 4 NRC should consider planning for and obtaining funding support for a longer minimum period of implementation (18 months versus 12 months), dedicating more of its own staff time to follow up monitoring and support, particularly for BLP 1, and more broadly reconsidering its focus on maximising reach and scale over depth.
- 5 To improve the efficiency and management of NRC's own staff engaged in BLP, existing M&E processes and tools need to be both reconsidered and streamlined, to ensure that attention is given to both components of the programme, and process-driven, immediate, intermediate and long-term outcomes.
- 6 NRC needs to more firmly locate BLP as an inclusive education strategy within UNRWA and MoEHE, and ensure that it does not become perceived as solely a specialised form of PSS provision for severe individual cases.
- 7 Within the planned research into BLP in 2017, NRC should consider assessing the sustainability of impacts on one or more cohort of former beneficiaries, and exploring how context of implementation (i.e. Gaza/ West Bank) and gender shapes beneficiary needs, experiences, and outcomes.

For NRC globally, there are important lessons from the implementation experiences of BLP in Palestine regarding the critical compromises that are made between achieving scale and programme quality, broad-based versus specialised PSS support programme delivery, and the challenges that come about in measuring the educational outcomes of an intervention which straddles the child protection/education border. These are further discussed in the full report.

# 2

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>BLP</b>	Better Learning Programme	<b>NKVTS</b>	Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies
<b>ECHO</b>	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations	<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>GCMHP</b>	Gaza Community Mental Health Programme	<b>OCHA</b>	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>ICLA</b>	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance	<b>PSS</b>	Psychosocial support services
<b>INEE</b>	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies	<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation	<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>MoEHE</b>	Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education	<b>ToT</b>	Training of Trainers
<b>MRM</b>	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of Grave Violations against Children	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>MSC</b>	Most Significant Change	<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Refugee and Works Agency

# 3 INTRODUCTION

## THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF PALESTINE

As recognized by the 2016 Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Humanitarian Needs Overview, the situation in Palestine remains a protracted protection crisis with humanitarian consequences, driven by lack of compliance with international law on the part of the Occupying Power.

In the past couple of years increased and tightened procedures on checkpoints in the West Bank have been witnessed, and new checkpoints, road blocks, attacks on school premises and increased violations against children--which include detention, arrest, house detention and cases of individual displacement – have been reported. According to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of Grave Violations against Children (MRM), in the period of January until September 2016, 25,674 children were affected by violations against education: 6,494 students by attacks on their schools<sup>1</sup>, and a further 19,180 by a denial of access to education.<sup>2</sup> A separate Berzeit University study suggests that approximately 45% of children in Gaza and West Bank have seen soldiers besiege their school, 25% seen their school exposed to weapon fire and explosives, and 18% witnessed a schoolmate killed.<sup>3</sup>

In Gaza, during Operation Protective Edge in 2014, nearly 500,000 people were displaced and 147 schools destroyed. Until now, the population struggles to cope with high levels of continued

severe emotional distress and trauma of both children and their parents. Children continue to be victims of persistent rights violations, including exposure to violence, risk of death and injury from both state and non-state actors, arrest and detention, displacement, lack of safe access to good-quality education, poverty, discrimination and restricted movement. The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme's (GCMHP) Deputy Director General for Professional Affairs in July 2015 said that around 51% of Gaza's children and 31% of its adults continued to suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of Operation Protective Edge.

These conditions have a significant impact on children's ability to enjoy meaningful access to quality education, and to ensure that their learning is not interrupted or unduly affected by this crisis. The UN OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2016 estimates that 593,000 Palestinian children had their access to education affected by this crisis. Evidence suggests that despite the strong value traditionally placed on education in Palestinian society, and the historical resilience of the education system to withstand recurrent shocks, students' willingness, motivation and capacity to learn and the capacity of education personnel and service providers is suffering under such conditions.

<sup>1</sup> The MRM classifies this as: direct attacks against school children; forced entry for the protection of settlers; weapon fire on the school itself, raid/vandalism, fire or graffiti on school facilities; pillaging, looting, destruction or appropriation of school property (for military use or otherwise); and the appropriation of school facilities by military authorities. In 2016, nine direct attacks on schools were carried out, killing seven children and affecting 1,070 children.

<sup>2</sup> This MRM classifies this as: demolition or intended demolitions of school facilities; lost school time; search operations on around the school; threats of violence to the school and its staff; or weapon fire in the environs around the school.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Save the Children (2017) *Protecting Children Under Attack: Palestine Briefing*





The INEE Minimum Standards clearly state that:

“National authorities, communities and humanitarian organisations have a responsibility to ensure that all individuals have access to relevant, quality education in secure learning environments...[that] promotes the physical protection and psychosocial wellbeing of learners, teachers and other education personnel.”

As a result, within the most recent Humanitarian Response Plan for Palestine<sup>4</sup>, protection measures have been mainstreamed across all sectors. In education, this has been prioritised through the provision of “school based psychosocial support for children who face regular harassment in the West Bank and those still dealing with war trauma in Gaza.” UNOCHA estimates that approximately 265,000 Palestinian children remain in need of psychosocial support.

## NRC'S RESPONSE: THE BETTER LEARNING PROGRAMME

Since 2007, NRC, in cooperation with the Institute of Education at the University of Tromsø and the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), has developed and refined the Better Learning Programme (BLP). The programme aims to improve learning conditions for children and adolescents exposed to war and conflict. NRC in Palestine introduced BLP as a pilot project in 2011 to address the acute psycho-educational needs of children affected by conflict-induced trauma in the Gaza Strip, but has since evolved significantly. It is now an approach that spans both acute emergency and more protracted crises situations across Palestine, with the expansion of BLP in 2014 to the West Bank. Additionally, Operation Protective Edge in 2014 in Gaza, and the significant needs this conflict created for a psycho-educational intervention such as BLP in its aftermath, has led to a significant scale-up of NRC's efforts in the period since (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> UN Coordinator of Humanitarian Action, 2017 Palestine Humanitarian Needs Overview

<sup>5</sup> See Section 5.2.3 for a fuller explanation of how these beneficiary numbers are tabulated. The table amalgamates direct and indirect beneficiaries accounted for within BLP, based on data provided by NRC Palestine.

**Table 1: BLP Beneficiaries 2012-2016**

Beneficiary Group	2012	2013	2014		2015		2016 <sup>6</sup>		TOTAL
	Gaza	Gaza	West Bank	Gaza	West Bank	Gaza	West Bank	Gaza	
Child	67	179	55	53,610	1,906	54,650	4,533	92,342	207,342
Parent	0	0	196	10,125	247	2,750	1,636	1,771	16,725
Counsellor	337 <sup>7</sup>	617	10	128	26	212	90	83	1,503
Teacher	0	0	123	5,000	297	212	339	772	6,743
TOTAL	404	796	384	68,863	2,476	57,824	6,598	94,968	232,313

The Better Learning Programme consists of two components: BLP 1 reaches out to all pupils and provides psycho-education and coping skills, while BLP 2 is a specialised intervention for those with chronic symptoms of traumatic stress. Both components combine a psychosocial and trauma-focussed approach.

The BLP 1 is a general preventive tool based on education, crisis psychology and traumatic stress research and is administered by the teacher in the classroom. It provides explanations to students on normal reactions after experiencing crisis and focuses on teaching them relaxation methods to enhance their normal coping resources. Teachers are equipped with a guide that provides model language, but with scope to adapt to the circumstance and particular context. The intention is that BLP 1 is implemented as part of the normal classroom/school programme, and is aimed to strengthen the psychosocial wellbeing of all learners.

The BLP 2 targets pupils who report nightmares and sleep disturbances, linked to a conflict-inflicted trauma incidence, and uses a series of structured group and individual sessions to provide them with strategies for calming themselves and improving self-regulation. Trained

counsellors have implemented this component and run a more targeted and focussed initiative for those children suffering more acute forms of conflict-induced trauma. BLP 2 uses a more clinical approach with a clear sequence of activities and approaches which counsellors are expected to adhere to in running the sessions.

Both modules aim to improve pupils' learning capacity by empowering the school community, integrating coping techniques into daily teaching and learning, and encouraging pupils' natural recovery. The psychosocial support offered in both components aims: (1) to establish a sense of stability and safety; (2) to promote calming and a capacity for self-regulation; (3) to increase community and self-efficacy, including where to find support and how to give and receive support; and (4) to promote mastery and hope.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, BLP works to strengthen collaboration between teachers, counsellors, and parents on supporting students' wellbeing and building resilience in the school community.

The programme's scale-up across Palestine has been accomplished by training and using a cadre of Master Trainers (experienced BLP counsellors) who cascade training and support to colleagues in other schools. Within the umbrella of NRC's

<sup>6</sup> Numbers reported for 2016 are up to November only.

<sup>7</sup> In the first two years of BLP implementation, teachers, school principals and counsellors were aggregated together as beneficiaries. Numbers reported for 2012-3 for counsellors also include teaching staff trained.

<sup>8</sup> These goals are based on commonly accepted prevention efforts for dealing with traumatic stress (e.g., Hobfoll et al. 2007).

*Improved Education*<sup>9</sup> approach in Palestine, BLP has been added as an important component of this more comprehensive support to a smaller number of schools; that withstanding, it also operates as a standalone project in many other schools. BLP is now at a stage where the focus is shifting to mainstreaming BLP within the UNRWA system in Gaza, increasing penetration into MoEHE schools in both Gaza and West Bank, and considering how it can be replicated and expanded to NRC's Education in Emergency responses within the region.

## PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF EVALUATION

In 2014, BLP was evaluated to a limited extent, within a broader evaluation of NRC's Education programming in Palestine. At that time, the evaluation highlighted that learners with reduced frequency of nightmares showed increased concentration in class, increased motivation for schoolwork and a decrease in conflict and negative behaviour at school. Teachers and counsellors felt that the programme enabled them to better understand and support their pupils.

At that time period, however, BLP was still in its pilot phase, and since then it has rapidly expanded. As such, this evaluation comes at an important point in the history of BLP, and focuses most explicitly on BLP's evolution since the last evaluation in 2014.<sup>10</sup> It aims to (1) *retrospectively* examine what NRC has been able to accomplish to date in supporting and sustaining protective,

<sup>9</sup> This is based on a recommendation that came out of the 2014 evaluation of NRC's education programming in Palestine (Shah, 2014). *Improved Education*, typically runs over two years, and in addition to the psycho-educational support provided through BLP, also focuses on: (1) increasing the capacity of teaching and non-teaching school staff on child-centered teaching and learning approaches; (2) increasing community involvement in schooling by establishing and activating parent associations and supporting recreational and awareness raising activities in partnership with the school and other partners; (3) providing legal awareness to students, parents and teachers and supporting the existing referral system for protection; and (4) providing small capacitation grants to allow targeted schools to meet gaps in provision of materials, especially improved teaching and learning aids.

<sup>10</sup> It is acknowledged that while the original ToR suggested that the evaluation limit investigation to the period from 2014 onwards, it was agreed to also, to an extent, explore longer-term impacts for those in Gaza who participated in BLP prior. It allowed the evaluation to explore whether BLP approaches/ techniques allowed children and their caregivers to better withstand the stressors of the 2014 conflict, which was the most intense one experienced in Gaza since 2008.

inclusive, enabling learning environments through BLP's focus on psycho-educational support to learners affected by a combination of protracted and acute crises; and (2) *prospectively* help NRC strategize on how it can leverage on the successes and shortcomings of BLP's approach to date to ensure that institutional duty bearers in Palestine and other emergency settings can better support student wellbeing and learning outcomes through school-based psycho-educational support. Several key lines of enquiry, specified in the original Terms of Reference for this evaluation, were reworded and simplified in the initial evaluation plan. The particular questions/areas, which this evaluation gives specific attention to, are as follows:

- ➔ Impact: What have been the intended and unintended outcomes for BLP participants (male and female) and participating duty bearers (counsellors, teachers and caregivers)? What influence has the context and approach to implementation had on outcomes noted?
- ➔ Relevance: How relevant and responsive has BLP been to the needs of participating children and their duty-bearers, and the education system as a whole in Palestine?
- ➔ Targeting: Has BLP's approach to identifying, selecting and addressing needs of project beneficiaries been appropriate and ensured that those most likely to benefit from its activities have been selected?
- ➔ Efficiency: Have the resources and support deployed for BLP been sufficient and appropriate to the needs identified for project beneficiaries, and if not, what factors have constrained this?
- ➔ Sustainability: Can the impacts/effects of BLP be sustained with children and responsible duty bearers within the context of Palestine; and how/in what ways can the project as a whole be supported by local partners (MoEHE and UNRWA) independent of NRC's involvement?
- ➔ Scale: What practices and factors might enable effective scale-up of this programme, in Palestine and regionally?

# 4 METHODOLOGY

**The evaluation adopted the following approaches to answering the evaluation questions noted in the Introduction: (1) Key stakeholder interviews with key individuals within NRC and externally; (2) Desk review of project documentation to date; (3) Further quantitative analysis of project-collected data and UNRWA student achievement/attendance records of former BLP 2 beneficiaries; (4) Most Significant Change stories collected from past project beneficiaries; and (5) Workshops with NRC Education team/key internal stakeholders at the conclusion of fieldwork. For each question within the evaluation, data was triangulated from at least two different approaches/sources.**

## KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The evaluation was carried out in late 2016. An inception period, to review existing programme documentation and identify gaps in data, was followed by nearly three weeks in Palestine in late October/early November. During that time, key stakeholders were interviewed, Most Significant Change stories collected, and workshops and discussions with NRC team members held. Following completion of the fieldwork, further data analysis was carried out, particularly of additional monitoring information collected from students, counsellors, teachers, and parents within the current period of implementation. Below is a brief description of the methodologies employed in this evaluation, including a description of how data was collected and analysed from these approaches.

Key stakeholder interviews occurred with individuals within NRC and external to NRC to understand: (1) the impact and relevance of BLP within the broader educational/psycho-educational support landscape of Palestine; (2) assess the ways in which BLP is both perceived, understood and enacted within NRC and externally by local partners. A semi-structured interview guide for internal and external stakeholders was developed and is appended to this report. A total of 9 individuals internal to NRC Palestine, and 8 external to NRC from a range of organisations were interviewed. The organisations spoken to are included in the appendices.

Additionally, within the 8 schools visited across West Bank and Gaza as part of the MSC story collection process, interviews or focus group discussions were held in each setting with teachers, counsellors and the school principal. The aim of these interviews was to elicit more information on the potential sustainability of BLP beyond the period in which NRC is directly involved in supporting efforts in the school. The same was done for a group of master trainers and an area supervisor in Gaza. In total 14 teachers, 1 area supervisor, 2 master trainers, 8 school counsellors, and 8 school principals were interviewed.

## DESK REVIEW OF EXISTING DOCUMENTATION

A number of documents were provided to the external evaluator by the NRC Palestine Education team and reviewed as part of the evaluation. This documentation included the BLP 1 and 2 Manuals, BLP Guidelines/Terms of Reference; presentations to parents/caregivers and others about BLP; and funding proposals related to BLP along with associated progress reporting.

This documentation provided a wealth of information on the intent, design and implementation stages of BLP to date, and where appropriate is included in this evaluation as either background or evidence.

## ADDITIONAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As part of data collection with BLP 2 groups in the current programme implementation year (2016), NRC has begun to collect data on student wellbeing, at two time periods (pre/post), rather than solely at the outset, as was done in the past. This provided opportunity for the evaluation to further analyse these data in terms of self-reported changes. Such analysis also afforded various types of disaggregation, in terms of student demographics, location of implementation and context of implementation.<sup>11</sup> Several different data sets from various BLP 2 cohorts in West Bank and Gaza were combined together. Data was available from a total of 584 students.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, NRC has also begun to collect data on changes in parent, counsellor and teacher

knowledge and capacity to support children in dealing with traumatic events. This is based on training/information sessions that these groups receive as part of BLP where surveys are administered prior to, and following these sessions. The first complete set of pre/post surveys from this group was recently collected in both West Bank and Gaza and was included, as much as possible, in this evaluation with analysis exploring shifts noted from these self-reported surveys. Due to the limited numbers of respondents in each stakeholder group, it was not possible to further disaggregate these data.

Finally, in an attempt to assess whether there is any evidentiary link between students' participation in BLP and improved education outcomes, understood for this evaluation to be reflected in improved academic achievement<sup>13</sup> and improved attendance at school<sup>14</sup>, data from UNRWA in Gaza was requested for past BLP 2 student cohorts who completed their participation prior to the end of the 2015-6 academic year. Longitudinal data from the 2011-2 academic years onwards was successfully obtained for approximately 329 students.<sup>15</sup> Given, however, the fact that NRC's implementation period spans over two academic years due to funding cycles<sup>16</sup>, it became apparent that only students who were part of BLP 2 in NRC's 2012-3 and 2013-4 years would have sufficient years of data to examine patterns longitudinally (before, during and after the intervention for at least one year). Analysis is thus limited to a smaller sample set of 41 students for whom data was available. For this reason, no remark can be made on statistical significance of the trends noted.

<sup>11</sup> Context of implementation was only explored by comparing MoEHE and UNRWA schools. Initially it was intended to also compare BLP only to BLP within Improved Education schools. Unfortunately, data from only 29 students was available from BLP+IE schools, making comparison impossible. This will, however, be further explored in the planned 2017 external evaluation of Improved Education.

<sup>12</sup> This included: 242 males and 309 females (with 33 students unidentified by their sex); 405 students from UNRWA and 179 students from MoEHE; and 463 students from Gaza and 121 from West Bank.

<sup>13</sup> Within the UNRWA system this is reflected in their overall academic average at the end of the year across all subjects.

<sup>14</sup> Captured within the UNRWA system as complete days the student attended school.

<sup>15</sup> Obtaining this data from UNRWA proved challenging due to the fact that NRC has not collected the students' ID numbers as part of its own data collection processes, instead using names, school name, and age. In several instances matching student names to the names stored in the UNRWA database proved difficult due to duplications or differences/similarities in spelling of the names.

<sup>16</sup> While NRC has traditionally labelled its implementation years as spreading over two calendar years (in line with the academic year), the reality is that active implementation has only occurred in the latter of the two years. For example, students in NRC's BLP 2BLP 2 2012-3 cohort would have participated in BLP 2BLP 2 groups over the span of the 2012 calendar year, which spans two academic years: 2012-3, and 2013-4, given that the academic year starts in late August/September and ends in May/June.



## MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE (MSC) STORIES

MSC was used to collect stories of change from a sample of BLP 1 and 2 direct and indirect beneficiaries during the field visit. MSC is a collaborative, qualitative evaluation method that has gained significant attention within international development circles in the past decade.<sup>17</sup> It provides information that can be used to identify impacts of an initiative and promote programme learning (such as improving implementation, and identifying and addressing negative or unexpected outcomes). In MSC, participants of an initiative, as well as those responsible for managing and implementing such activity, are asked in an interview to identify at least three positive or negative changes, from their perspective, that are the result of the initiative in question. From this, each individual selects the one change that they believe is most significant to them, and the interviewee documents a narrative story of this change, documenting what things

were like prior to the change, the change itself, and what things are like after the change. The interviewee also documents why this change is significant to the narrator, and the narrator also provides a short title for the story.<sup>18</sup> In the case of this evaluation, stories of change were collected from those who have been beneficiaries of BLP since 2013.<sup>19</sup>

A sampling framework for the types of schools to be visited for MSC story collection, and the number of individuals of each type was sent to NRC during the inception phase.<sup>20</sup> NRC, in consultation with the evaluator, then selected the schools in line with this criterion and communicated to the school counsellor the individuals they should recruit on the day of the evaluation visit. While initially, the intention was to visit 9 schools – 5 UNRWA and 4 MoEHE schools – across West Bank and Gaza, in the end

<sup>17</sup> See Davies, R. and Dart, J. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to Its Use. [www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf); or Shah, R. (2014). Assessing the 'true impact' of development assistance in the Gaza Strip and Tokelau: 'Most Significant Change' as an evaluation technique. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55 (3), 262-276.

<sup>18</sup> An MSC interview guide for adult interviewees is provided in this report. For participating BLP children a modified approach was where they were asked to draw a picture before and after their participation in BLP and then asked to narrate (orally) a story about this. Selected pictures are included in the appendices.

<sup>19</sup> It is acknowledged that while the original ToR suggests that the evaluation limit investigation to the period from 2014 onwards, the evaluation suggests exploring 2013 for a particular reason. The 2013 cohort would have completed BLP shortly before the commencement of the 2014 Gaza War. Given the acute nature of this conflict, assessing whether BLP approaches/techniques allowed children and their caregivers to better withstand the stressors of that conflict should be of interest, particularly from the standpoint of longer-term impacts of the programme.

<sup>20</sup> This initial framework is included in the Appendices



## FINDINGS/SENSE-MAKING WORKSHOPS

the evaluation visited 8 schools – 3 UNRWA and 5 MoEHE. This was due to a UNRWA strike affecting NRC’s access into schools during the period of the evaluation. Additionally, within schools, counsellors were sometimes unable or unwilling to recruit the required number of students, teachers and parents, particularly for BLP 1, within the confines of the school’s schedule.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, a total of 91 stories of change were collected, from 1 school principal, 54 BLP 1 and BLP 2 students, 6 counsellors, 11 teachers and 19 parents. Stories were collected predominately by the external evaluator (using translation assistance), but in some schools, a member of NRC’s M&E team also collected stories. In addition to collating all the stories into a collection (see annexes), all 257 changes described/noted by the storytellers were thematically analysed. This analysis is presented later in this report and themes discussed are reported as percentages, based on the frequency which a particular theme is mentioned as compared to the overall number of changes discussed by this group of stakeholders.

At the conclusion of the evaluation visit, two separate workshops were held. The first workshop was for the teams in West Bank and Gaza, respectively to review all the MSC stories collected, and deliberate on which 2-3 stories best reflect BLP to date. The deliberations, as well as the final stories selected helped to inform aspects of this evaluation, particularly as it relates to the key values and beliefs held about BLP by the programme team. Stakeholders from NRC’s key partners – MoEHE and UNRWA – were also invited and participated in the discussion.

Following on this, a presentation of key data and the conclusions that could be drawn on this to date was presented to the teams. Time was afforded within this to discuss and debate the conclusions reached, and for the teams themselves to identify the possible implications of these conclusions in terms of ways forward. These perspectives helped to inform the final conclusions and recommendations included in this evaluation.

<sup>21</sup> In some cases, this was due to counsellors expressing reservations about asking parents, teachers and students about an initiative, which they felt they would know very little about personally. In other circumstances, it proved difficult to manage to speak to all stakeholders in a 3-4 hour window (the length of the day in practical terms in most schools).

# 5 FINDINGS

## 5.1 IMPACT AND RELEVANCE

This section assesses the evidence collected and/or reviewed in the course of the evaluation against the question of the impact (intended and unintended) on the key beneficiary groups which BLP 1 and 2 work with, and to also understand whether factors such as the context of implementation or the demographics of the beneficiary have some effect on impacts observed. As part of exploring impact, attention is given to the longer-term impacts which beneficiaries note to result from their participation in BLP. These impacts are categorised into the broad outcome areas currently specified in the programme's theory of change, but not in terms of order of importance or degree of impact.

The relevance of these impacts for BLP 1 and BLP's 2's direct and indirect beneficiaries and more broadly for the Palestinian education sector as a whole, are also explored in this section. In considering this, BLP is assessed alongside the range of other PSS interventions in Gaza and West Bank, to identify its added value.

### NIGHTMARE STORIES (BLP II participant, male, Gaza)

A year ago, I was having dreams that my brother was dying. Then a few days later this actually happened. This made me really sad. I then started to dream that my parents were dying as well. Because my previous dream had come true, I became really worried and would wake up to check that it was in fact a dream. I even would walk outside my room in the middle of the night just to see if my parents were alive. The school counsellor distributed information about BLP to my parents, and held a session with them. He also went around to our classrooms and encouraged us to come see him if we were suffering from nightmares. I decided to go see him after my parents told me to do so, and did the pre-screening tool. I started the sessions recently. In these sessions we've started to talk about our nightmares and been practicing the stress and release exercises. We've also learned how to respect each other, behave appropriately, and keep our nightmares confidential. This has made me feel a bit better but I still suffer. Last night for example, I woke up again with a bad dream and could not go to sleep for some time.

### 5.1.1 BLP SUPPORTS CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

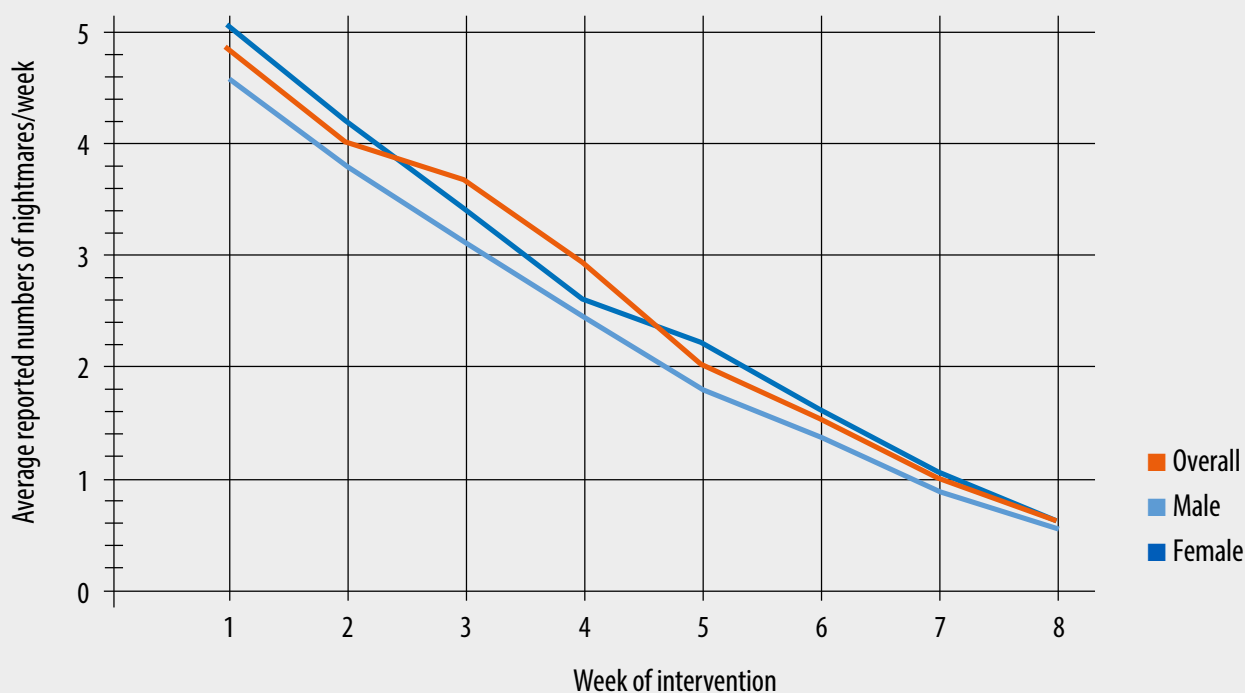
Recently, NRC has developed a theory of change for the BLP that aims to better articulate the impacts the programme is expected to have in the immediate, medium and long-term. One of the immediate impacts, particularly for the children participating in BLP 2 is a reduction in the frequency of nightmares. Strong evidence exists of this, in both the nightmare tracking sheets filled out by counsellors on a weekly basis over the 8-week course of intervention (see Figure 1), as well as a number of the MSC stories collected.

As Figure 1 suggests, children's nightmares were often drastically reduced from an average of nearly 5 nightmares per week at the outset of their counselling sessions, to on average less than 1 per week after 8 sessions. Approximately 58% of the 584 students from the 2016 collated sample reported to not be suffering from any nightmares at all by the last week of their sessions.

A number of stories of change clearly articulated the process by which children's nightmares were reduced through their participation in BLP 2, such as the one below.



**Figure 1:** Average number of nightmares per week reported by 2016 BLP 2 beneficiaries



This story was selected by the NRC Education team in Gaza as one of its two stories of significant change because it was felt that it clearly shows the impact that nightmares have on children’s wellbeing, and the fact that fear of loss and death are common drivers of nightmares in the context of Gaza.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, NRC felt this story identifies the process of ‘treatment’ clearly and vividly, but also provides a pragmatic perspective on what the programme can and cannot do. While by the end of the eight weeks many children do report to suffer no more nightmares, the NRC team in Palestine do not fully believe that this data accurately reflects the reality of the situation, where it might be expected that children may still suffer from nightmares from time to time. Rather, as the BLP Roving Capacity Building Coordinator noted, “*it is normal that nightmares will return... but the idea is that if a traumatic event reoccurs, they are better able to help themselves, and to know where to go for help.*” Evidence of this actually occurring surfaced in a number of other stories, where children discussed the idea of continuing to

use what was learned in their sessions long after, particularly when nightmares return.<sup>23</sup>

Both components of BLP intend to promote calming and self-regulation amongst students by teaching them about how the body and mind are connected to each other, and how a stressed mind impacts on the body and vice-versa. In both components, students practice a range of calming techniques and find their own combination of relaxation exercises to regulate their reactions to stress. 22% of students, in their stories of change, described how it was one of the more significant changes from the participation in BLP, making it the category of change most remarked upon across all the stories (see Figure 3). As a student in one story described, “*...the balancing act...really helps me relieve all the stress inside my body. Right now, I feel more calm, and I don’t feel afraid all the time anymore;*” and as another commented in her story, “*The breathing exercises help me to feel more relaxed, and I feel as if my fears start to escape out of my body when I do them.*”

<sup>22</sup> While this story was selected by the NRC Palestine Gaza team, it should be noted that the nightmare described and detailed is not a typical trauma related nightmare.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, MSC stories 9, 23, 26, 33.

## BLP TECHNIQUES

The Better Learning Programme teaches students to use and practice a number of different coping techniques for dealing with the ongoing fears and anxieties of living in conflict. These include:

- ➔ Tense and release – a relaxation exercises aimed at releasing muscular tension by applying tension in various parts of the body (arms/hands, face, neck/shoulders, stomach, and legs/feet), holding that tension for several seconds, and then releasing it.
- ➔ Breathing activities – a series of different activities that aim to get students to focus and control their breathing, by teaching them to breath through their belly and exhale slowly.
- ➔ Safe place – a visualisation technique which encourages students to use their imagination to create a place in their minds where they feel safe, happy, and relaxed.
- ➔ Concentration and balancing exercises – a series of poses (palm, tree, eagle and balancing) which allows students to focus on the mind-body connection, bring them into the present, and restore inner balance.
- ➔ Stretching exercises – a series of different stretching exercises with different parts of the body (spine, side, neck, shoulders, chest) using a range of different poses and movements.



Parents of these children also observed this change in their children frequently, with improved self-regulation of their children featuring prominently in the range of MSCs identified by them (Figure 9). One mother described how, “...now when my daughter wakes up with a nightmare, she knows how to deal with them through the relaxation exercises, and she is able to support herself better.” Data from a recent group of 385 BLP 1 parents surveyed in Gaza affirms how children are using these exercises at home. The majority of them reported that their children were using the tense and release (63%), concentration and balance (61%), and deep breathing exercises (64%) all the time at home to relieve stress, tension and/or boredom.

Beyond these immediate aims, NRC’s theory of change also suggests that in the medium to long-term improved self-regulation and reduced nightmares should contribute to improved

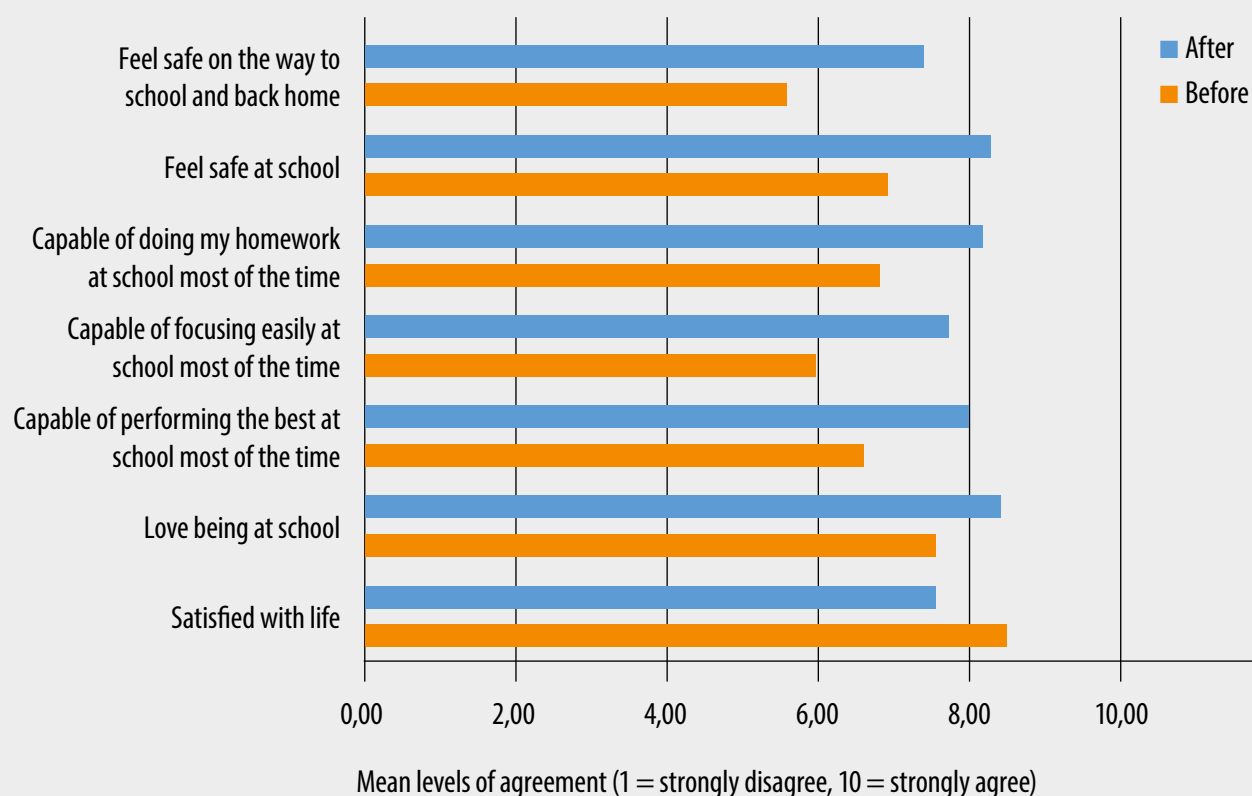
engagement in education/schooling, greater life satisfaction, and students feeling more comfortable to share their feelings with others. Strong evidence exists, from the wellbeing survey data and other data collected/analysed of these impacts.

As Figure 2 below suggests, mean levels of agreement to all statements on NRC’s wellbeing survey show improvement over the course of the BLP 2 intervention.<sup>24</sup>

Disaggregation of data reveals that between males/females, UNRWA/MoEHE schools, Gaza/West Bank, there are similar patterns of improvement between pre and post mean scores. There are however, differences between these groups in terms of the percentage of students who respond more positively to these statements after their participation in BLP than before (see Table 2 below).

<sup>24</sup> The well being survey was administered at two time points: immediately prior to the commencement of BLP 2 sessions with students, and immediately following the end of BLP 2 sessions with the same students.

**Figure 2:** Mean levels of agreement on wellbeing survey from 2016 BLP 2 Participants



**Table 2:** Percentage of students with improved levels of agreement at the end of BLP 2 to wellbeing survey

Statement	Male	Female	UNRWA	MoEHE	West Bank	Gaza
Satisfied with life	65.70%	59.22%	56.05%	70.95%	67.77%	58.75%
Love being at school	45.04%	33.98%	36.79%	46.93%	48.76%	37.58%
Capable of performing the best at school most of the time	55.79%	54.37%	50.62%	63.69%	64.46%	52.05%
Capable of focusing easily at school most of the time	64.46%	58.58%	57.28%	67.60%	66.94%	58.75%
Capable of doing my homework at school most of the time	50.83%	45.95%	36.79%	46.93%	66.12%	43.41%
Feel safe at school	54.96%	45.95%	50.62%	63.69%	42.15%	49.89%
Feel safe on the way to school and back home	57.85%	54.37%	57.28%	67.60%	47.11%	55.94%

**Figure 3:** Types of changes noted by BLP 1 and 2 children from MSC story collection (as % of overall number of changes)



What the table reveals is that males are more likely to report improvements than females, and students in MoEHE schools more likely to report improvements than students in UNRWA schools across all categories. For differences between Gaza and West Bank, there is an interesting split in responses – where for most statements, students in West Bank are more likely to report improvements than students in Gaza, yet when it comes to feeling safe at and on the way to/from school the situation is the opposite. This may be a product of the areas which NRC targets in West Bank – areas like Hebron H2, where students face settler attacks, military operations, and harassment going through checkpoints on a continuous basis.

One of the clear changes identified by children in their stories of change (see Figure 3 above)<sup>25</sup> was a sense that what they had learned through their participation in BLP had made them less afraid (19%) with improved ability to be more calm and relaxed in stressful situations (16%). As one child described in her story, “*The breathing exercises*

*help me to feel more relaxed, and I feel as if my fears start to escape out of my body when I do them. Now I’m not afraid all the time...only when I pass the checkpoints to and from school everyday.”* This impact does not appear to be captured at present in the BLP Theory of Change, despite the fact that one of the key aims of BLP, as specified in its manuals, is to restore a sense of stability and safety to children living in the context of conflict.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, data from the wellbeing survey (see Table 2) suggest differences between West Bank and Gaza in regards to children who show improvements in their sense of safety and security both in and on their way to and from school. Specifically, respondents from the West Bank had lower levels of agreement to the statements “I feel safe on my way to/from school” and “I feel safe at school”, particularly girls, and less than half of the respondents in West Bank responded more positively to these statements because of their participation in BLP. In a number of MSC stories as well, is a clear indication that while having the

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that Figure 3 aggregates changes specified by both BLP 1 and 2 students. Further disaggregation might suggest different percentages but was not done within the analysis completed as part of writing this evaluation. That stated, a number of stories collected from BLP 1 participants also discussed reductions in nightmares, despite it not being a focus of BLP 1. See for example MSC stories 14, 19, 20.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, BLP 1 Manual, p. 7-8

## STRESS AND FEAR (BLP 1 participant, male, West Bank)

I used to feel a lot stress and fear, particularly when I go to sleep. I was afraid of the trees and leaves that move in the dark with the wind. I also would feel tired often because I work in the supermarket with my father after school. It meant at school I often lacked energy and was not that motivated. Then I learned to do the breathing and balancing exercises that my teacher taught us. I feel more active now, with more energy and concentration at school. I can now do whatever the teacher asks me to do.

self-regulation skills which BLP 1 or 2 teach and reinforce is helpful to some degree, it cannot erase on its own the protection concerns and needs of the protracted crisis, particularly when threats are more episodic and persistent in nature.<sup>27</sup> As one student from West Bank noted at the end of her story:

“*Now I'm not afraid all the time...only when I pass the checkpoints to and from school everyday.*”

In recognition that psycho-education support on its own may be insufficient to address the protection needs of children, families and educational institutions within West Bank in particular, NRC under a recent ECHO funded project, has brought together support provided by BLP with an Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance Programme (ICLA)<sup>28</sup>, and the provision of emergency school MoEHE approved kits.<sup>29</sup> The intention of this broader intervention is to better support NRC's overall education programme goal for Palestine of promoting a more inclusive,

protective and enabling education environment for those most vulnerable.

While BLP to date has not been designed to link directly to the learning outcomes, there is growing interest and attention in linking PSS interventions like BLP more directly to such aims.<sup>30</sup> This was assessed in this evaluation by exploring whether participation in BLP 2 had any discernible impacts on patterns of school attendance and academic performance.<sup>31</sup> Data from past cohorts<sup>32</sup> of BLP 2 in Gaza suggests, that on average, their performance trends in school roughly mirror that of their grade cohort during and following participation in the programme (see Figure 4 for an example). Also interesting is the fact for most BLP 2 cohorts<sup>33</sup>, prior to their participation in the programme, they appear to be performing at similar levels to, or stronger than their grade-level cohort. This suggests that there may be a selection bias in which students BLP 2 attracts into the programme – namely well-performing, rather than under-performing students impacted by trauma.<sup>34</sup> It is an issue that could be further explored in further research.

<sup>27</sup> See for example MSC stories 14, 19, 38, 50, 77

<sup>28</sup> This focuses on providing students, school staff and parents with: (1) legal information sessions to target schools on relevant legal issues including Housing, Land and Property (HLP), residency, freedom of movement and settler violence; (2) Responding to incidents/violations against students and schools by various legal steps including documentation and data collection, providing preliminary legal advice and referral and follow up, and; (3) assistance in the development of the advocacy activities around these violations.

<sup>29</sup> Schools are surveyed as to their needs for emergency supplies and materials (i.e. first aid and medical equipment, fire extinguishers, hygiene kits, cleaning detergents, nutritional snacks, security surveillance etc.)

<sup>30</sup> For example, in NRC's most recent education strategy (2017) in Palestine, BLP is situated as an initiative that does contribute to improved learning outcomes. What these learning outcomes might be, and how it might contribute in concrete ways is a matter that is to be further explored with the upcoming research into BLP, which is to be carried out, by NRC and University of Tromsø.

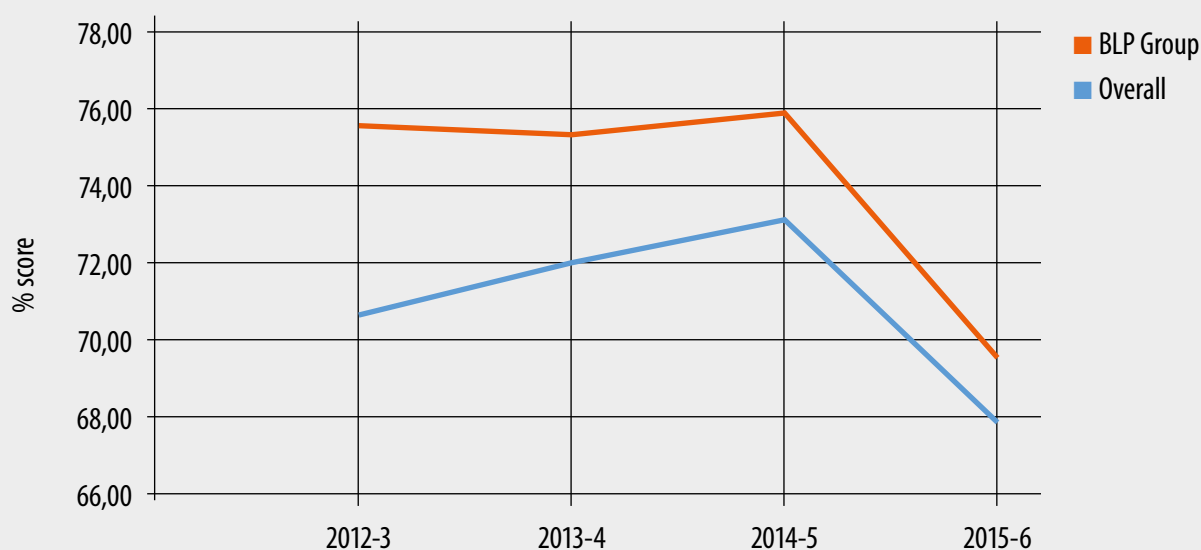
<sup>31</sup> The reason these two measures of learning outcomes were chosen is because they were readily available from UNRWA at the time of the evaluation, and also because they are important proxies for two dimensions of SDG 4, that of access and learning.

<sup>32</sup> Analysis was done on the 2014 and 2015 cohorts as well, but is not presented here.

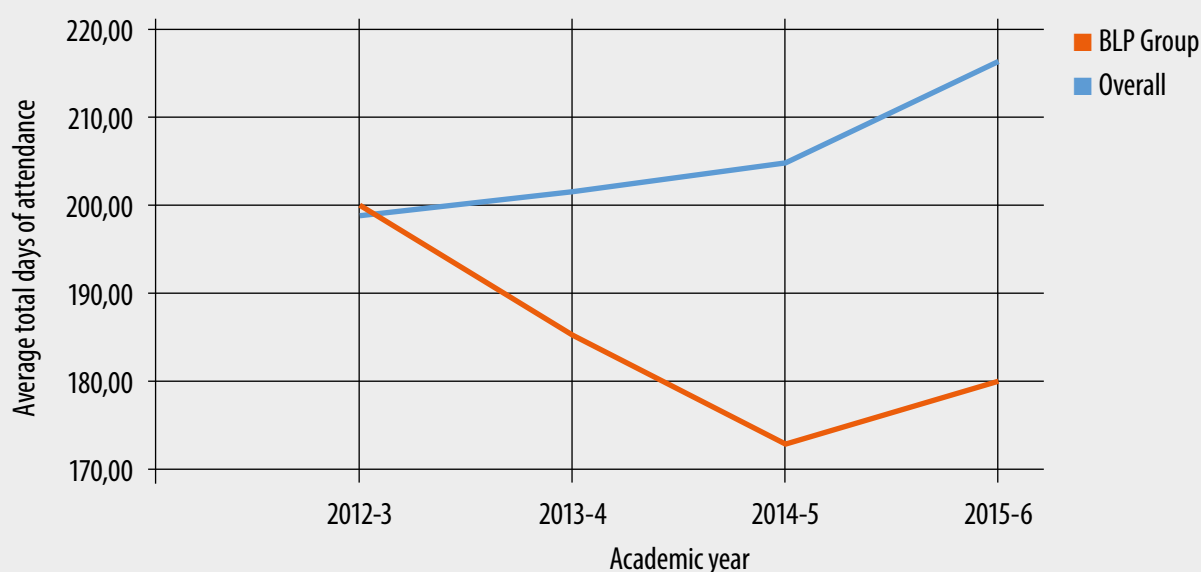
<sup>33</sup> The same was true of the 2014 and 2015 cohort data. For example, in the academic year 2013-4 (immediately prior to participation), the 2014 BLP 2 cohort had an average score of 65.11% compared to the 63.94% for their grade cohort; and the 2015 cohort had an average score of 73.20% compared to 71.45%. These differences are within the realm of statistical variation and sample sizes at present are not sufficient to determine with certainty whether there is in fact a definitive selection bias.

<sup>34</sup> When collecting MSC stories, a number of BLP 2 parents relayed to the interviewer how prior to the traumatic event(s) their children were strong students in school.

**Figure 4:** Academic average of BLP 2 2013 group (Gaza) compared to their grade-level cohort



**Figure 5:** Average total number of days of attendance for 2013 BLP 2 Group (Gaza) compared to their grade-level cohorts



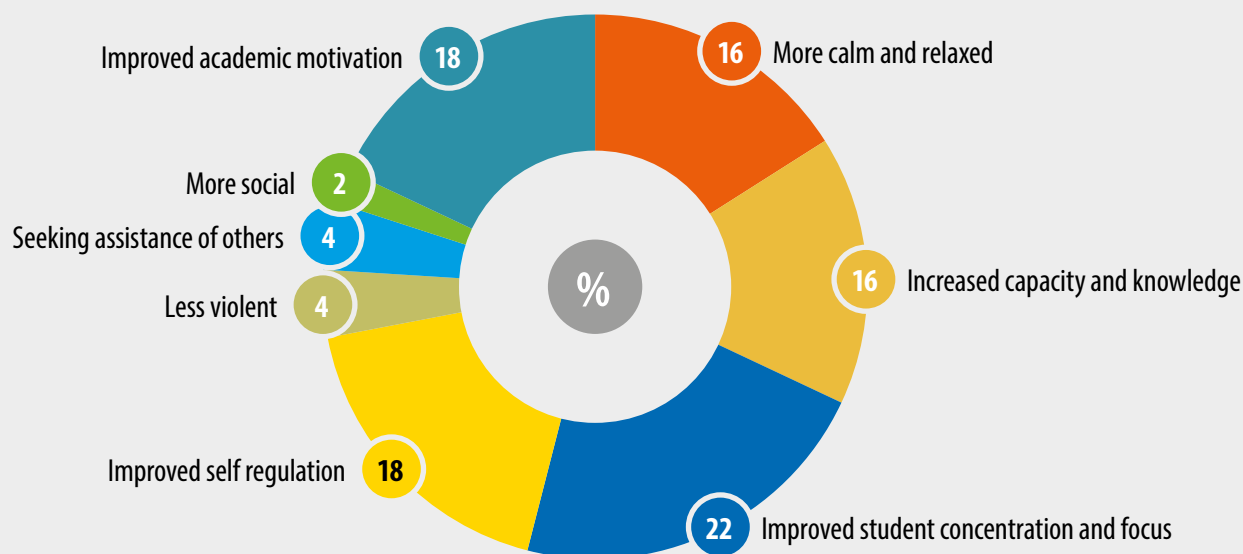
Attendance patterns, on the other hand, appear to suggest a negative association between participation in BLP and average number of days of school attended as Figure 5 suggests.<sup>35</sup> That

noted, there remain significant questions about the reliability of attendance data held centrally by UNRWA administration, and too much should not be read into this data.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The same was true of the 2014 cohort. Analysis could not be done for the 2015 cohort, as attendance data was incomplete for the last academic year at the time data was requested from UNRWA.

<sup>36</sup> This is because attendance data is collected at the level of daily classroom records, which rely on individual teachers to accurately keep track of, as well as school level administrators to effectively monitor and report on in the central UNRWA database. Additionally, there is an incentive within UNRWA to skew attendance figures up to meet targets for schools and the system as a whole, according to several sources spoken to.

**Figure 6:** Types of changes noted by teachers from MSC story collection/interviews (as % of overall number of changes discussed by this group)



NRC to date has not collected data on the impacts of BLP 1 on children. It is hypothesised, within the 2017 Theory of Change for the programme, that it has impacts on children’s concentration and participation in class. This was recognised as a change (6%), though not the most significant change, for a number of children interviewed (see Figure 3). As the story below, from one BLP 1 child suggests, however, there is a clear relationship between learning and doing the relaxation, stress and release and breathing exercises taught within BLP 1, and being able to concentrate in class better. A number of other stories make a similar point.<sup>37</sup>

Teachers were the ones most likely to observe and comment on this aspect as being one of the more significant impacts of BLP on their students (see Figure 6 below).<sup>38</sup>

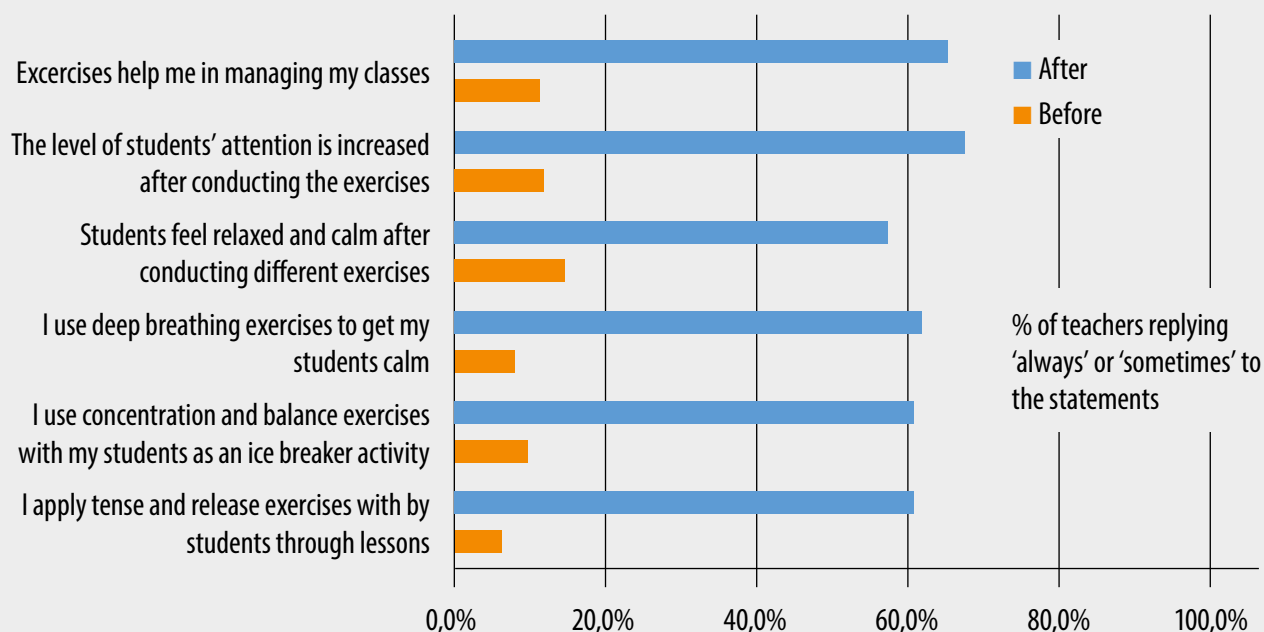
As the individuals most involved in implementing, and seeing the results of BLP 1 in the school/ classroom setting, what was most visible to teachers was the improved concentration and focus of students in the classroom. Teachers, such as the one whose story is featured below, frequently described how the breathing, relaxation and stress/release activities could effectively be used as a classroom management technique with their students.

Data from pre/post surveys conducted of 178 BLP 1 teachers trained in Gaza in 2016 corroborates the sentiment expressed in the story. As Figure 7 suggests, after participating in BLP 1 training, teachers are using the practical exercises much more within their classroom practice on a daily basis, and are more likely to observe that they have an impact on students’ attention and mood. For example, prior to BLP 1, only 7.9% of teachers

<sup>37</sup> See MSC stories 89, 88, 55, and 50 as examples of this.

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that when presenting data on the changes described by teachers, student-focussed changes, and changes in themselves are combined. For example, “increased capacity and knowledge” refers to their own capacity and knowledge on how to help students to relax and/or cope with traumatic events, while categories like “improved student concentration and focus” and “less violent”, “more social”, more calm and relaxed, or improved self regulation refers to the changes in students behaviours and actions. There is overlap in categories such as “improved self regulation” and “more calm and relaxed” where teachers described how BLP helped them and/or their students to regulate their emotions and improve their emotional state.

**Figure 7:** Pre/post survey results for BLP 1 teachers in Gaza, 2016<sup>39</sup>



always used deep breathing exercises in their classroom, while after participation in BLP 1 training, this jumped to 61.8%. Similarly, prior to BLP 1, only 9.6% of students used balance and concentration exercises as an icebreaker/warm up activity, while afterward this increased to 60.7%.

This, in turn, is impacting on teachers' sense of value and utility of BLP 1 within their classroom practice. While prior to starting BLP 1, only 7.9% of teachers agreed that the exercises assist in managing the classroom, this increased to 61.8% following the completion of training on BLP 1.

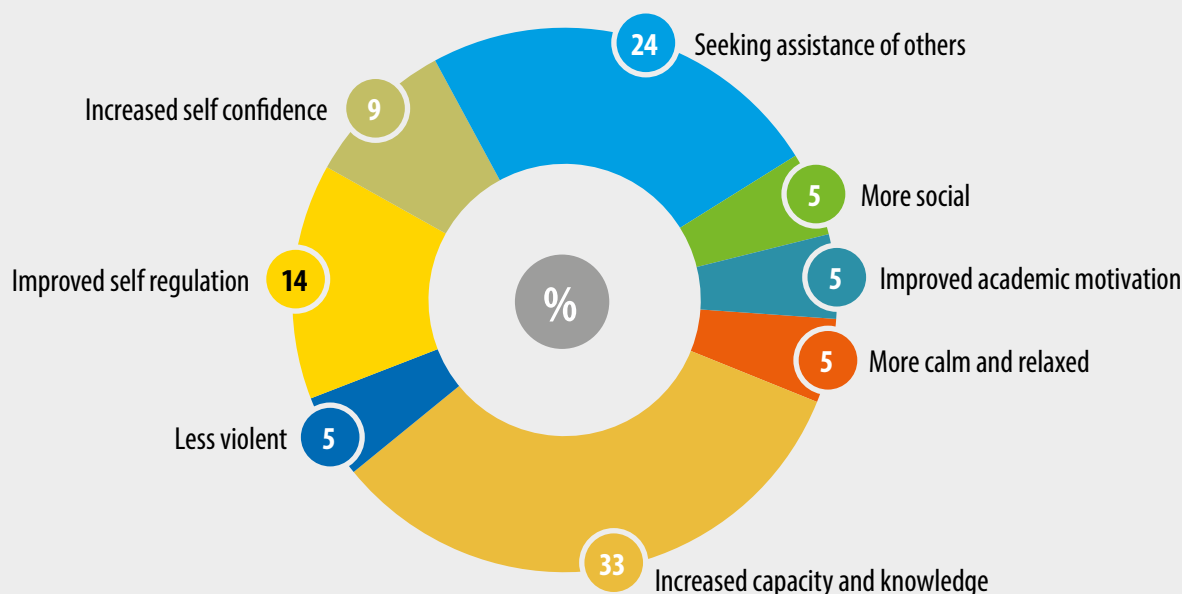
**BRINGING A SMILE IN A STORM** (teacher, Gaza)

A few months ago we were introduced to BLP by the Counsellor and NRC in a training session. In the workshop, we learned about how symptoms like nightmares can be related to stress and trauma, and were introduced to a series of exercises including stress and release, and balancing activities, to help us relieve stress and tension. At first, when we saw these exercises we laughed, and it was the same when I first introduced them to my students...they laughed as well. But over time I've seen that these exercises are more than just fun. In my own classes, I can notice the difference, both in myself and my students. Using the activities at the start of each of my lessons, I now notice that my students are more calm and relaxed, and concentrating more on what I'm teaching. Importantly, I'm also noticing that my lower achieving students seem more motivated to learn, and are participating in class more. All of this allows me to spend more of my time on teaching the students, and I feel more relaxed than before. Now when others walk by my classes, they make comments to me about how focussed and relaxed my students are compared to before. I'm hoping that after months of using these techniques with my students, it will result in improved achievement for all of them.

<sup>39</sup> These surveys were administered to teachers prior to them being introduced to BLP 1 techniques (before), and immediately following the training (after).



**Figure 8:** Types of changes noted by counsellors (as % of overall changes specified in MSC stories)



### 5.1.2 BLP STRENGTHENS THE SCHOOL AND HOME ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

BLP 2 and BLP 1 are implemented by counsellors and teachers in targeted schools, and supported by parents in the home environment. This occurs through training and follow-up assistance, which NRC facilitates and/or supports (either directly or using Master Trainers), and through the provision of resources and materials to schools, such as the BLP 1 and 2 manuals. Yet, it is only recently, with the development of the 2017 Education Strategy and theory of change that NRC has begun to articulate the types of impacts this engagement is expected to have on strengthening the protective, inclusive, enabling educational environment in which children learn, and to measure them more explicitly through its M&E tools and activities. The majority of data to explore impacts with

parents, counsellors and teachers, comes in turn, from the MSC stories collected.

Counsellors identified a number of changes, in both themselves<sup>40</sup>, their students<sup>41</sup>, and parents/teachers<sup>42</sup> they work that have been the result of from their participation in BLP (see Figure 8 below).

The change discussed most related to counsellors feeling that they gained specific knowledge, expertise and support (i.e. increased knowledge and capacity) on how to assess and address children's nightmares in a concrete and tangible way. A number of comments, across a range of MSC stories allude to this, such as:

“...Through BLP I've been given the skills, knowledge and experience to be an expert in addressing children's nightmares,”

(Counsellor, UNRWA, Gaza)

<sup>40</sup> This includes the category of “increased knowledge and capacity” and “improved self regulation”. It is important to note, however, that improved self-regulation overlaps with students, as some counsellor stories described how they were using BLP techniques and approaches on themselves, while others described how they were using it on their students. This is discussed later in this section.

<sup>41</sup> This includes the categories of “improved academic achievement”, “increased self confidence”, “less nightmares”, “and more social”

<sup>42</sup> This is specific to the category of “seeking assistance of others”, which is described in more detail in subsequent pages of this report.

## SCHOOL IS MY SAFE PLACE (mother of BLP 2 beneficiary, West Bank)

I live in a community where there are five checkpoints next to our mosque and near our house. This makes it dangerous for us to move around our community. We have seen young Palestinian boys killed in front of our eyes. We suffer at the checkpoints on a daily basis, and the soldiers harass and taunt us when we pass. It makes me nervous to send my children out of the house to school, and I wait with worry each day for them to come home. Sometimes the soldiers make it hard for me to return home after I've gone shopping and make me wait for hours to pass through. Settlers have even come and occupied the house next door to us. We live in fear that they will attack us one day. Additionally, the checkpoints are making it difficult for us to survive. My husband has lost his job because often the soldiers do not allow him to pass through the checkpoints. All of this makes me feel stressed and hopeless for my children's future. I end up shouting at my children all the time, and my children ask me why I was always shouting at them. Additionally, the situation of feeling as if we were living in a prison made my children nervous and hyperactive, and I did not know how to deal with them.

Then last year, I was invited to a series of meetings with the counsellor at the school. The counsellor discussed with me and the other mothers, how parents can help their children through the crisis using 'sports exercises' and deep breathing. We learned that when we do these exercises the mind will be more active. The counsellor taught us how to talk with our children when they have fears or bad thoughts, for example telling them pleasant stories, taking them for an excursion in the garden, doing knitting with them. We also practiced imagining a safe space in our minds, and calming ourselves and our children this way. At first, when we practiced these exercises as a group we laughed because we did not think they would actually work...but over time, we could see how some of these activities could support us as mothers. These sessions have helped me to decrease the stress I feel. While they were maybe intended for us to use at home with our children, I feel they have benefitted me even more. When I feel angry or depressed these days, I use these exercises and feel more relaxed afterwards. I have learned how to better deal with the pressures and stresses of living in the crises. I am more aware of my children's emotions and needs, and have new activities I can use to support all my children at home, not only my daughter at this school. When my children feel trapped at home, I let them draw and express their feelings this way. When I come to school, I feel I can release the worry I feel. The school has become the only place where I have some support to deal with the conditions we live in. All we need now is security to ensure that we can travel safely around our community, and send our children to school without worry.

“*When I was introduced to BLP, it was the first time that children's nightmares were given particular attention in my role as a counsellor. Yet, it was clear to me how nightmares are very clear evidence of the impact of trauma on these children. Because of my participation in BLP, I have new skills, expertise and knowledge on how to deal with traumatic events in a clear and comprehensive way.*”

(Counsellor, UNRWA, West Bank)

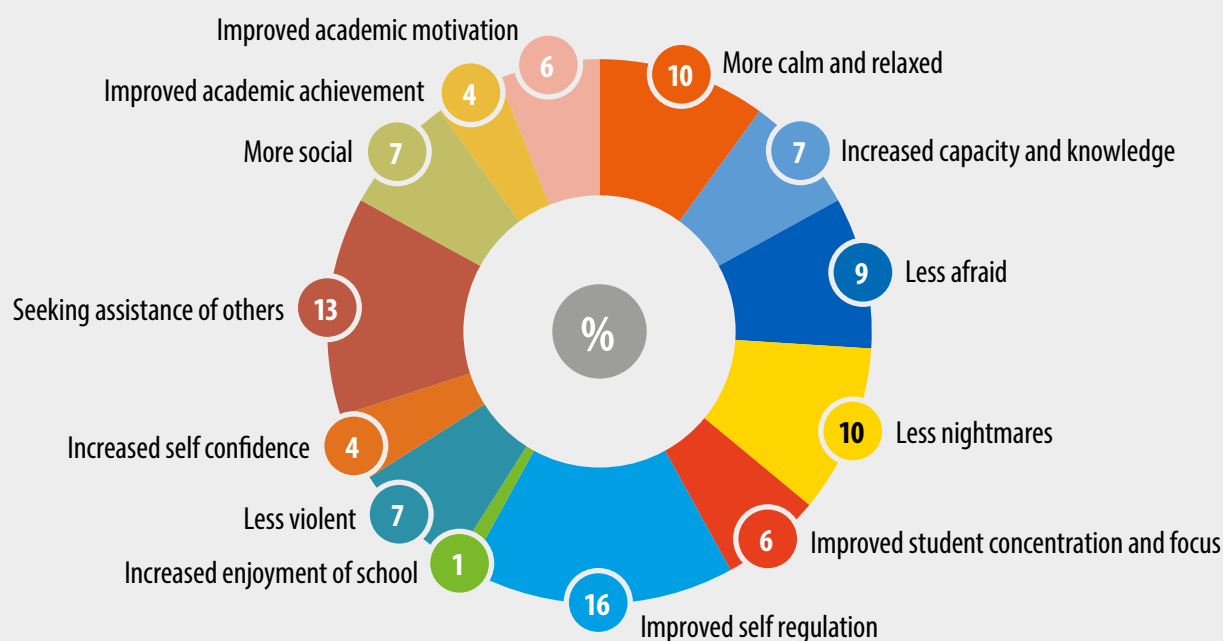
“*I felt that through BLP I gained new skills and knowledge, and now have a technique for dealing with a problem which I didn't even know existed before.*”

(Counsellor, MoEHE, West Bank)

These sentiments are reinforced in a survey of 65 counsellors undertaken in Gaza in 2016 at the conclusion of their initial BLP 2 training. 42% of them acknowledged that up to that time, they had paid no attention to the issue of nightmares with the students they worked with, but that as a result of the training, 95% believe the focus and methods taught were relevant. Additionally, 83% of counsellors felt strongly that the skills, knowledge and techniques learned through the BLP 2 training were relevant and necessary to their capacity needs as a counsellor.

Another important change, which surfaced in MSC stories, was the belief that BLP helped to strengthen the connection between the students, parents and counsellor (i.e. seeking assistance of others), particularly in BLP 2 groups. This meant that teachers, parents and children were more likely to seek each other's support in the future. As one counsellor described in her story, “*Over the*

**Figure 9:** Type of changes specified by parents (as % of overall changes specified in MSC stories)



*course of the group and individual sessions, the students and I grew very close, and I also built a strong relationship with their families. It forged a bond between all of us, which we keep to this day. We have maintained this relationship through the difficult times we have faced together, including the 2014 war. Some have even come back and asked for more assistance after the war, and I did the best I could.”*

The improved engagement which BLP fosters between the school and home in support of children’s wellbeing was also identified by a number of parents as a significant change in their stories (see Figure 9 above).<sup>43</sup> One such story, narrated by a mother facing significant challenges in the context of West Bank describes this process.

What the stories from parents suggest is that BLP increased parents’ awareness of the importance of nightmares as a marker of traumatic stress (particularly if they attended the sessions run by the counsellor), provided them with knowledge of

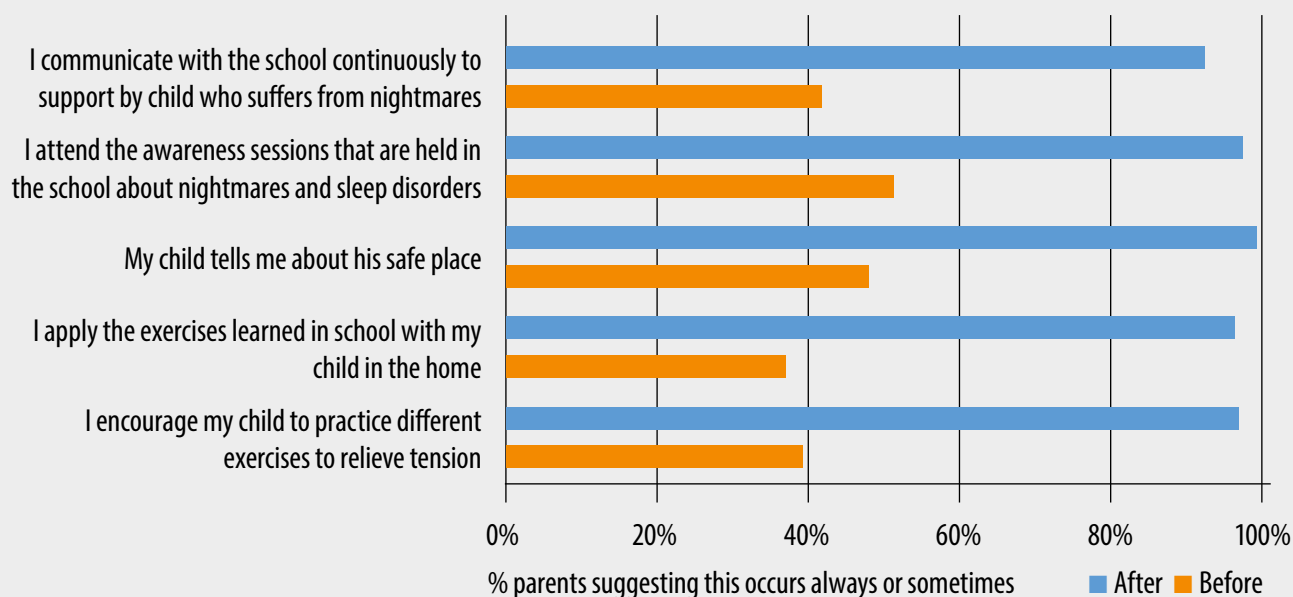
what could be done in the home environment to support their children’s regulation of emotions, and connected them to the counsellor whom they could then turn to, as situations or concerns arose with their children.<sup>44</sup> This is also reflected in recent data collected by NRC from parents who participated in awareness sessions as part of BLP 1. On the survey, parents responded to a number of statements, with clear indication that the programme has impacts in terms of improving communication between the school and home about a child’s nightmares, identifying and discussing their child’s “safe space” when confronting fears, stress and anxiety, and supporting their children to use various techniques learned through BLP in the home (see Figure 10).

Linking all of this back to the key beneficiaries, the children, the importance of the stronger bond and support established through BLP between the parent, teacher and counsellor is that the children in turn are more likely to come to these adult figures with their fears and concerns. This comes

<sup>43</sup> As noted previously with the range of changes described by teachers and counsellors, parents also described changes in themselves and changes in their children because of BLP. These changes are combined in the graph. Most of the categories of change relate to only changes in the students, but the category of “improved self regulation” relates to both parents and students using and applying the BLP techniques to address stressors in their lives. Categories of change that are exclusive to parents include “increase capacity and knowledge”, and “seeking assistance of others”, which are described in the text that follows.

<sup>44</sup> See MSC Stories 41, 77, 81, 86, 92, 10

**Figure 10:** Pre/post survey results for parents attending BLP 1 awareness sessions in Gaza, 2016



out quite strongly in evidence from surveys of both BLP 1 and BLP 2 students. For example, in a recent survey conducted with 420 students, prior to being exposed to BLP 1 less than 50% of students reported to tell their parents and teachers about their safe place some or all of the time, while afterwards, 98% of these same students reported to be doing so. Likewise for BLP 2 students, while prior to their participation in nightmare groups just 15% of students reported to tell their teachers about feeling psychological pressure, stress or fear, after being part of BLP 2, just over 50% reported to do so.

Importantly, BLP also provides parents, teachers and counsellors skills and tools to help themselves with their own stresses, which are often also linked to traumatic events of one kind or another. A number of MSC stories highlighted how applying the exercises and techniques have assisted these groups to regulate their own emotions, and in some cases to help themselves heal from traumatic experiences of the past. One of the most vivid examples is the story below, which was selected by both the Gaza and West Bank teams in their respective panels.

As the teams discussed, this story is an important one to feature within the evaluation because it demonstrates quite vividly the way in which the carers themselves need support which is oftentimes not present, and how BLP has the potential to equip them with the tools for healing and self-care. In the case of the teacher above, his traumatic experience manifested itself quite visibly in an impaired physical condition, suggesting the strong links between body and mind that BLP acknowledges and works to address. Importantly, both teams also recognised the importance of these individuals needing to heal themselves first, before they can help others, as was the case in the story above.

To date, however, NRC has not adequately acknowledged or capture the changes in the wellbeing of educational personnel and caregivers, as a precursor to their ability to support improvements in children’s wellbeing. Nowhere is this discussed or mentioned in the 2017 Education Strategy, or in the BLP theory of change. This appears to be a critical oversight, particularly given the need and relevance of caring for the carers as an issue in and of itself.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> This issue is one that is readily recognised as critical within the INEE Minimum Standards (2011, p. 61), which under the Access and Learning Environment Standard 2 specify that it is critical that “learning environments...promote the protection and wellbeing of learners, teachers and other education personnel.”

## NOW, LIFE IS BETTER (teacher, Gaza)

When you look at me at first, you might think I'm a person that has always been full of life and energy...but that is not true. For a long time I was suffering, suffering from nightmares myself as a result of the 2008 war. In that war, my cousin who is the only son of my aunt and uncle did not come home from work one day. My father and I went out to look for my cousin in the middle of the conflict, walking through bombs and air strikes for kilometres to reach my cousin's place of work. There we discovered a building in ruins and body parts and blood everywhere. From that experience, and the other traumas of that war, my nightmares became very intense. I would wake from these dreams where I would relive this experience. My whole body would be tense and my right arm would become paralysed for days from this stress. This tension and the paralysis of my arm affected me severely. I went to doctors at first, who said there was nothing they could do. They referred me to the Mental Health Department, but I refused to go because I did not want to be labelled as crazy. Instead, I went to seek religious advice, and learned to talk to myself with verses from the Koran to calm myself. It helped a little but I still suffered. Then earlier this year, I attended training about BLP as the lead teacher from our school. Because I was suffering from the nightmares myself, and wanted to find a cure, I put all my attention into what was being explained at the workshop. I learned all the exercises – breathing, balance, talking to self, safe space, stress and release – and practiced this on myself. I could see it beginning to work on me. When I would wake from the nightmares, I would use them to calm myself and almost immediately my arm would relax. I then started to use these exercises with my wife and saw it made her more calm and relaxed. Finally, I brought these exercises in to the school, first with my own students and then with the school as whole. Before, my students lacked energy and concentration in class, but with the BLP activities I saw my students becoming more active, focussed and relaxed. Now I use them in my class each period of the day to help them focus and learn better. Because I saw the success with my own students, I went to the school principal and asked her if we could start to use this with all the students in the school. We now start each day in morning assembly with the exercises. I try to spread the success of BLP wherever I go, because I can see the impacts it has had on not only myself but everyone else in my life.

In a recent pre-assessment survey conducted with a sample of counsellors trained in Gaza, 36% of them reported to suffer sleep disturbances frequently or sometimes, over 70% of them suffered from consistent feelings of sadness either some or all of the time, and 51% reported feeling helpless some or all of the time. Discussions with education stakeholders in both Gaza and West Bank also acknowledged that often, psychosocial interventions did not give adequate attention to the wellbeing of the carers themselves and that more attention was needed in this realm. Within the MoEHE in Gaza, for example, a recent partnership with the Body Mind Medicine programme had all teachers attend a one-day training focussed on their own self-care and wellbeing in the context of conflict. It was widely agreed amongst NRC staff that more could and should be done to make this an explicit focus of BLP moving forward.

### 5.1.3 IMPACT AND RELEVANCE ON BROADER PALESTINIAN EDUCATION SECTOR

As identified in the introduction of this report, there is an acute need at present for school-based psychosocial programming as part of the protective response to the protracted crisis of Palestine. In this way, BLP fills a key gap within the education sector in regards to both its scale and scope of activity. Discussions with representatives from the Education in Emergencies Working Group for Palestine, and from within UNRWA and MoEHE suggests that a key advantage of BLP is its scale. In being able to reach all UNRWA schools in Gaza, and an increasingly number of MoEHE schools in both Gaza and West Bank, it provides an immediate solution to a critical need. At the same time, it was also acknowledged by UNRWA Community Mental Health team that BLP, unlike other PSS programmes, has a clear focus to its activities (i.e. the nightmares mitigation focus) and has a much more structured and theoretically informed approach than other programmes it oversees or implements.

Within the most recent HRP, for example, nearly 40% of all interventions that were proposed within the education sector, and nearly 50% of the protection sector proposals, had a psychosocial component to it. Yet, a further review of many of these proposals revealed that most of these programmes are: (1) community rather than school based interventions and do not directly engage with the education service providers; (2) work with a much smaller scale of beneficiaries; and/or (3) focus on activities that might be classified as falling into the realm of socio-emotional learning rather than psycho-social or educational support.<sup>46</sup> What is interesting is that NRC's proposal was one of the few PSS within the HRP that was actually funded, potentially because it is different in terms of a more clearly defined PSS focus, its deeper engagement in schools, and its wide reach.

As one interviewee from MoEHE noted, *“BLP is different to other support our counsellors and schools receive in the area of PSS...[other agencies] support us in addressing schooling violence or building student councils, but this is the only programme that has a concentrated clinical focus. It is dealing with specific trauma symptoms and getting students to talk about their fears and dreams...what is good is that it really focuses on the individuals.”* This sentiment was mirrored by another interviewee from MoEHE who acknowledged that when the programme started *“...we questioned whether the focus on nightmares was relevant or not...but what our counsellors and teachers have found is that many of our students do suffer from these nightmares...in this way the idea of having a programme with a narrow and specific focus has been fantastic...it has met our needs and filled a gap in PSS provision.”*

Area supervisors interviewed were also able to clearly identify the unique niche that BLP fills in

Gaza. One supervisor argued that, *“a lot have approaches that do not fit in with the context, and often they use PSS in name only, when they really have other larger priorities they want to work on in our schools.”* With BLP however, the feeling was that, *“there has been a real commitment and priority given to PSS, and to strengthening the Mental Health programme in schools as a whole.”*

More senior leaders within both UNRWA and MoEHE were also able to clearly identify how NRC has worked in close partnership with them to ensure alignment and maximum relevance to their own priorities and objectives. BLP is clearly aligned to the Ministry's and Education in Emergencies Working Group Joint Protection and Advocacy Strategy. Within the PSS component of the strategy, four clear priorities are outlined:

- ❶ Provision of long-term PSS for schools regularly affected by violence
- ❷ Provision of emergency PSS following attack/incident
- ❸ Support to strengthen and expand MoEHE counselling services
- ❹ Counsellors to be hired as 'external consultants' to fill the large gap in public service counsellors

BLP was perceived by Ministry officials to address the second and third objectives quite clearly already, and in 2017, would begin to address the fourth objective as well.<sup>47</sup> There was some sense that with the expansion of BLP into West Bank, particularly Area C, it was also addressing the first objective, though it was felt that engagement needed to be longer-term than just the eight week period of the nightmare group, according to one MoEHE individual interviewed. Another MoEHE representative felt that the nightmare focus might

<sup>46</sup> The recent INEE Background (2016) paper on PSS and SEL acknowledges that there is significant overlap between the two realms of programme activities but distinguishes the two by identifying that SEL is more focussed on preventative measures by creating environments that support positive student outcomes. This is done through teaching students skills of self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, social awareness and managing relationships. While PSS interventions also touch on aspects of these, attention within PSS is can be more focussed on curative approaches, in addition to preventative action, and give greater attention to improving students' sense of emotional and social wellbeing by teaching particular skills and knowledge. See <http://goo.gl/nZFDrV>

<sup>47</sup> One objective of the 2017 Improved Education programme in Gaza is that it will select 65 newly graduated counsellors through a joint-NRC/MoEHE interview panel to support in a first phase the existing school counsellors and later, once the capacity building process is finalised, to fill in the psychosocial provision gap in the schools where there are no counsellors. NRC will pay monthly allowances for these individuals, with the expectation that eventually, the Ministry will take over payment of salaries for these individuals.

still be too narrow, particularly as the Ministry as a whole moves towards a more inclusive education approach to PSS provision.

Within UNRWA, particularly in Gaza, officials could clearly articulate the influence that BLP had on their ways of approaching PSS in schools. They acknowledged that UNRWA has learned from BLP of the importance of supporting counsellors and teachers in PSS provision, not as a one off Training of Trainers approach (as was done in the past); but rather, as continuous and well-monitored implementation. Through the success of BLP, it has also come to recognise the importance of engaging parents and teachers more in PSS, conducting pre-assessments to identify children in need, and using a combination of group and individual-based supports for those children. As one individual commented, “*BLP has had a significant influence on our structures and approaches within Community Mental Health.*” At the same time, as UNRWA has moved from a problem to child-focussed modality for counselling services support, there has been a need to reconsider how BLP fits into this new paradigm. The secondment of the BLP technical expert from the University of Tromsø in 2016 facilitated this process, and led to the development of a new manual entitled “Better Sleep”. Within the new child-focussed approach, it is seen that BLP (or Better Sleep) will sit as a specialised programme for children who identify themselves, through prior engagement and work with teachers and counsellors in whole-class and group sessions as having issues with sleep. The intention of broadening the scope and changing the language is to ensure that children are not labelled from the outset as having a “problem”, according to the UNRWA officials interviewed, but rather to build on the strengths identified prior. In this way, BLP 2 will sit alongside other specialised programmes of support at the more intensive, targeted and individualised support that follows general PSS provision in the classroom and in group-based settings.

What became evident, however, was the fact that for most stakeholders, the activities of BLP 1 in the classroom remain largely invisible to them. While they were well aware of BLP 2’s clear and explicit focus on nightmares, and often referred to BLP as

## ➔ KEY CONCLUSIONS

- ➔ BLP has clear and demonstrable impacts when it comes to improving the wellbeing of participating children, by equipping them with skills for coping with the fear, stress, and anxiety of living in a context of continual conflict. There are variances between males/females, Gaza/West Bank, and MoEHE/UNRWA that warrant greater attention and study.
- ➔ BLP on its own, may not be a relevant or effective mechanism for supporting students to feel safe on their way to/from school or feel safe in school, particularly when traumatic stressors are chronic and ongoing.
- ➔ BLP supports conditions for children to better succeed in school, by improving their ability to focus/concentrate in class, strengthen connections between them/their parents and school actors, improve their ability to complete homework, and increase their overall enjoyment of school. That stated, the actual contribution it makes to learning outcomes – as measured by academic achievement or attendance – may be difficult to measure, and existing data does not support such linkages.
- ➔ BLP also strengthens the home and school environment for students by improving the capacity of these duty bearers to acknowledge, respond to and address the symptoms of traumatic stress.
- ➔ Importantly, BLP also equips these duty bearers with skills of self-care, healing and support, which are vitally important in the context of Palestine. To date, this has not been appropriately acknowledged within NRC’s Education strategy and ToC for its education programming.
- ➔ BLP appears to fill an important niche in the realm of PSS activities in Gaza and West Bank and several aspects of BLP are well aligned with international best practice as stipulated in the IASC Mental Health Standards, INEE Minimum Standards, and recently published INEE review of PSS/SEL interventions.

## ➔ KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 In light of the findings of this evaluation, the Theory of Change for BLP needs to be revisited to assess current outcomes expected, the outcomes which this evaluation identifies, and where there may be gaps. This should then inform the subsequent revision of BLP related M&E tools and approach, to ensure appropriate alignment and to maintain a clear and consistent evidence-base on outcomes observed.
- 2 NRC needs to refocus attention and priority on BLP 1 as its primary intervention and impact focus – particularly in light of the scale of reach of BLP 1 in comparison to BLP 2. This will have implications in terms of resourcing, implementation approaches/ support, and timing (see later recommendations).
- 3 Thought needs to be given to how BLP is situated within the realm of protection (i.e. improving students’ sense of safety within and on their way to/from school), particularly in West Bank. It may require that NRC continue to strengthen BLP’s complementary links to other initiatives (such as Improved Education) aimed at improving the protection of children and educational institutions/actors in line with the INEE Minimum Standards.
- 4 Within the planned research into BLP in 2017, NRC should consider assessing the sustainability of impacts on one or more cohort of former beneficiaries in terms of re-administering the wellbeing and nightmare surveys.

the “nightmares programmes”, the preventative and more generalised support offered through BLP 1 to all students in targeted schools was either not known about in any great depth, or unmentioned until prompted. Within UNRWA in Gaza, for example, part of this may be the product of the divisions in responsibilities between that of the Community Mental Health Division, which oversees the counselling services in schools and where BLP’s point of contact has traditionally been, and the Education Division, which addresses the general school population and what occurs in classrooms more explicitly.

NRC needs to consider how it can raise the profile and visibility of BLP 1 amongst these key partners, and by doing so reconsider the entry point for BLP more broadly. At present, there are key opportunities to link BLP 1 activities to the prioritisation within both UNRWA and MoEHE for inclusive education practices, which focus greater attention for PSS/SEL provision at the whole population level, and with emphasis on the educational rather than psychosocial focus. This is a point that has been raised in the past by the BLP Advisor from the University of Tromsø, who in a report from 2015 specified that, *“If a large scale intervention is needed I would recommend considering starting with BLP 1. This would be 100% education intervention and allowing for negotiations with one department, rather than two. When BLP 1 is successfully implemented, the intervention could be expanded with BLP 2 to include the psychology department.”*



## 5.2 TARGETING AND EFFICIENCY

This section briefly explores questions related to the approaches which NRC has taken when identifying BLP schools and the beneficiaries within them, to identify whether the right individuals and schools have been targeted for both BLP 1 and 2, and whether there might be alternative approaches to identifying and targeting these individuals. Given that some of the issues related to targeting are closely linked to the issue of how the programme is administered and resourced, the questions related to efficiency are also taken up in this section.

### 5.2.1 TARGETING OF SCHOOLS

NRC has in place within its broader Education Strategy a clearly identified selection criterion<sup>48</sup> for schools and communities it will engage with in its programming. For BLP it includes: 1) Schools in the most affected conflict areas and marginalized areas (e.g. with difficult access because of restriction-gates, close to settlements or check points, under demolition order; in the Gaza strip more than 500 meters away from the border); 2) Schools based on vulnerability areas identified by MoEHE and UNRWA; 3) No similar type of support provided from other INGO and NGOs; 4) Basic education schools (grade 1-10); 5) Low levels of achievement with high risk of drop-out rate; 6) Lack of community involvement; 7) High rates of violence in the community; 8) Schools with poor services for special needs children; and 9) Schools with counsellors or special education officers assigned. In West Bank, for example it has led to BLP focussing explicitly to date in Area C, Hebron and East Jerusalem; while in the past in Gaza attention was focussed on schools and communities most effected by the large scale Israeli military operations (i.e. Operation Protective Edge), namely East and North Gaza, and the region around Rafah. This targeting approach appears to be relevant and in line with,

for example, the Ministry's own priorities within the realm of protection, the schools identified as most vulnerable by MRM and those that are being supported for the West Bank Protection Consortium. Additionally, the final decision on targeted schools is made in consultation with MoEHE and UNRWA.

One challenge faced by NRC has been the lack of counsellors in some of the targeted schools, which is a requirement for both UNRWA and MoEHE in running BLP 2. In response, NRC has had to drop these schools, and replace them, as much as possible with alternative new schools, or to further support schools that had been part of BLP in the past.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, project reporting suggests that in West Bank, counsellors are often working across more than one school, impeding their ability to effectively participate in trainings and implement/follow up on BLP activities. Finally, at various points in implementation, access to targeted schools has been impeded by security restrictions (a specific concern for H2 Hebron and other parts of Area C), by issues with particular directorates within the Ministry of Education<sup>50</sup>, or strikes within the UNRWA system. This has resulted in NRC unable to support all targeted schools to an equal extent.

### 5.2.2 TARGETING OF BENEFICIARIES

Within the schools themselves, the intent of the programme is that participants for BLP 2 should be carefully selected. The manual and training that counsellors receive at the outset clearly specify that students should be selected based on having identified problems in learning and following the ordinary education processes, which are the product of traumatic stress. The selection criterion for BLP 2 is primarily based on sleep disturbance with a focus on nightmares. This is assessed through a pre-assessment screening tool that measures nightmare frequency, duration, and impact. It is intended that participating children

<sup>48</sup> In 2017, this is being changed for NRC in Gaza given the clear need that exists with communities and schools in the "buffer zone" closest to the Israeli border (or Army Restricted Areas). After completing security assessments and approval, NRC is intending to target schools in this buffer zone within BLP and its broader education programming.

<sup>49</sup> This is done through the provision of more intensive follow up/refresher training.

<sup>50</sup> In late April/early May 2016, the East Gaza Directorate stopped NRC's activities due to not having received an official facilitation letter from MoEHE.

should be selected based on: (1) reporting 3 or more nightmares per week; (2) having had these nightmares for more than three months; and; (3) clear impact of these nightmares on school functioning. Most counsellors spoken to in the evaluation used this pre-assessment tool to identify students to participate in BLP 2, but some also acknowledged that truncated periods for implementation (i.e. two months to conduct all sessions), meant that they worked with students who were known to teachers, or their parents to have nightmares, behaviour problems, bed-wetting or concentration problems.<sup>51</sup> An additional issue, raised by the NRC programme team, is concern that because of the self-identification process, there is a danger that those students and families who are less prone to coming forward or volunteering themselves, may be ignored, in spite of their need. As previously discussed, there is some indication that this may lead to better performing students (and their families) self-selecting themselves into the programme.

A review of the 2016 students' nightmare data suggests that approximately 5% of the students from a sample of 405 students do not meet the threshold for nightmare frequency at the outset of participation (less than 3/week). Additionally, amongst beneficiaries spoken to as part of MSC story collection, it became evident, in a few instances that the nightmares which students discussed were not immediately linked to a specific traumatic event.<sup>52</sup> On the whole, though, it would appear that beneficiaries for BLP 2 are being selected in line with the programme's intent and focus.

### **5.2.3 CURRENT TARGETING: MEETING THE FULL SCOPE OF NEED?**

The bigger issue, however, is whether the programme is able to target all those who require the support of BLP 2 in the limited timeframe within which NRC is actively supporting implementation in the school. Reporting from West Bank in 2015, suggests for instance that within the nine schools that were targeted in that

period, 25% of the students in the classrooms surveyed were identified from the pre-assessment intervention as needing support through BLP 2. Due to the limited period of programme implementation, and counsellors' limited capacity to run BLP 2 groups alongside other commitments, only a small proportion of the total students in need were served (32 students, or 6% of those children identified as having needs). More recently, a similar analysis of ECHO-funded BLP 2 schools in West Bank revealed that only 41% of the students identified as needing the support of BLP 2 (using the pre assessment tool) were able to participate in the programme in the time afforded, leaving more than half of the students' needs unmet. Additionally, counsellors were only able to administer the pre-assessment with 23% of the school population, suggesting that many students' needs for BLP remain both unidentified, and unaddressed. This has led to NRC arguing that longer engagement is needed in each of the schools it works with.

While the intention is that the counsellors will continue to run BLP 2 groups after NRC ends its active support, interviews with counsellors suggested that with the myriad of demands, and the constant introduction of new activities and initiatives, finding the space and time to do this was a key challenge. In many situations, despite counsellors recognising and articulating the value of BLP 2, they were also quick to acknowledge that they could not always prioritise these groups as much as they would like within the demands of their job.

The other issue relates to how students are identified for their participation in BLP. Often it is teachers who help to refer students directly or engage parents in conversations with the counsellor about their children's nightmares. But, if teachers themselves are not aware of the importance/relevance of nightmares to children's wellbeing, this may limit further referrals. The reason this is a concern is that at present, BLP training, run by NRC, is limited to usually 1-2 teacher/schools. In the current schools in West Bank

<sup>51</sup> BLP Guidelines for Implementation do acknowledge that there is scope for the selection criteria to be changed to other symptoms caused by traumatic stress (p. 4).

<sup>52</sup> See for example MSC story 26

**Table 3:** BLP 2 Beneficiaries by Gender, 2012-6

	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		TOTAL	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Gaza	40	27	59	120	224	136	680	720	236	196	1,239	1,199
West Bank	0	0	0	0	16	39	34	5	197	138	247	182
TOTAL	40	27	59	120	240	175	714	725	433	334	1,486	1,381

supported through ECHO, for example, only 39 of 267 (16% of total) teachers have been trained by NRC on BLP. Effectively, NRC is currently unable to meet the full needs for those students it identifies as needing support; but also, the unmet need may be much greater than is currently reported and visible within each of the BLP schools.

Another important question is whether the approach which NRC takes in regards to gender targeting is the right one, in light of some of the findings raised in the previous section. Specifically, the findings presented previously suggest that females report all dimensions of their wellbeing as lower than males, and show less positive change than males in regards to their participation in BLP 2. This might suggest, potentially, that BLP 2 should give greater focus and attention to females. Yet, data would suggest that for BLP 2, there have been more male beneficiaries over time than females.<sup>53</sup>

The explicit targeting to date of greater numbers of males than females has been an intentional programme decision, due to data from the MRM that indicates that they are more vulnerable to consequences of the protracted crisis – specifically in regards to experiencing detention, search operations, and threat of violence. The presumption is that because they are more likely 100% of them noted to have been have been involved in clashes & demonstrations; female have been more affected (64%) by weapon fire, looting/

pillaging, & extensive destruction & appropriation of property; males have been more affected (68%) by the loss of school time, by detention (78%) by search operation (100%) and by threats of violence (81%) than female. What has not been done to date, however, is a specific gender-based needs analysis to assess whether the presumption – that because males are more affected to the consequence of the conflict, they are in greater need of BLP – is in fact a true one.

#### 5.2.4 WHO COUNTS AS A BENEFICIARY?

Prior to 2014, NRC was fairly conservative in how it counted beneficiaries within BLP.<sup>54</sup> Beneficiaries were those who were solely part of BLP 2, and who had worked directly and intensively with counsellors who NRC had directly trained (who were also counted as beneficiaries). When BLP 1 was developed to accompany BLP 2, it was agreed with NRC regional and global advisors that unlike the students participating in BLP 2, BLP 1 beneficiaries would be *indirect* beneficiaries, as they were one step removed from NRC's direct inputs. This is because NRC would be training teachers and counsellors who would then go and implement BLP 1 in the classrooms, but often without the same level of follow up, support and monitoring that was extended to BLP 2. This partially explains the significant growth in the accounting of programme beneficiaries from 2014 onwards in Table 1, particularly in Gaza.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> In recent times, this prioritisation has been made explicit, particularly within West Bank where within the current ECHO schools, the intention is to target a higher number of boys because they are detained and attacked more often.

<sup>54</sup> According to the Education Core Competency Specialist for Palestine, this conservative accounting is typical for NRC, where beneficiaries are normally those who are directly receiving goods or services from NRC. This is different to other INGOs working in Palestine.

<sup>55</sup> As already noted in a previous footnote, Table 1 does not differentiate between direct and indirect beneficiaries and amalgamates these two groups together. This is done intentionally, as in many of NRC's proposals to donors, it does not distinguish between these groups, and rather indicates the total intended/projected beneficiary numbers.



Additionally, following Operation Protective Edge, there was a strong push from NRC's partners and donors to rapidly scale up the programme in Gaza, and maximise beneficiaries reached. With the particular funding which NRC received at that time to accomplish this scale-up, it was agreed that a cascade training approach would be used for the roll out of BLP 1 – in other words, NRC would directly train a small number of teachers who would then go and train all remaining teachers within UNRWA schools (a cascade or train the trainer approach).<sup>56</sup> In consultation with NRC regional and global advisors, it was agreed that NRC could count *all* students within all schools where BLP was being introduced as *indirect* beneficiaries, irrespective of whether the teachers had been trained directly by NRC or not.<sup>57</sup> Finally, with the inclusion of BLP into the *Improved Education*<sup>58</sup> initiative, and in light of the comprehensive and long-term nature of engagement that NRC has in targeted schools in this programme, all children in these schools are

presently counted as direct beneficiaries (of both BLP and the Improved Education initiative).

The beneficiary tabulation, presented in Table 1: BLP Beneficiaries 2012-2016 Table 1 reflects this varied accounting and explains some of the stark differences between the programme prior to 2014 and after, and between West Bank and Gaza.

There is significant concern, that the assumption that all teachers either trained directly by NRC, or by other teachers/trainers are implementing BLP 1, may not actually be true. This is potentially inflating beneficiary totals beyond what is actually happening in targeted schools. NRC's own programme documentation questions this assumption and notes that there is a critical need for more close monitoring of what happens with the teachers who receive the training from NRC on BLP 1 – in terms of whether they actually go back and train their colleagues, and to identify what teachers actually do in the classrooms, what components they use, and their experiences of the programme.

<sup>56</sup> Additional to all these factors is the reality of the current funding situation in Palestine, where donor funding (particularly in education) remains severely underfunded, and where there is significant competition for scarce funds. NRC also launched a *One Million Children* initiative in 2015 that aims to reach one million children living in emergencies/crisis situations annually through its education programmes globally. These two factors, in combination, have led to pressure to maximise stated number of beneficiaries, even if mechanisms for follow through, support and monitoring may not be fully in place (an issue discussed in the next section).

<sup>57</sup> In West Bank the situation is slightly different, and NRC continues to only count children as BLP 1 beneficiaries when they are within a classroom where NRC has directly trained their teacher. However, under a new proposal for BLP, NRC is suggesting to count all BLP 1 teachers and their students as direct, rather than indirect beneficiaries.

<sup>58</sup> Improved Education is a two-year programme, and includes in it

This evaluation would agree that it is appropriate to question this assumption, and to better consider how a student, who is a beneficiary of BLP 1 is counted as such. It was apparent in many schools visited, that the trained teachers had not necessarily found the time or opportunity to train their colleagues, or responsibility for doing so was delegated to the school counsellor instead. Additionally, while there is evidence of impact for teachers and students where BLP 1 activities are occurring as intended, the evaluation also identified that there was often a significant gulf between the full BLP 1 programme, and the message that was delivered and practiced in schools/classrooms. Teachers, students and parents labelled as BLP 1 beneficiaries spoke most frequently about the exercises, and for the most part failed to clearly articulate the four theoretical/classroom-based components of the BLP 1 manual. According to both the BLP roving capacity-building coordinator and the BLP technical expert, these components are equally important, and are critical if BLP 1 is to be used effectively in tandem with BLP 2.

To date, however, there has been little ability for NRC to put in place a monitoring system to assess actual nature and quality of implementation of BLP 1 in schools following training. While NRC has advocated for it to have more of an active role in the follow through of BLP 1 in both UNRWA and MoEHE schools, it has been unable to gain the necessary permissions from relevant divisions in both systems to allow for access of its officers into classrooms. This is largely because the divisions that grant such permission are different to the ones which NRC works most closely with in the implementation of BLP activities, and are less familiar and engaged with BLP as a programme. Additional to that, however, is the fact that M&E activities within BLP are already quite cumbersome and time intensive, and without sufficient resources (i.e. staff, time and expertise) devoted to such tasks. Adding BLP 1 monitoring tasks to the already heavy workload of existing staff may be unrealistic, and may necessitate dedicating specific additional resources for such purposes.

### **5.2.5 EFFICIENCY: QUANTITY AND EXPEDIENCY OVER QUALITY**

Typically, NRC has planned BLP as 12 month (one year) supported intervention in schools. In this time, it is generally expected that for BLP 1, one teacher and the school counsellor from targeted schools are trained for two days, and then return to their school to cascade the training to all other teachers, and conduct awareness sessions with parents. The remainder of the year is then spent with the teachers implementing BLP 1 in their classrooms, with hopes that it becomes institutionalised into regular classroom practice.

For BLP 2, the schools' counsellor attends three days of basic training at the outset. The counsellor then returns to the school and commences work on establishing their first group of students using the pre-assessment measures/recruitment approaches, and runs this group with some support from NRC staff and/or Master Trainers. After running this first group, the counsellor returns to training to discuss his/her cases with other colleagues, and to learn from the experiences of others. The counsellor then returns to his/her school and is expected to run at least one other nightmare group before the end of the year.

At present, however, this plan is impeded by a number of factors, which effectively limits the period of implementation for BLP activities to much less time than a full academic year in each school. One key challenge is that NRC receives funding for BLP on a calendar, rather than a scholastic year from the majority of its donors.<sup>59</sup> This means that NRC uses the first half of the year to concentrate activity on schools it started work with in the solar year prior, and when the new school year commences, the focus shifts to a new cohort of BLP schools. For the new schools, however, there always remains uncertainty regarding whether activities will be able to be continued for the second half of the academic year, as it then moves into a new budget year for BLP. Additionally, because of NRC's need to coordinate

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<sup>59</sup> It is important to note this is a concern NRC has voiced to its donors. Having a funding cycle that mirrors or follows the academic calendar would support much greater continuity of care, particularly for the students across an entire school year, rather than spread across two.

with a number of different directorates and officers within the MoEHE and UNRWA for BLP activity, training does not commence until February/ March. This then leaves counsellors and teachers who are trained with just under two months to complete all activities before the examination period at the end of the academic year. Following the summer break, active project implementation does not recommence in new schools before October, and must be concluded by early December. Effectively, this means that BLP is actively implemented for only 5-6 academic months every year.

The split of activity across two academic years also creates significant challenges in regards to continuity of activity. Issues of staff mobility often mean that NRC and those in schools must spend time at the start of the new academic year training or raising awareness with new individuals, as those originally trained or familiar with BLP have moved outside of the programme, into non-targeted schools. For example, in West Bank, nearly 50% of the teachers trained in BLP 1, 30% of counsellors trained on BLP 1 and BLP 2, and 20% of school principals sensitised on BLP in the 2015-6 academic year moved to schools not targeted by BLP in the 2016-7 year.

This pressure is further exacerbated by other extraneous conditions which appear to be a constant feature of working in Palestine – issues like delays in obtaining necessary permissions or approvals from the various departments of the Ministry/UNRWA, strikes, unplanned and urgent other demands on teacher and counsellor time (i.e. training on the new curriculum), or political/ security constraints which preclude NRC and its staff from operating in the field during particular periods.

A compressed timeframe for implementation, the churn of staff in schools, alongside an oft-expressed viewpoint from both programme staff and counsellors/teachers that there is a sense of pressure to meet beneficiary numbers, has led to a reduction in programme quality and insufficient time for appropriate follow up within BLP at present. At least three counsellors discussed

during the field visit how they ran out of time for completing all eight sessions as part of BLP 2, and in one case, a counsellor described how he made a decision with limited time, to only focus his attention in the last three weeks on those who he deemed were still suffering from nightmares, rather than the entire original group of eight. The rushed timeframe also leads to counsellors recruiting students opportunistically, rather than purposefully and systematically. One counsellor interviewed described how, rather than going to all classrooms of a particular grade level, they asked parents following an awareness session meeting to refer their children directly. Another recalled how she decided to form a group based on students she was already familiar and working with from another programme.

This truncated period for implementation, alongside the significant scale of BLP also has led to NRC sacrificing or compromising the quality and depth of training and support it provides. A recent progress report to one donor, for example, describes how in early 2016, a Master Trainer training session was cut from two to one day, and BLP 1 training for teachers cut from two days to one, due to the late start of project activity in Gaza. Additionally, while the BLP Terms of Reference specifies that NRC BLP Focal Points (i.e. Education Officers), have an important role in providing field support in the implementation of BLP 1, discussions with these individuals revealed that time for doing so was extremely limited in a compressed implementation timeframe; particularly when more urgent and pressing demands such as coordinating trainings and meetings, and managing the extensive data collection processes that are part of BLP's M&E systems take precedence.

While NRC has attempted to shift some responsibility for the important monitoring, support and oversight role within BLP to Assistant Supervisors, Master Trainers, and Area Supervisors, the reality for these individuals is that the competing demands on their time preclude them from doing so. Interviews held with two Area Supervisors and several Master Trainers revealed that it was difficult for them to do more

than try to support other counsellors and teachers by telephone occasionally<sup>60</sup>, and that while BLP is now part of their recognised workload, it sits alongside many other responsibilities.

Additionally, for the Master Trainers, who do not receive any additional payment from NRC for this extra responsibility<sup>61</sup>, and where their role in supervising/supporting other counsellors in implementation is still not included in their job description, expecting them to take on the role of providing technical advice to teachers/other counsellors outside of their school, in addition to carrying on their normal duties, may be unreasonable.

It would appear, in turn, that NRC has been compelled to potentially increased scale and scope of BLP, but without the necessary increase in resourcing necessary to ensure that the implementation process is done with sufficient quality and support. This is largely the product of significant pressure within NRC to keep BLP running, at a time when resourcing is increasingly constrained for the education sector in Palestine, and where there is a push, internal and external to NRC, to do more with less. This is despite the BLP Guidelines for Implementation<sup>62</sup> clearly specifying, “*the funding timeframe should consider not only the start-up phase but the follow up phases to ensure quality of service delivery.*”

<sup>60</sup> It could also be questioned whether support by telephone, even if done more frequently, would suffice, given that research on follow up from capacity building activities suggests that the best follow up support is that which is done face-to-face and within the context of implementation.

<sup>61</sup> NRC does cover expenses for these Master Trainers when on duties required by NRC in this role (i.e. transport to/from training or other sites of implementation). Payment of an extra incentive is something, which NRC would have to negotiate with its partners and would need to be in line with set policies and procedures in this area.

<sup>62</sup> See pg. 5

## ➔ KEY CONCLUSIONS

- ➔ NRC has a clear and consistent approach for identifying target schools for BLP. Evident in this selection criterion is prioritisation of schools with acute protection needs, which is well aligned with vulnerability matrixes of both the Ministry of Education and protection clusters. In this way NRC is indeed prioritising the most vulnerable schools and communities through its work in BLP.
- ➔ While there is a clear rationale and process for the targeting of beneficiaries within BLP 2 in participating schools, the degree to which this process is followed systematically varies and depends quite strongly on time constraints, and the degree of follow up support which counsellors receive in this critical period.
- ➔ There remains a significant unmet need within the existing schools that NRC has targeted to date. Less than half of the students who are assessed by counsellors as needing the support of BLP 2 are currently able to participate in the programme, and often, counsellors are only able to screen a small proportion of the entire schools’ population to assess the full scale of need in the school. This would suggest an impetus for NRC to remain engaged in each of its schools for longer than it currently does within BLP.
- ➔ The significant scale-up of BLP in recent years has allowed the programme to reach significantly more beneficiaries, particularly with the addition of the classroom-based BLP 1, and the increased reliance on Master Trainers for training delivery and follow on support. While on efficiency grounds this is laudable, it does appear to come with some significant compromises on the quality of programme implementation, and potentially the depth of engagement and impact that can be expected from BLP.
- ➔ Due to a range of constraints, the effective period of implementation for BLP in any one school is 5 months rather than the intended 12 months. This appears to significantly compromise the quality of implementation and puts undo focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than process.

## ➔ KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 NRC should consider planning for and obtaining funding support for a longer minimum period of implementation (18 months versus 12 months), dedicating more of its own staff time to follow up monitoring and support, particularly for BLP 1, and more broadly reconsidering its focus on maximising reach and scale over depth.
- 2 To improve the efficiency and management of NRC's own staff engaged in BLP, existing M&E processes and tools should be streamlined, with consideration given to using stratified sampling approaches, rather than collecting data from all schools and beneficiaries, as is being attempted at present.
- 3 At the same time, a much greater focus within NRC's approach to BLP should be focussed on monitoring the quality of implementation processes, rather than solely capturing outputs and outcomes. This is particularly true for BLP 1, where it cannot be presumed that teachers are implementing the programme as intended (or indeed at all) in their classrooms.
- 4 NRC should consider undertaking a more comprehensive gender-based analysis of beneficiary need for and impact of BLP, to test whether assumptions it has about males being in greater need of psycho-educational support are in fact true, and whether this varies by context. This is something that could be explored in the planned research focus for BLP in 2017, or as a standalone piece of work.

## 5.3 SUSTAINABILITY

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This final section of the findings explores the ways in which NRC has worked to institutionalise BLP within its key partners in Palestine – UNRWA and MoEHE, and some of the key challenges and issues that remain in this process. In doing so it also examines whether the approach that NRC has taken to institutionalising BLP is the right one, and where critical gaps remain.

### 5.3.1 BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

Within both UNRWA and MoEHE it is evident that NRC has invested significant time and energy into building a strong relationship with the relevant directorates and individuals within these organisations to ensure long-term buy in and support for BLP.

One issue that arose in early discussions with both UNRWA and MoEHE is whether teachers could be involved in running the group and individual sessions with students as part of BLP 2. In the pilot phase of the project, experienced teachers were trained alongside counsellors in the facilitation of such groups. This was done in line with the BLP 2 manual<sup>63</sup>, which was originally written “*for experienced teachers, school counsellors, and educational psychologists targeting children and adolescents with persistent nightmares.*” Strong concern was voiced within both UNRWA and MoEHE about this, with NRC agreeing that for BLP 2, trained and specialised personnel (i.e. school counsellors/educational psychologists) should be the only ones involved in this component of the programme. Additionally, within MoEHE, a strong preference was voiced for training/follow up support to be facilitated by qualified and experienced clinical professionals (education psychologists and counsellors). This has led to NRC ensuring that the staff it employs to be part of BLP come from this background.

In the time since, NRC has maintained on going and active communication with both entities. What was made clear in the interviews held with

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<sup>63</sup> BLP 2 Manual, p. 9





key stakeholders within each of these organisations, was a sense that NRC had approached the implementation of BLP with flexibility, a willingness to recognise the needs and demands of their organisations/schools, and with a sincere commitment to working together to support effective and sustainable solutions to the PSS and protection needs of children. As one stakeholder from MoEHE noted:

*“ NRC, unlike other partners, has shown a sustained commitment to working with us, and are transparent in their agenda.”*

This relationship has significantly supported NRC’s efforts to institutionalise BLP within each of the two systems.

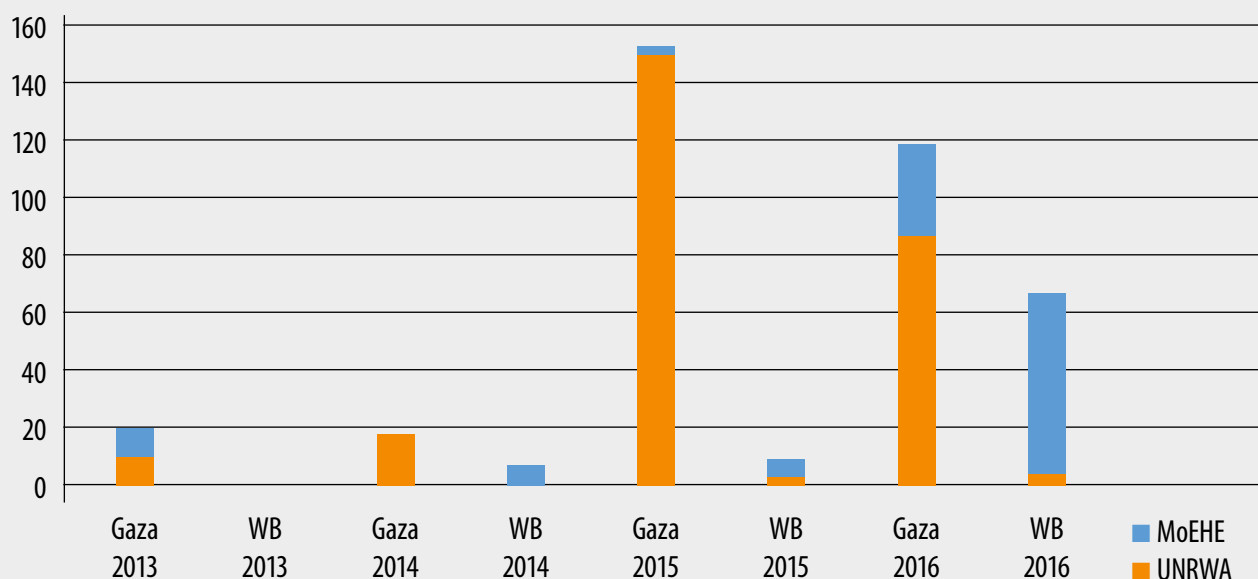
### 5.3.2 SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN UNRWA

In UNRWA in Gaza, the process of institutionalisation is quite far along. As already described in previous sections, the secondment of the BLP Technical Expert from the University of Tromsø to UNRWA in early 2016, along with NRC’s approach to using and relying on a cadre of

Master Trainers to support the further implementation and extension of BLP into all Gaza schools, has proven to be a strong sustainability solution. In 2016, four assistant supervisors working in the UNRWA Community Mental Health Department were included in the Master Trainers group to ensure supervision and proper follow up of the process. Ultimately the aim is that it will be these assistant supervisors who will take over from NRC in managing oversight and monitoring of BLP in all UNRWA schools. Additionally, BLP 2 groups are expected to continue in all UNRWA schools as it has now been incorporated as an integral component of the ‘Service Delivery Handbook’ for counsellors, and is considered part of their annual work plan.

The process of transferring responsibility to UNRWA for BLP has occurred over three years. The idea of using Master Trainers came about with the demand for NRC to respond to the significant PSS needs following Operation Protective Edge in 2014. In 2015, with additional training and support from the external BLP Technical Expert, the first cadre of eight Master Trainers began to run training sessions and follow up case sessions independently. These eight Masters Trainers were carefully selected based on their experience of

**Figure 11:** Number of schools targeted in BLP 2012-2016 by location/category of school



implementing BLP since 2013, and having successfully run several BLP 2 groups in their schools in the period between 2013-4. Based on the key learning from this first round of using Master Trainers, NRC developed a clear criterion for the selection of future Master Trainers.<sup>64</sup> Against this criterion, a much larger group of Master Trainers was trained in 2016 (approximately 22 counsellors, 2 per area) to support the implementation of BLP across 87 UNRWA schools in Gaza. Now the focus is shifting to remove NRC completely from its oversight of these Master Trainers and to shift the responsibility to staff within UNRWA. Following UNRWA's request, NRC is focusing its efforts in 2017 on training 20 UNRWA assistant supervisors, who will attend two supervision technical support sessions in January and April led by the BLP technical expert from the University of Tromsø. The training will provide them with the full BLP training package and support them in setting up a solid structure to be able to provide guidance, supervision and support to school counsellors and BLP Master Trainers on an ongoing basis.

That stated, there remain a few key challenges that remain before NRC can hand over BLP to

UNRWA completely. As already discussed earlier, while BLP is noted as being included in the programme of work for counsellors, it may be in a much narrower form than the totality of the BLP 'package'. There still appears to be a lack of acknowledgement of BLP 1 in UNRWA's positioning of BLP moving forward, and it does not appear that to date, the UNRWA Education and Community Mental Health departments have fully identified how, if and why BLP 1 fits within the broader spectrum of UNRWA's School Based Teacher Development Reform and its Inclusive Education approach to PSS provision.

Additionally, as roles/responsibilities are currently specified within the BLP ToR, it appears to be neither the job of the Master Trainers nor of the Area and Assistant Supervisors to oversee the implementation of BLP 1 in classrooms. In part, this may be because this task falls under the role of the Education Officers who sit under another department. If BLP is to continue to be implemented as a complete package in UNRWA schools, NRC must work with urgency to ensure that there is a commitment and sense of responsibility to maintaining BLP 1 within classroom practice across all relevant UNRWA departments.

<sup>64</sup> The BLP Guidelines for Implementation specify that Master Trainers should: (1) have a professional background (e.g. psychology or education); (2) experience in counselling; (3) undertaken the training for BLP 1 and BLP 2; and (4) have experience of running a minimum of 3-5 BLP 2 groups.

### 5.3.3 WORKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY IN MOEHE

Within Ministry of Education schools, the path to institutionalisation and sustainability is aspirational rather than fully in sight at the moment. In part this is a reflection of the fact that to date, the majority of schools that have been targeted by NRC through BLP in both Gaza and West Bank have been within the UNRWA system (see Figure 11).

For NRC the decision to prioritise UNRWA schools was driven primarily by a regional MoU framework agreement between NRC and UNRWA HQ in Amman that facilitated the start up and expansion of BLP in Palestine. Building the relationship within MoEHE took more time, proved more difficult, and often involved working across a number of different directorates simultaneously. At the same time, the shortage of counsellors is more acute in MoEHE schools at present, making implementation of BLP difficult.

In West Bank, the process of training and using Master Trainers to support the expansion of BLP into new schools began in 2016 with the training of 5 Master Trainers. These trainers are now working alongside NRC in the scale-up of BLP in new schools across West Bank. A challenge for many of these trainers, however, is managing their own responsibilities in their schools, with the additional and added responsibilities of supporting counsellors in other schools. In West Bank, most of these counsellors were working across more than one school themselves, and having to balance their caseloads in each. Many acknowledged that it proved difficult to meet the full range of responsibilities for Master Trainers, specified in the position description, particularly given that no additional time allowance or financial incentive was given for this role.

In Gaza, the intention is in 2017 to work towards institutionalisation within MoEHE schools in two ways. The first is to recruit 65 newly graduated counsellors through a joint-NRC/MoEHE interview panel and use them to support existing school counsellors at first, and later, once their training and capacity building process is finalised, to fill in the psychosocial provision gap in schools

### → KEY CONCLUSIONS

- In Palestine, NRC has had to diligently manage relationships and partnerships to reach a point where BLP can now be institutionalised within the two large education service providers (UNRWA and MoEHE). Institutionalisation is much further progressed within UNRWA Gaza at present, than other jurisdictions, owing to the longer period of implementation in this context, and the strong relationships and capacity that have been built through time.
- While NRC has a clear, well-planned exit strategy in place for UNRWA Gaza in regards to the handover of responsibility of BLP 2 (through the establishment of the *Better Sleep* module), BLP 1 is not yet institutionalised and will likely not continue independent of NRC's active support/engagement.
- It is still uncertain if there is sufficient support and resourcing in place, independent of NRC, to allow Master Trainers and Assistant Supervisors to manage full responsibility for oversight and quality control for BLP 2 beyond 2017.
- A key challenge in both MoEHE and UNRWA, which still remains unresolved, is whether as part of institutionalising BLP, responsibility for the programme should be shared across the education-focused and counselling/community mental health divisions – particularly in regards to the classroom-focused aspects of the programme.

## → KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 NRC must work with urgency to ensure that there is a commitment and sense of responsibility to maintaining BLP 1 within classroom practice across all relevant UNRWA departments in Gaza. Supporting institutionalisation of BLP 1 may require NRC to remain engaged in Gaza beyond the end of 2017.
- 2 NRC needs to consider how it can set in place systems within BLP to bring the education-focussed divisions of MoEHE and UNRWA into ongoing and sustained conversation with the counseling/ community mental health divisions about the programme. This will help to ensure that BLP is seen as a shared responsibility across these areas, and help to locate BLP, in its entirety, within the umbrella of inclusive education approaches that both partners are currently stressing.

where there are no counsellors. These 65 graduates, who will receive a monthly allowance from NRC, will be trained in BLP 1 and the standard MoEHE capacity building package and seconded to the MoEHE to enable them to work hand-in-hand with the existing school counsellors. The second is to begin to develop a group of MoEHE Master Trainers. The intention is to support 12 experienced MoEHE counsellors in BLP into this role using a ToT approach. That noted, the same issues, noted in West Bank for Master Trainers is likely to occur in Gaza as well. What is different, however, is the additional support NRC is providing to a number of counsellors/schools by placing a second counsellor alongside them to support implementation of BLP 1 in particular. Both NRC and the Ministry recognise that the process of institutionalisation will be a slow one. As one individual within the Ministry said in his interview, *“I would rather have the pot simmer and soak in the flavours for a long time, than heat up too quickly and burn out.”* In making this analogy, his sense was that NRC’s more phased and gradual approach was sensible, and was more likely to enable BLP’s institutionalisation in Ministry schools.

One of the unanswered questions regarding institutionalisation within the Ministry of Education is who will ultimately take over responsibility for managing and overseeing the work of teachers and counsellors as part of BLP. Unlike in UNRWA, where responsibility has been clearly tasked to the Assistant Supervisors, this does not appear to have been articulated or identified in NRC’s approaches to sustainability within the Ministry. Interviews in both the Field Support Office and the Counselling and Special Education Office suggests that there is viewpoint, held in each, of BLP falling under their jurisdiction, but for different reasons. Until this point is negotiated, it may prove difficult for NRC to move to the next phase of handing over oversight to the Ministry for BLP activities.

# 6

## LESSONS

**This section considers some of the key lessons to be learned from the implementation of BLP in Palestine. In doing so, it explicitly engages with one of the key questions posed in the evaluation ToR about the implications of what has occurred with BLP in Palestine for the programme’s continued roll-out in Palestine and the region over the coming years.**

### **INVERTING THE PYRAMID OF ACTIVITY AND ATTENTION**

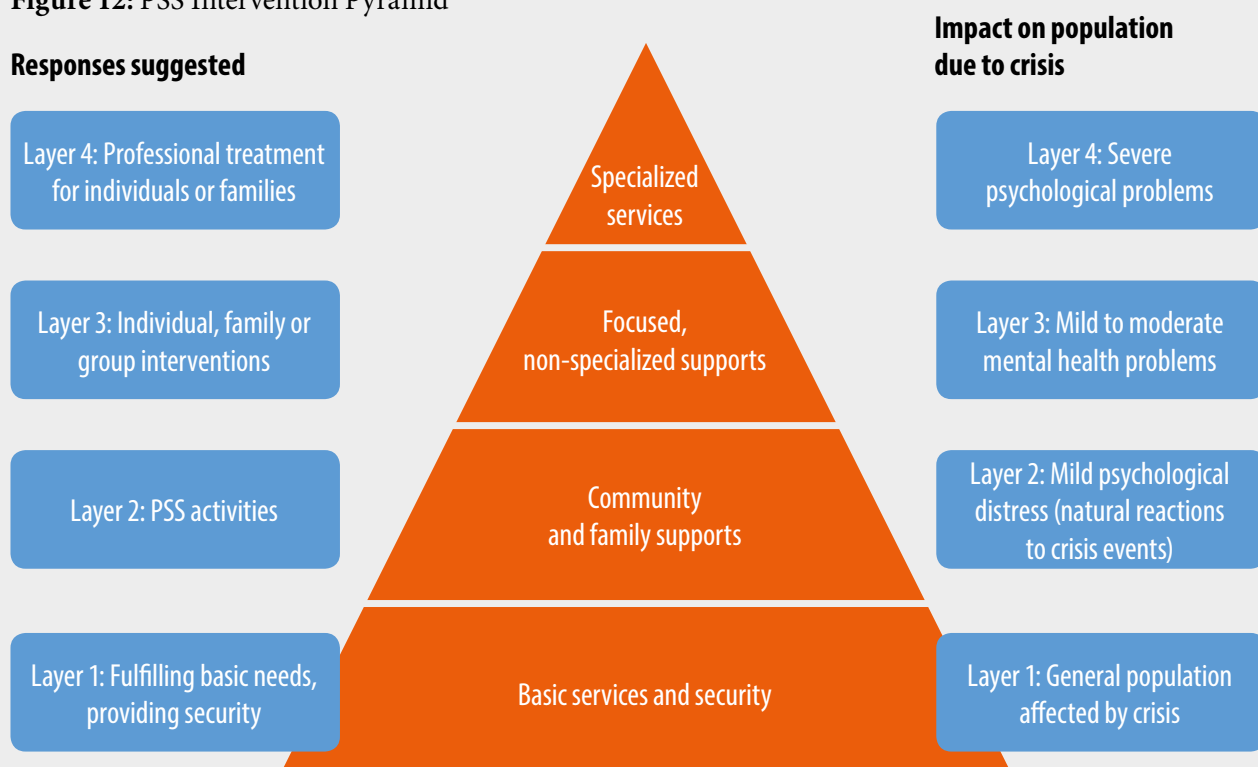
As has been discussed at various points throughout this evaluation, one of the key issues at present is the challenge of balancing programme activity and attention between BLP 1 and BLP 2. Mapped within the intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies (see Figure 12), BLP 2, as it is currently constructed, would sit at the higher end of the pyramid of intervention, as a focussed, specialised form of PSS support (Level 4). BLP 1 would be located further down – as broad PSS support which strengthens the protective capacities of individuals to manage and cope with stress, and where reach is broader, but more diffused. Given that BLP is an education response and initiative, and keeping in line with what emerging guidance and good practice notes suggest about PSS support in educational settings, rather than working from the top of the pyramid (BLP 2) and working down, as has been done in Palestine in its implementation approach, it may be necessary to start from the bottom (BLP 1) and work up.

This is in line with what NRC’s external BLP Technical Expert has recommended, namely to commence with BLP 1 exclusively, working and training teachers and parents in first instance, who in turn work with the entire school/community population. This would serve to better position and justify BLP as an education programme. It

would also help to position BLP as a programme meant for all students, rather than just those suffering from acute trauma, and give more attention to the broader academic coping skills (concentration, focus and anxiety relief), which BLP 1 supports and strengthens. While this is already being done in other programmes outside of Palestine, according to the BLP Roving Capacity-Building Coordinator, it will require a significant reconceptualization of BLP for Palestine.

It would mean that NRC would have to challenge the still prevalent idea in Palestine that BLP is most relevant for acute psychosocial needs (i.e. recurrent nightmares), and hence requiring specialist support and intervention at the higher levels of the pyramid (i.e. Layer 3 or 4). Instead, BLP needs to be rebranded not as the ‘nightmare’ programme, but as a protective and broad-based PSS programme which provides all learners in situations of crises, with some protective skills and techniques to manage the stressors created by their situation (i.e. Layer 2). Through this process, however, teachers and counsellors could begin to identify students whose PSS needs are unmet through this general intervention alone, and requiring more attention and support. At the next level up, BLP might then support these students further in a group based setting, but potentially

**Figure 12: PSS Intervention Pyramid<sup>65</sup>**



still under the support of a teacher, rather than a counsellor (i.e. Level 3). Finally, for the most acute cases, the currently branded BLP 2, would remain as a series of focussed, specialised and individualised sessions for students suffering specific trauma as exhibited through recurrent nightmares (i.e. Level 4). These sessions would continue to be managed by trained counsellors.

It should be recognised that in 2017, this process of reconceptualising BLP in Palestine will commence with the development of an additional module that will sit between BLP 1 and BLP 2. The new module will incorporate aspects of the group sessions currently in the BLP 2 manual, and expand on this; but also create a platform for this component to be carried out by non-specialised staff within the classroom, rather than counselling context.

<sup>65</sup> This pyramid is based on the intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies in the IASC Guidelines (2007) and IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (2009a & 2009b). It is taken from the 2016 INEE Background Paper on Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Youth in Emergency Settings (p. 23).

## IDENTIFYING BLP'S NICHE

Related to the above, a question that has loomed for the Palestine programme has been “what justifies BLP as an education response?” In part, this is a product of how BLP started in Palestine, where the focus for the first years was exclusively on BLP 2 alone. The approaches, training and monitoring tools were developed with this in mind. Later, when BLP 1 was added, it was seen as that, an add-on, rather than the precursor to, BLP 2. To this day, this perception persists, within schools, with UNRWA/Ministry partners, and even within NRC programme staff still viewing it as the “nightmares programme”. If instead, the opposite genesis had occurred, then the same issues may not be occurring in Palestine today.

Nonetheless, NRC continues to struggle to find the right balance in its support to each component of BLP, and it is clearly evident that NRC’s own monitoring and evaluation activities and implementation approaches in BLP remain heavily focussed towards achieving the clinical/ psychological (i.e. reduction in nightmares), rather



than education outcomes of BLP. To rebalance this, it may be important both in the Palestine programme, and other BLP programmes in the region, to fully articulate and identify which components of BLP make it an education intervention, other than its site of implementation. What this evaluation suggests is that there is ample evidence on which to answer this question, but in doing so, it may also require a reconsideration of the outcomes that NRC currently prioritises. It necessitates shifting away from the programme's prioritisation, measurement and tracking of nightmare frequency, towards a broader, and more intermediate set of educational outcomes, such as improved concentration, focus, enjoyment of school, and academic self-confidence. Again, this rebalancing process has already commenced within NRC's revised 2017 Education Strategy for Palestine.

## RECOGNISING THE UNIQUE CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTATION

To date, BLP has been employed universally across Palestine. In doing so it has largely presumed that the approaches being utilised are equally relevant and meaningful to boys and girls, and children living in Gaza and West Bank. Yet the analysis from this evaluation would suggest that there are important contextual differences that need to be taken into account.

As an example, the BLP manuals as written presume that nightmares are linked to a specific traumatic event. For the children of West Bank where the traumatic events may be of a lower intensity than that experienced by the children of Gaza, but which are experienced on an almost daily basis, the cumulative impact of this may be underestimated or potentially poorly served by a programme that aims to get children to overcome a single, past traumatic experience. One area that could be further researched within the planned research on BLP for 2017, would be the question of how this difference in context results in different

manifestations and experiences of conflict in children, and the ways which BLP's impacts may be varied, particularly in regards to overall well-being because of this. Having this information would create a platform on which to assess whether a different approach and level of support is needed for children in West Bank (or areas of the buffer zone in Gaza) than in other parts of Palestine.

As NRC implements BLP regionally, careful consideration should be given to managing the imperatives of efficiency, effectiveness, and scale. The pragmatic issues and challenges of the context of implementation need to be appropriately considered, and realistic timeframes for project activity and achievement of results established to avoid the quality-quantity conundrum that has sometimes been experienced with BLP in Palestine.

## **MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS**

One of the key issues that surfaced in this evaluation was a clear lack of conclusive evidence to date on the BLP's contribution to academic performance (as measured by examinations) or attendance. MSC stories and further analysis of secondary data do suggest, however, that BLP, and particularly BLP 1, does have impact on educational outcomes, and is a valuable component of improving the classroom and school environment and experience for students. Rather than showing direct contributions to academic achievement or attendance, NRC may be better placed to track and measure BLP's contribution to other educational outcomes – such as improved academic self-efficacy and academic self-confidence – which are well known precursors for academic success, and for which there are internationally validated survey instruments to measure such outcomes.

Another missing component to date from BLP's M&E tools is any measure of impact, beyond that of skills/knowledge gained, on the teachers, counsellors and parents. What the findings from this evaluation suggest is that it is important to acknowledge and capture the important impacts

BLP can have on the wellbeing of those entrusted with the care of the students in the school.

At present, there appears to be a proliferation of new tools and measures to fill some of these gaps and better capture outcomes that to date have been poorly assessed. There is however, a danger in creating these tools. With more tools, will come more data, and the need to manage the collection, collection and analysis of these data. This is an area that the programme team is already struggling to manage and keep up with, and there is a real danger of collecting more data than can be meaningfully utilised. For this reason, it may be important for NRC to streamline both its Theory of Change for BLP, and limit the outcomes it specifies to 2-3 key outcomes. From this, tools that easily and reliably capture the measures that are required should be developed, piloted and refined. For the student-focussed education and wellbeing outcomes, some thought might be given to using pre-validated and internationally recognised scales such as the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), to ensure both validity and comparability across contexts.



# 7 ANNEXES

## 7.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EVALUATION

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### Background on the context

As recognized by the 2016 Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Humanitarian Needs Overview, the situation in Palestine remains a protracted protection crisis with humanitarian consequences, driven by lack of compliance with international law on the part of the Occupying Power.

Despite historically high levels of literacy and cultural commitment to education in Palestine, the sector is constantly under attack threatening these achievements and shaking the very foundations of society. In the past couple of years increased and tightened procedures in the West Bank on checkpoints have been witnessed, new checkpoints, road blocks, attacks on school premises and increased violations against children – which include detention, arrest, house – detention and cases of individual displacement have been reported. Between January and December 2015, according to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of Grave Violations against Children (MRM), overall 34,192 children were affected by violations against education: 19,276 being attacked in schools and 14,916 being denied access to education. The deployment of tear gas, sound bombs and, albeit to a lesser extent, rubber bullets and live ammunition by Israeli soldiers and Border Police presents a continuous threat to the health, safety and well-being of Palestinian children. In Gaza, during the 2014 war, schools were targeted by bombings and children were left with physical and psychological wounds and most children are still exposed to the dangers of unexploded ordnance and are especially vulnerable when they play in conflict-affected areas.

The provision of education responses that can build the capacity of institutional duty bearers to provide long-term, school-based psychosocial support to conflict-affected children and contribute to build protective, inclusive and enabling learning environments remains a gap.

### NRC's BLP Intervention

Since 2007 NRC, in cooperation with the Institute of Education, University of Tromsø and the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), has developed the *Better Learning Programme (BLP)* which aims at improving learning conditions for children and adolescents exposed to war and conflict. The intervention was piloted in Palestine in 2011, targeting eight schools in Gaza. Based on the success of the pilot, from 2012 to 2014 the intervention was implemented across 40 schools in Gaza and the West Bank and scaled up to 168 schools in Gaza and 10 in the West Bank in 2014-2015 scholastic year. The BLP is a school-based intervention combining psychosocial and educational approaches whereby pupils are provided with explanations for their emotional reactions and practical exercises to calm down and enhance concentration. The BLP aims to help children recover their lost or reduced learning capacity, strengthen resilience and promote well-being. The goal is not only to promote behavioural change in the classroom, but also to regain lost learning capacity and strengthen resilience, concentration and learning in the school community.

The 2014 'Evaluation of the NRC's Palestine Education Programme 2010 – 2014' shows that 67% of the target children reported having their nightmares decreasing to 0 or 1 a week, 28% reported having their nightmares decreasing to 2 or 3 a week, and the remaining 5% reported having their nightmares decreasing to 4 per week. Results also provide a strong indication on the improvement in the well-being of children: the majority became more active academically and socially, 79% reported improvement in completing their homework after the intervention; 52% reported feeling safe at school and in the way to school and finally, 74% felt they were no longer isolated because of their problems.

### Purpose of evaluation and intended use

The main purpose of this evaluation is to support learning and provide guidance for future programme direction: whether and how the BLP programming is scaled up, improved and implemented further including how it is phased out as a directly implemented programme and handed over to partners. In addition, the evaluation should be an opportunity for NRC to be accountable to beneficiaries, partners and donors.

This is a country specific evaluation that will contribute to the research envisioned in 2017 funded by the same donor, focusing on the impact of BLP on learning outcomes specifically and what part BLP has to play in implementation of Education in Emergencies (EiE) programmes.

### Scope of work and lines of inquiry

The evaluation will cover the BLP programme spanning nearly 2 years: from September 2014 to date.

### Lines of enquiry

The evaluation will look to answer the following questions:

#### Effectiveness

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1. What are the intended, unintended, positive and negative **outcomes** for children, teachers, counsellors, schools and parents of this programme? What have been the main contributing factors to achieving or not achieving these outcomes?
  - Regarding **intended outcomes**<sup>66</sup>, evaluation needs to comment on our understanding of how change happens and whether/how the programme facilitated this through activities (or didn't) including how prog decisions impacted on those
  - Regarding **unintended negative outcomes**, the enquiry needs to clarify what these are exactly, how and why these came about and what a future programme needs to consider to overcome this
  - *Commentary on this question will allow us to retrospectively build a more informed Theory of Change for the BLP project, in part by concluding which parts seem to have significantly contributed to outcomes with respect to how they were practically implemented and which activities do not appear to have a strong correlation with outcomes.*

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1. With respect to question 1, how does the difference in contexts between emergency and protracted crisis and whether the BLP programme was implemented in isolation or as a part of the 'Improved Learning' framework, contribute to the above positive and negative outcomes of the project?

Please see Annex C for eval matrix envisioned for Q1 and Q2 (just students as stakeholder group).

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<sup>66</sup> NRC will compile as much of the actual data from schools, our own monitoring methods on as many outcomes of interest as possible, for that to be reflected on during the evaluation. If time permits, we will do this internally, further tailoring this question to specific outcomes (those we didn't have time or information to look into more deeply)

## Relevance

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1. Based on what perceived need was the programme initiated and does the design of BLP modules respond to that need in theory?
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1. NRC has selection criteria for both BLP -1 and BLP -2 modules. Are we identifying the right individuals for the BLP 1 and BLP 2 modules: i.e. do our criteria include individuals that should not be part of the programme as the benefits of the programme could not extend to them<sup>67</sup> – or do our criteria prevent selection/inclusion of individuals that would likely benefit? How can the targeting process be done differently and/or what other parameters should we include and why?<sup>68</sup>
- 
1. How does BLP compare to other PSS interventions in Gaza and West Bank, what is its added value?

## Efficiency

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1. Were resources used in the best way possible, allowing us the potential to achieve desired results within both BLP 1 and BLP 2? How can we improve use of resources, for these aims?
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1. What could we tweak in how BLP is implemented, to maximize results, reach more individuals, reduce resources, improve the programme in general?<sup>69</sup>
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1. Are there any other resources available that NRC could use in future (partners, etc) to achieve same or more?

## Sustainability/ When does NRC stop providing support

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1. What are the possible long-term effects of the BLP project, including those likely to be observed beyond the project's life for all stakeholder groups and why?<sup>70</sup>
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1. What is required to be done by NRC and Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in order to take the programme over and be able to deliver the same/similar programme with same/equal results and do we and MoEHE have the capacity/resources etc to do this effectively as of now?<sup>71</sup>
- 
1. What quality control / follow-up does NRC have to do once handover to UNRWA happens (if any)?

## Scale up/expansion

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1. What practices and factors might enable effective scale up of this programme, in Palestine and regionally?

## Methodology

To answer the evaluation questions, NRC would like the evaluator to submit a study design and methodology based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, which focuses on participatory, qualitative methods, to complement the available quantitative data gathered through our M&E system. In particular, we are seeking an evaluator experienced in participatory psychosocial and education evaluations and with demonstrable experience of qualitative evaluations such as most significant change. We require an evaluator who is familiar with theory of change approach.

As a minimum, the methodology should include a desk review of key documents, including analysis

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<sup>67</sup> Either the 20% that are severely traumatised and required more comprehensive care; or the 70% that should be part of BLP 1 alone

<sup>68</sup> Please see Annex B for further details on lines of enquiry about this aspect

<sup>69</sup> NRC will conduct an internal quality assessment of the programme looking at various implementation, contextual factors, integration with community and need and our response to all of these, just prior to start of the eval. QA is an introspective exercise with NRC team and not beneficiaries directly, which is used to improve how we implement. This will be made available for this evaluation

<sup>70</sup> We have a graduating class of May 2015 that can be considered closely in this question

<sup>71</sup> We anticipate some kind of 'matching of needs and resources' matrix for both NRC and MoEHE.

of existing quantitative data, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and methods to seek the views and perceptions of the targeted communities and key stakeholders.

## Evaluation follow up and learning

The result of this evaluation will be followed by a workshop for the education team in country, including relevant regional staff, to review recommendations and plan the way forward for country and regional continuation and expansion. The results of the evaluation will be shared with relevant partners (e.g. UNRWA, MoEHE) through a workshop.

NRC follows up all evaluations with a management response and the implementation of requisite actions are subsequently tracked. This will include the documentation of key learning, which will be shared with relevant country, regional and head office colleagues.

This evaluation will contribute to an annual learning review, which feeds into the global annual strategic planning processes. Key findings will be reported to NRC's senior management team in Oslo. The evaluation will also be published on ALNAP.

## Evaluation principles

The views expressed in the report shall be the independent and candid professional opinion of the evaluator. The evaluation will be guided by the following ethical considerations:

- ➔ Openness – of information given, to the highest possible degree to all involved parties
- ➔ Public access – to the results when there are not special considerations against this
- ➔ Broad participation – the relevant parties should be involved where possible
- ➔ Reliability and independence – the evaluation should be conducted so that findings and conclusions are correct and trustworthy

## Coordination and management of the evaluation

The following evaluation Steering Committee within NRC has been established:

Palestine Head of Programmes, Martino Costa (Chair); Palestine Programme Advisor, Angelita Caredda (Coordinator), Global Education Advisor, Andrea Naletto (technical support); Regional M&E Advisor, Ana Stiglic (Evaluation Focal Point).

The Steering Committee can also draw upon a reference group consisting of:

Palestine Education Specialist, Camilla Lodi; Roving BLP Advisor, Karam Elshanti; Palestine Education Coordinator in Gaza, Jamil Sawalma; Palestine Education Coordinator, West Bank – Asad Ashour; Palestine M&E Coordinator, Walaa Abu Zaiter.

The Steering Committee will oversee administration and overall coordination, including monitoring progress of the evaluation. The main functions of the Steering Committee will be:

- ➔ to establish the Terms of Reference of the evaluation;
- ➔ select external evaluator(s);
- ➔ review and comment on the inception report and approve the proposed evaluation strategy;
- ➔ review and comment on the draft evaluation report;
- ➔ establish a dissemination and utilization strategy.

The main functions of the Reference Group are:

- ➔ to facilitate the gathering of data necessary for the evaluation;
- ➔ to participate in the validation of evaluation findings, and to ensure that they are factually accurate;
- ➔ to contribute to the management response;
- ➔ to act on the relevant recommendations.

Please see Annex A for roles and detailed responsibilities of both these groups.

## 1. DELIVERABLES AND REPORTING DEADLINES

The evaluator will submit three reports and two presentations:

**Inception report:** Following the desk review and prior to beginning fieldwork, the consultant will produce an inception report subject to approval by the NRC Evaluation Steering Committee. This report will detail a draft work plan with a summary of the primary information needs, the methodology to be used, and a work plan/schedule for field visits and major deadlines, within the date ranges suitable to NRC (provided in Annex A). With respect to methodology, the consultant needs to provide a description of how data will be collected and a sampling framework, data sources, and drafts of suggested data collection tools such as questionnaires and interview guides, preferably against the research questions (not generically stated). Once the report is finalised and accepted, the consultant must submit a request for any change in strategy or approach to the NRC Evaluation Steering Committee. First draft inception report is due by COB Sunday 25 Sept and final version submitted no later than COB Sun 9 October.

**Draft evaluation report:** A draft evaluation report needs to be submitted to the Evaluation Steering Committee no later than COB Friday 25 Nov and feedback will be provided to the evaluator by COB Tue 6 Dec.

**Final evaluation report:** The final evaluation report will follow NRC's standard template for evaluation reports, which will be shared with the evaluator at the beginning of the consultancy. Submission is due COB 21 Dec to the Steering Committee.

### Presentation to NRC and relevant partners & stakeholders

Please see Annex A for a detailed timeline. All material collected in the undertaking of the evaluation process shall be submitted to the Chair of the Evaluation Steering Committee prior to the termination of the contract.

The language used for the deliverables will be English

## Timeframe & Budget

Proposals should present a budget for the number of expected working days over the entire period.

The evaluation is scheduled to start at the beginning of September with desk work; fieldwork is projected to begin middle of October (16th) depending on the availability of the evaluator. The draft evaluation report should be finalized by 25 November, with the final report due end December.

The evaluator is expected to provide a suggested timeline and work plan for the evaluation based on these scheduling parameters and in keeping with the scope of the evaluation questions and criteria.

In event of serious problems or delays, the evaluator should inform the Steering Committee immediately. Any significant changes to review timetables need to be approved by the Steering Committee in advance.

## 2. EVALUATION CONSULTANT

NRC seeks expressions of interest from individuals/teams, ideally with the following skills/qualifications and expertise:

- ➔ Sound and proven experience in conducting evaluations based on OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, particularly utilisation and learning focussed evaluations
- ➔ Extensive experience of theories of change and how they can be used to carry out evaluations
- ➔ Expertise in participatory qualitative data collection techniques
- ➔ Background in delivery of psychosocial programmes specifically within the education sector
- ➔ Additional, desirable knowledge, includes:
- ➔ Understanding of psychosocial programming within education setting
- ➔ Understanding of global and regional trends and initiatives on psychosocial programming within education settings

Necessary Skills:

- Fluency in written and spoken English is required; Arabic highly desirable
- Prior experience in the Middle East, preferred
- Proven experience of managing evaluations of humanitarian projects
- Experience of designing qualitative data collection methods and of managing participatory and learning focussed evaluations
- Excellent team work and communication skills, flexibility and good organisational skills

## 7.2 MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

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### 1. My Journey with Nightmares (Counsellor, Gaza)

I've been a counsellor since 2011, the same year I was introduced to BLP. At that time, I was working in Beit Hanoun in a very difficult school, which is located next to the border. In the community there were regular incursions between the Israeli forces and the community, and this led to high incidences of trauma and need amongst my students. In this school I decided implement nightmare groups at once to deal with this problem. Then the following year, I moved to another school in the same community, but this school was in even more distress because it had been targeted in an air strike during the conflict of 2012. Children and their families who had been sheltering the school witnessed others in front of them dying. Again, because there was a level of need amongst the students, I implemented a number of different nightmare groups in the school, and often had several groups going at once. Throughout this period, there was follow up from NRC and I would meet its staff, the technical expert, and other counsellors to discuss the difficult cases and brainstorm ways to solve them together. In 2014, after three years of implementing the nightmare group sessions in my schools, I was approached by NRC to be a master trainer. It was explained to me that in this role, I would work with and train other UNRWA

counsellors in the same way I had been trained and supported earlier. I was surprised and honoured to be asked. They clearly thought I had the knowledge and skill to work with others on the programme. After receiving some further training directly from the technical expert, I started to work and train other counsellors on the programme. It was the first time in my role as a counsellor that I had been given the responsibility to stand in front of others, and to train and support them. At first I was nervous and timid about this, but over time I've grown more confident in this role. I have really appreciated the opportunity to meet and work with counsellors from other schools, though at times balancing my support to them, with the demands in my own school, can be a challenge. Through BLP I've been given the skills, knowledge and experience to be an expert in addressing children's nightmares.

### 2. Dreams and Fear (BLP II Participant, Male, West Bank)

My nightmares were about a soldier who wanted to come and kill me, time after time I felt that something or someone wanted to kill me. I would feel afraid, I would stay in my bed after having a nightmare. I would just be sitting there not knowing what to do. I learned how to do the balancing move with the counsellor, and I feel joy when I do it, I would feel rested, rested from the fear. The relaxation exercises were great too, I want to talk to the counsellor more.

### 3. Working for myself and for others (Counsellor, West Bank)

As a counsellor working in an on going crisis zone, I've had to deal with the impacts of trauma for sometime. I had some techniques to work with children, but they were piecemeal rather than comprehensive, and insufficient to deal with the circumstances and needs which our children face. When I was introduced to BLP, it was the first time that children's nightmares were given particular attention in my role as a counsellor. Yet, it was clear to me how nightmares was very clear evidence of the impact of trauma on these children. Because of my participation in BLP, I

have new skills, expertise and knowledge on how to deal with traumatic events in a clear and comprehensive way. In the programme, I was trained using a clear and structured approach, how to work with children, teachers and parents to discuss and resolve nightmares, and give them skills and techniques to deal with the traumatic events they have and continue to face. The exercises were easy to teach and practice, and the results were quickly evident to those who used them. I was able to discuss the impacts of trauma on children with both parents and teachers, and to give them skills to support their children. This I believe is really important because I'm only with the children for a very small part of their day, and usually not able to reach them in the middle of an emergency. Over time, I've come to live and breathe BLP. I use it in my role as a Master Trainer, and also as part of the Emergency Response team in the Ministry. I use it with my children at home, and on myself whenever I feel stress. I feel as if BLP has become part of my personality and I use the breathing and relaxation exercises unconsciously now. My hope now is that the students, parents and teachers I've worked with will continue to use the skills independently, as the trauma is on going and the need for the exercises and activities of BLP is continuous.

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#### 4. A mother with hope

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

A few months ago, I received a request from the school counsellor to come to the school. It was for all mothers of the school. At the session, she taught us about relaxation and breathing exercises we could do at home, as well as to better understand the impacts that trauma has on children's wellbeing. A few weeks later, the counsellor then asked me to come in again and she discussed with me the fact that she had done an assessment with my daughter and found that she had a significant numbers of nightmares. Until that point, I had no idea that my daughter was suffering from nightmares, and so it came as a bit of a surprise to me. But I had noticed that my daughter was starting to wet her bed quite often. I had also observed that after the war, she became quite scared of the dark, and would not go out at Maghreb time. Over these last two months, my

daughter has started to participate in sessions with the counsellor at the school. At home, I have started practicing the breathing, tense and release and relaxation exercises with all my children, but with particular focus on my daughter. I started to notice after doing these activities, that my children were more relaxed and calm around the house... and more importantly that I started to feel more relaxed around them as well. My daughter has started to open up to her father and I about her nightmares, and we have discovered that she was terrified of someone chasing and kidnapping her. When she discusses her fears, we have tried various other techniques at home to deal with this, in addition to the breathing exercises, such as giving her a shekel to go to the shops and forget her worries. My daughter is still having these nightmares, but she is becoming a bit less afraid. I am hoping that these sessions will help her to regain her concentration and improve her academic performance.

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#### 5. More participation, more engaged

(Principal, West Bank)

One of the boys in my school was wetting himself all the time. This was because his home is close to the main road between Jerusalem and Hebron which is dangerous because of the constant Israeli military presence there. He came to school late often and sat quietly saying nothing in the classrooms. His mother expressed concern that her son was afraid to sleep by himself because of his on going nightmares. As part of BLP, the counsellor discussed this child's situation at length with the mother, and gave her some tools and techniques from the programme to help her son at home. She learned how to reassure her son at night, when his nightmares arose. The combination of the sessions with the counsellor, and the mother's reinforcement of relaxation techniques at home, means this child is now experiencing less nightmares. At school, he is now less withdrawn and more engaged with the other students. He now comes to class on time. Through the nightmares programme, parents of children like this child now have more awareness of why nightmares are an important issue for their children and their wellbeing, and have knowledge of how they can deal with this concern in the home.

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## 6. The Fear

(BLP II Participant, Male, West Bank)

I was at my grandfather's house and the soldiers came in and they search us, they searched me. I would always have nightmares about these soldiers, especially because during that same day they shot a man, in front of me. I will never forget it. I felt very very afraid, because I felt they were going to kill me. After that, the nightmares started coming. I would wake up crying a lot, and sweating, and I would go wash my face and go to my mother. She would tell me it's a nightmare, but it was real. I want to see my counsellor more. When I sit with my counsellor, I do different activities and I really feel better, very slowly. I really like the tree activity and the relaxation activity, it makes me feel rested and keeps the fear away and I forget it a little.

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## 7. A better life

(Mother of BLP II beneficiary, Gaza)

During the 2014 war, our neighbourhood was dangerous. While my in laws decided to flees, we decided not to because I believe that death is destiny...if we are meant to die then that is God's Will. Even those that chose to escape often were bombed as well, so there was no safe space. As time went on, the war got more intense and the bombing closer and closer. I tried to distract my kids' attention by playing games and reading stories, but one day, a huge airstrike targeted the house that is directly behind ours. Fire and dust entered our house from the strike. My older son covered his hands over his ears, and lay down on the floor, screaming uncontrollably, and peed on himself as well. My younger daughter, saw this, and was shocked to see her brother, normally so strong this way. After the end of the war, my daughter would relive this experience in her dreams. She would wake up screaming and in a panic when she would relive this in her mind. It made her very anxious, and she started biting her nails and lips until they would start to bleed. She also became increasingly angry with me, for our decision not to flee during the war. Then the counsellor introduced by daughter to a project focussing on children's nightmares. The counsellor taught her breathing and stress and release activities to relax her. While I haven't been that involved in all the activities she is doing with her counsellor, I can see that she is now 80% better. For me, I want her to get from

better to best for her and all my children. I really believe that we need as Palestinians to get out from traditional healing techniques and use the new techniques that are introduced by psychologist through programmes such as BLP.

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## 8. Hesitant

(Mother of BLP Beneficiary, West Bank)

My daughter is 12 years old, and the most apparent thing about her personality is that she's hesitant. Always hesitant when she wants to do anything, think about anything, or decide anything. She is really struggling with her self-confidence. I constantly hear her talking to herself. It would be in a loud voice. She only plays with younger kids and doesn't like to play with her kids which are not her age. Her dad always tries to help her and support me to find out how we can help her. She would have nightmares at night about anything she sees during the day. There have been soldiers in our area and shootings but her fear is no different from that of any other child. While she is doing good in school, her teachers tell me that she has an actual fear of being wrong. Recently I started seeing her do the balancing, breathing, and relaxation exercises. A great thing she does is take any thought that is negative and make a conscious effort to transfer it into a positive one. The most important change is that I saw that is she is not so sensitive, and as a mother this is so important to me but it will really help her in life.

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## 9. My nightmares

(BLP II Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to have bad dreams. One which I remember is that my parents and I were trying to make a trip to Al Aqsa Mosque. On the way, we were stopped by the soldiers and they came onto the bus and started to shoot people including my parents, leaving me an orphan. This dream terrified me and I would wake up to make sure that what I was dreaming was not real. My heart would beat really fast, and sometimes I would fall off the bed when I had these dreams. The nightmare programme taught me to breathe in and breathe out, and I started to use this when felt afraid. Even though I might still feel afraid sometimes, I can now continue, and I don't have nightmares such as these as often.



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## 10. Difficulties of life

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

My daughter has suffered from nightmares and bed wetting for some time. I know this is because she in an unstable family environment. Her father left the house sometime ago and is married to another woman. He does not visit our house often, and when he does, he gets in fights and shouts with me and my children. He also does not support us financially so we struggle to get by. A few months ago, I came to the counsellor to discuss the fact that my daughter was suffering from these issues. This was soon after I had attended a session run by the counsellor for all parents where she had discussed how nightmares can be linked to real issues in a child's life and impact on them emotionally and academically. At the same session, she introduced us to some exercises we could use with our children at home to address these feelings. My daughter, soon after, participated in a series of sessions with the counsellor. Afterwards, I noticed that her nightmares have stopped. But, her bed-wetting continues, and I can see that she continues to struggle academically. I haven't been able to use these exercises at home with my children, because of the personal stress I am under, but I see my daughter practicing these exercises independently. Perhaps my daughter hasn't improved because she continues to live in an unstable family where the tensions still exist.

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## 11. The story of the naughty students

(BLP I Participant, Female, West Bank)

Sometimes in school we feel bored. When we get bored, some students get naughty and misbehave. I am the one who has responsibility for writing the names of the students who are naughty. In the past, I had to give many names to my teacher each day. Then my teacher taught us some new exercises, like balancing. It is fun for me and the other students to do sometime different in the classroom other than reading and writing. Now, we feel less bored in the classroom. There are less students misbehaving and I no longer have any names to give to the teacher at the end of each class.

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## 12. Reducing children's suffering

(Teacher, West Bank)

At the time BLP came to our school we had just had two students from within the camp shot by soldiers. There were also stabbings and shootings occurring between Palestinians and Israeli which students would see on television and in social media. During this time, my students would come to school stressed, and often this would then result in them acting out violently in the classroom, for example, using rulers and pretending to stab each other. As teachers, NRC introduced us to techniques for relaxing our students in the classroom in these tense times. The exercises help students to forget some of the issues they are facing or seeing in the camp or on the television. These exercises allowed me to shift the mood of my students from angry and depressed to engaged and happy quickly and easily. My students need these activities, particularly those who live close to the Israeli checkpoints. Sometimes now, I even go into the classroom and see my students doing these exercises without me. As a school, we are now using these exercises at the beginning of each day, and this is helping me to motivate students who used to be late to school. Knowing these techniques is a tool I can continue to use with my students until the end of my time as a teacher.

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## 13. A girl with hope

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

Our house is close to the border with Israel. After the war, I told my daughter that she should not walk outside alone, because there are people from the other side who sometimes come across and take people away. I noticed that this advice caused my daughter to become quite afraid, and she started to have daily nightmares, often the same one, of someone chasing and kidnapping her. This impacted on her severely. She would wake up almost every night and have to run back and forth to the bathroom. She lost her appetite and became very skinny. Then one day, I noticed that when my daughter came home from school, she was doing these funny exercises using breathing and stretching. When I asked her what she was doing she said that she was now part of a group to help her with her nightmares and that the counsellor

had told the group to go home and practice these exercises to help them with their dreams. Afterwards I made a meeting to speak with the counsellor about this, and also attended a briefing meeting for all parents where she discussed in more depth the relationship between nightmares and stress. I noticed that after the sessions with the counsellor, her nightmares stopped. Her appetite improved, and she started sleeping through the night again. Her concentration has increased and she seems to be enjoying school more. Now, everyday I see my daughter practicing the breathing and stress and release exercises with her cousin. I am relieved that my daughter has started to improve.

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#### **14. Dreams and nightmares**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

At night, I used to have a dream about a monster who would appear and kill me. I also had dreams about being placed into an eagles' nest and then being eaten by baby eagles when the other eggs in the nest hatched. These dreams used to wake me up. I would say a prayer and try to go to back to sleep but it was hard. In the sessions, I learned how to relax myself and breathe in and out. At first these dreams went away, but now they are back.

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#### **15. Now, life is better**

(Teacher, Gaza)

When you look at me at first, you might think I'm a person that has always been full of life and energy...but that is not true. For a long time I was suffering, suffering from nightmares myself as a result of the 2008 war. In that war, my cousin who is the only son of my aunt and uncle, did not come home from work one day. My father and I went out to look for my cousin in the middle of the conflict, walking through bombs and air strikes for kilometres to reach my cousin's place of work. There we discovered a building in ruins and body parts and blood everywhere. From that experience, and the other traumas of that war, my nightmares became very intense. I would wake from these dreams where I would relive this experience. My whole body would be tense and my right arm would become paralysed for days from this stress. This tension and the paralysis of my arm effected me severely. I went to doctors at first, who said

there was nothing they could do. They referred me to the Mental Health Department, but I refused to go because I did not want to be labelled as crazy. Instead, I went to seek religious advice, and learned to talk to myself with verses from the Koran to calm myself. It helped a little but I still suffered. Then earlier this year, I attended training about BLP as the lead teacher from our school. Because I was suffering from the nightmares myself, and wanted to find a cure, I put all my attention into what was being explained at the workshop. I learned all the exercises – breathing, balance, talking to self, safe space, stress and release – and practiced this on myself. I could see it beginning to work on me. When I would wake from the nightmares, I would use them to calm myself and almost immediately my arm would relax. I then started to use these exercises with my wife and saw it made her more calm and relaxed. Finally, I brought these exercises in to the school, first with my own students and then with the school as whole. Before, my students lacked energy and concentration in class, but with the BLP activities I saw my students becoming more active, focussed and relaxed. Now I use them in my class each period of the day to help them focus and learn better. Because I saw the success with my own students, I went to the school principal and asked her if we could start to use this with all the students in the school. We now start each day in morning assembly with the exercises. I try to spread the success of BLP wherever I go, because I can see the impacts it has had on not only myself, but everyone else in my life.

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#### **16. Sport exercises makes me happy**

(BLP I Participant, Female, West Bank)

At school, we used to not have sports activity. This made me sad. Then my teacher started to teach us some exercises that we would do in the classroom – like stress and release and balancing. We started to do them each morning, at break times and sometimes during the day in the class. After doing these exercises I started to feel happier and felt I had more energy for learning.

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**17. The school helps me to decrease my stress**

(Mother of BLP II Beneficiary, West Bank)

I worry about my children's safety on their way to and from school where they face the daily threats of the settlers and the soldiers. I also worry for their future, and want them to do well academically. This worry makes me nervous and stressed sometimes. In the past, this would mean that when I would sit to help them with their homework, I would get angry easily, and when they did things incorrectly, hit them as punishment. I met with the counsellor last year and along with a group of other mothers, she discussed with us how we can work with our children when they feel stress or fear. She taught us some breathing and relaxation exercises we could use with our children. We practiced them ourselves during the meeting. After using them, I noticed I felt more calm and relaxed. I started practicing these exercises at home, whenever I noticed myself feeling angry or upset with my children. Now I do the relaxation and breathing exercises before I react to my children's actions, and it allows me to deal with them more calmly. Knowing these exercises helps me to get all the bad feelings out my body, and throw them outside. Also, because I feel more relaxed, I know it will have an impact on all my children, who will see me more happy and calm than before.

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**18. The strong girl**

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

There are some girls at school who bully other girls. For example, they pull their hair. They were mean, but I was too afraid to do anything about it. I started to do the exercises, like the breathing, the balancing and the relaxation activities. We did them with our counsellor, and I also practiced these at home with my brother and sister after I taught them how to do them. I now feel more confident, and not as afraid of these girls. When they do mean things to me or other girls I now am not afraid to talk to the counsellor about what they are doing, and asking her to help with my problems.

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**19. The worst nightmares**

(BLP I Participant, Female, West Bank)

One of the dreams I used to have is of a girl with white eyes who would come at night and attack me with a sword. In another dream, I saw this girl destroying my home, and then living inside. When I had these dreams I would wake up crying and check to see if my mother was in the bed beside me. I would tell her the dream, and she would try to get me to sleep, but it was hard. I then sat down with the counsellor, and we wrote down and talked about these dreams. But my dreams still come, and each dream is getting worse than the other.

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**20. The lions and the ghosts**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to have a dream of a kidnapper coming and taking me to live with a lion family. The mother lion died, and I grew up with the baby lions. We lived fine, until one day people came and found us living together, and they shot me because I was living with the lions. When I used to have these dreams, I would get angry. I even woke up once punching and I hit my mother by accident. I participated in BLP, and learned how to relax myself when I was feeling tense. I learned a prayer I could say when I was having my nightmares. My nightmares began to decrease...I only started to have them once or twice a week.

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**21. Exercises to teach and to learn**

(Teacher, West Bank)

As a science teacher at the school I have many demands on my time. The curriculum is quite overloaded and some days I teach six different sessions without a break. Sometimes I also find it difficult to engage some of the students in the lesson I am teaching. They become restless and lose focus after some time. Last year, I was introduced to the breathing and relaxation exercises by the school counsellor. I started to use them in the classroom with my students. I noticed that it has helped both my students and myself. For me, I feel more relaxed after doing them, and better able to cope with my busy days. For my students, it helps them to regain concentration and focus. I've also used the breathing exercises in the teaching of the science curriculum itself, specifically when I need

to teach about the respiratory system to my students. These exercises are helping me to teach, and my students to learn better.

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### **22. The Ghost**

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

In 2013, my father died. After that I started to have a nightmare where a ghost with scary red eyes would try to steal my soul. I also used to have bad dreams of someone chasing me. I did not tell anyone about my dreams because I was told by those around me that if we talk about our nightmares they would become true. Instead I would sit in my room alone and cry by myself. Sometimes my mother would come into my room to ask if I was OK, and I would say yes, even though I was not feeling good inside. Then, one day, the counsellor came around the classrooms to tell us about nightmares and said that if we wanted to come and talk to her about them, we could. I decided to go and see the counsellor, and became part of a group where we discussed our nightmares with the others. We learned a number of exercises and activities like finding a safe space and talking to your mind, and it was fun to practice and use these techniques. I started to feel a change almost immediately. I stopped feeling so afraid about my nightmares, and started to discuss these dreams more openly with both the counsellor and my mother. Now, I don't have these nightmares anymore. I'm able to concentrate more at school because I'm not having these bad thoughts which distract me, and as a result my scores in school have improved.

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### **23. Birthday**

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

I used to go the nearby grocery shop to buy stuff for my family. While walking I would imagine someone running after, and wanting to stab me. I had also nightmares about the same incident. In these dreams, I would wake up screaming, afraid and feeling pain, as if I had actually been stabbed. Then one day, the counsellor came to our class and asked us who is having nightmares. I raised my hands, and after that the counsellor worked with some of us and introduced us to different exercises, such as breathing, balancing and imagining a safe space. After receiving and practicing all these techniques, I now imagine myself with my friend

at my birthday and she is giving me a rose as a birthday gift. I am feeling happy and now school is by safe space.

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### **24. I trust myself always**

(BLP I Beneficiary, Female, West Bank)

In the past I used to feel sadness and worry because I felt like no one liked me at home because my brother was always shouting and hitting me. I was also bullied by my cousins living next door. I was also scared, particularly on my way to and from school because one day I saw a boy killed outside our house by a soldier. Also, I was afraid from the raids which the soldiers carry out of houses at night. I was always crying and would not share my feelings with anyone. I did not like to leave the house. Last year my teacher taught us breathing and relaxation exercises in the classroom and in the morning assembly. After learning the exercises from my teachers, I feel much happier. The breathing exercises have helped me to balance my body and my mind, and made me less fearful. I enjoy playing with my friends more and am comfortable to go outside of my house after school. Now I use the exercises at home with my sister, who studies at the same school with me, as well.

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### **25. Reducing children's suffering**

(Teacher, West Bank)

BLP came to our school at a time where there was a lot of violence happening within and outside the community. We had just had two students from within the camp shot by soldiers. There were also stabbings and shootings occurring between Palestinians and Israeli which students would see on television and in social media. At this time, my students would come to school stressed, and often this would then result in them acting out violently in the classroom. For example, I would see them using rulers and pretending to stab each other. NRC introduced us teachers to techniques for relaxing our students in the classroom in these tense times. The exercises helped our students to forget some of the issues they are facing or seeing in the camp or on the television. They allowed me to shift the mood of my students from angry and depressed to engaged and happy quickly and easily. My students need these activities, particularly those who live close to the Israeli

checkpoints. Now, when I walk into the classroom, sometimes I see my students doing these exercises without me. As a school, we are now using these exercises at the beginning of each day, and this is helping me to motivate students who used to be late to school to come on time. Knowing these techniques is a tool I can continue to use with my students until the end of my time as a teacher.

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## **26. My past and my future**

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

I love to watch Dracula films. Maybe this is why I started to have dreams about a large snake surrounding me all the time. This dream would wake me up and I would need to go to the bathroom and take a drink of water. I also needed to make sure it was actually still a dream. It started to impact me at school. While I was normally a top student, my marks started to drop. The teachers would ask me what was going on, but I did not feel comfortable to say anything. Then the counsellor came around to invite us to be part of a group to discuss our nightmares. From the very first session which I participated in, I started to feel more comfortable with myself. Now, whenever I start to feel stressed or angry with anyone, I stop and use the breathing and relaxation exercises. I feel more comfortable to share my feelings with others, particularly my mother. This helped me, particularly during the 2014 war, when I witnessed my cousin dying in front of me. When I started to feel bad because of this, and the nightmares returned I discussed this with my mother immediately and remembered the safe space and talking to myself activities. As a result, I was able to rid my mind of these negative thoughts quickly. I'm back to being the top student in the class.

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## **27. How to use relaxation exercises inside of the classroom and in education?**

(Teacher, West Bank)

We work with young children at our school, who lose focus easily and come back from break times without much energy or interest in learning. As a teacher, I had some approaches for trying to regain their concentration, but they were often the same exercises, and the students got bored of them. NRC came to our school and taught us some new approaches for gaining back student concentration

and getting them to relax. I knew some of these exercises already, from my work as a volleyball coach outside of school. What I hadn't realised though, is how I could use them to support student concentration and learning in school. After the training, our school first started doing these exercises on the playground, with the school counsellor leading all the students. But when I saw my students doing and enjoying these activities, I started using them in my classroom. I would use them after breaks, or whenever the students started to lose focus in the lesson. They really enjoyed the stretches and breathing exercises, and it helped to energise them and refocus their attention. It gave them an opportunity to move away from their desks and do something active. As a result my students now are able to concentrate better in the classroom and are more engaged to learn.

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## **28. Through exercises, I solve my problems**

(BLP I Participant, Female, West Bank)

I always used to be stressed with the demands of life. I felt I had a lot of homework to do, and many exams to study for. I also had to manage the chores my mother would ask of me at home. This would cause me worry and stress because I could not manage all of this at once. Then, the teacher taught me to use the exercises, like breathing, balancing and stress and release when I feel worried and stress. The exercises have helped me. I feel that now I can manage to complete my homework and feel less stressed when studying for exams. I am more able to help my mother with the chores around the house. The exercises help me to release all the stresses from my body and allow me to better manage my life.

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## **29. I am more confident and strong**

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

After the war, I was really worried whenever I heard a loud sound or noise. I became really nervous and anxious. This is because the place where my family lives was targeted by a lot of bombing. I came to the counsellor to ask her to help me. She came to all the classrooms and introduced us on how to do the balancing and relaxing exercises. I started to practice these whenever I started to feel stressed, and I noticed I would feel more calm and happy afterwards. They

help me to feel better about the challenges I am facing and help me to continue doing what I need to do. I now use the exercises all the time, in and out of school. I know the rockets are still near us, but now I am not as afraid as I was before...I am more confident that I can continue to live my life.

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### 30. Happiness and Sadness

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

Before I used to feel some joy, but not a lot. I had many nightmares, where people and even animals would be chasing me and trying to kill me. They would want me to die. When I was coming to school I didn't feel very happy. Then we started the BLP programme, and the teacher really helped us feel better and more relaxed. We would do activities like reaching all the way down to the ground and then reaching up...like a tree that is growing into the sky. When we reached down it was like we were picking up oxygen balls and throwing them high up into the air. We even played outside in the rain. We made a circle and let the rain fall into it. It was very calming. While I still have nightmares sometimes, I now feel more joy and I feel more happiness in my life. I really feel like this after the activities with my teachers.

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### 31. Bold and independent

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

One day, on my way to dropping off the rubbish from the house, my daughter witnessed her cousin being hit by a car. The accident was quite serious and her cousin very injured by this. After this event, she started to have nightmares about children, including her, being hit by cars. She would wake up stressed from these dreams, and have a difficult time going back to sleep. She also began complaining of constant pain in her legs, despite her having no medical issues at all. Recently, she started participating in a psychological intervention at the school to help her with her nightmares. She attends weekly sessions with the school counsellor and is engaged in recreational activities with her. She still talks about the accident she witnessed a lot, but I can see she is slowly improving. She is focussing more on her studies, and as a result her Arabic scores have improved significantly. She appears to be more confident, and less fearful than before.

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### 32. I feel joy when the soldiers don't come

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

My heart would beat ... it would beat very fast. I would feel stressed all day, even in the classroom, because the teacher would not have any activity to help me. The Occupation always made me feel scared, because the soldiers would humiliate me and search me all the time. Then when they saw me every day, they stopped searching me ... as much. The soldiers would always bully me and tell me that I throw rocks, but I really don't, and this did not make me feel good. I learned through BLP to breathe in deeply and exhale and it would really help me not be so afraid especially when I see soldiers. I am happy now because the soldiers are farther away down the road, and also happy because I know how to breathe when I am around them. My favourite activity is reaching up and out like a tree, it makes me feel like I am bigger and like I am no longer scared of the soldiers.

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### 33. The past with my brothers

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

Once we were a very happy family. My brothers and sisters used to sit all together, until one day my older brother died suddenly when he was 14 years old. Overnight, things changed in my family and a dark cloud descended over our house. I started to have a nightmare, that one by one, my brothers were dying around me, and I would wake up terrified that this might actually be true. I would tell my mother about these dreams, and she would try to help me, but it did not work. I would struggle to go back to sleep. Then one day, the counsellor came around to our classroom and introduced us to the nightmare group. I went home and shared this information with my mother, and we agreed that I should participate in this group. In the first couple sessions, when I first spoke about our nightmares with the others and were introduced to the exercises, I left these sessions feeling worse than before. But by the time of the third session, and by practicing these exercises at home with my mother in between, I started to feel better. For a while the nightmares went away, but they came back during the war in 2014, when I saw another brother of mine and my uncle die in front of me, and witnessed my house destroyed by the Israeli forces. With the support of

my mother, we started to use the safe place exercise together when I would wake at night from these dreams. It helped me to return to bed, which I never would have been able to do before. Now that my mother has learned how to support me through the programme, we are able to work as a team – me, my mother and the counsellor – to work through the challenges I face in my life. This has helped me to become a better student again and feel OK about things. My mother and I have also been able to use the same techniques to help my younger brother, who also started having nightmares, and this has helped him to go back to sleep at night.

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#### **34. Stress and Relaxation**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

Before I was worried and I was afraid, a lot actually, very much afraid. In my heart I felt it, my heart was always very worried. I was afraid from life and from how I felt. When teachers weren't using the breathing and relaxing techniques, I would feel worse. My brother and I have been chased by soldiers and it really frightens me. My favourite activity is the balancing act, because it really helps me relieve all the stress inside my body. Right now I feel more calm, and I don't feel afraid all the time any more. When people I didn't know, people like you would come to see me, I would be afraid, but now, you don't see me afraid, I am ok. I am still afraid of snakes but I think it will be better.

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#### **35. Freedom**

(Mother of BLP II Beneficiary, Gaza)

During the 2014 war, the Israeli forces targeted our house. It was completely destroyed and we had to seek shelter in the schools for months afterwards. During that time, my daughter started to see nightmares of Israeli soldiers chasing after her, and trying to shoot her. She would wake up frightened and screaming. Over time, this led to her being more aggressive, angry and disobedient, and she also became forgetful. A few months ago, my daughter started participating in a group to talk about her nightmares, and she began doing exercises, which are a bit like "yoga". Now she is practicing these exercises, all the time, particularly when she gets angry or upset to calm her down.

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#### **36. Fighting our fears**

(Counsellor, West Bank)

Before BLP, the topic of nightmares had never crossed my mind as an issue which I needed to be worried about as a counsellor. I wasn't aware that it was something which impacted on students' learning and wellbeing. When I went to the trainings on nightmares run by NRC, I learned a lot more about this issue and how to deal with it in my role as a counsellor. When I then went about assessing how many students in just four classrooms had nightmares, I was surprised to see that 14 out of 100 of my students needed support, and this was only 1/6th of the entire school population. I did the sessions with eight of these fourteen. I could see that it had an impact on their students...on their ability to concentrate and focus, and to deal with their fears. I felt that through BLP I gained new skills and knowledge, and now have a technique for dealing with a problem which I didn't even know existed before.

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#### **37. My emotional well-being is the secret to my creativity**

(Teacher, West Bank)

As a teacher I feel that we need some support because we hardly have any time and we are responsible to take care of many students, in addition to our kids at home. Specifically, my grade 2 students really suffer from the presence of the military. For example, one day a student of mine came in crying and telling me about how soldiers raided her home the previous night and beat her father. They broke lots of things in the house, and ruined where she lived. And at home, I deal with these effects on my own family as well. Recently, the school my daughter went to was hit with 2 tear gas bombs that were thrown into the schoolyard by the soldiers. After that event, she started saying that she didn't want to go to school. Once I even found her sitting on the floor pulling her hair out and yelling that they (soldiers) choked her with the tear gas and that she is afraid they are going to shoot her. In the midst of all these daily life troubles, we were approached by NRC to participate in a 2-day training for teachers on BLP. I really enjoyed it because I feel like I had so much stress that I wanted to relieve. I came back to the school and showed the different classes in the school how to do all the different exercises we

learned. We also invited the student's mothers and we did these exercises together and they really seemed to benefit from it. But most importantly, learning these exercises have helped me. I use them on myself and feel more calm afterwards. The training really helped me relieve much of my stress and I learned so much.

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### 38. Ways to feel safe

(BLP I Beneficiary, Girl, West Bank)

I have fears that sometimes paralyse me. I'm afraid because I'm living in an insecure situation. I'm surrounded by the settlers and soldiers and many people have been killed in the last period. I couldn't concentrate on my studies because of this. When the teacher came to teach us about the breathing exercises, she explained that we can overcome all our stress and fears by practicing and using them in our lives. She also told us that it can also help us to feel less fear and to concentrate more on school. I started to do the exercises at home, particularly when I would lose concentration while studying. They helped me to refocus and complete the school work I need to do. The breathing exercises help me to feel more relaxed, and I feel as if my fears start to escape out of my body when I do them. Now I'm not afraid all the time...only when I pass the checkpoints to and from school everyday.

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### 39. Towards a new life

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

Our family lived in a zone heavily impacted by the conflict in 2014. Most the houses around us were damaged, our neighbour's house was partially destroyed by an air strike, and two of my daughter's cousins were killed. After the war, my daughter would wake up often. She would be imagining to hear planes overhead and striking our house with missiles. This would terrify her and she would wake up shouting and screaming. Her fear would lead to her being violent and angry. She would hit her brothers and sisters. She also became very jealous of her siblings, and would get angry at me when she thought that I was paying them more attention than her. I tried to seek help in many different places for her but nothing seemed to work. I then came to the school to speak with the counsellor. She told me about the Better

Learning Programme and how it could help her. My daughter learned how to do the relaxation and breathing exercises ...similar to yoga, and she also was in the sessions where she spoke with the counsellor about the nightmares. Through the programme, she has learned how to relax and has regained her motivation for life. While she was a good student before, she is an even better student now. Her handwriting has improved, and she is more willing to participate in school activities and be social with others. At home, she has become much more kind and loving to her siblings and myself, and more obedient. Now when my daughter wakes up with a nightmare, she knows how to deal with them through the relaxation exercises, and she is able to support herself better.

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### 40. The Story of Fear

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

My sadness comes because of seeing so many people dying...my grandparents who died and now so many martyrs who are being killed as well. Now they are less, but before, I would have so many nightmares about thieves coming into our home and killing me and my family. I would wake up feeling so scared, and sometimes I would still be scared during the day from the nightmare. The BLP program helped me feel happier because the counsellor and the teachers would help us calm down and pretend to be like a plant which is breathing. This makes me feel good and I did these relaxation exercises when I would have a nightmare, along with a prayer. Now we are also more active like doing on the spot jogging and picking up and oxygen balls during stretching exercises. This helps me feel better and it keeps me mind busy so I don't think about my sadness.

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### 41. My daughter and her recovery

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

After the war in 2014, my daughter would wake up almost every night, dreaming that the house was being burned by the Israeli forces and that she was being taken away by them. She would hear the voices of these soldiers in her dream and it would wake her up in the middle of her sleep. I decided to pay a visit to the school counsellor, because I had remembered that before the war she had held a meeting with all parents to discuss the fact that



she was running support groups with students with nightmares. After speaking with the counsellor, she agreed to set up and run another group for the students, and include my daughter in this group. As my daughter participated in the sessions, she would come home and show me the exercises and activities she was learning. She would teach them to me, and we would practice them together. Her nightmares disappeared. She started using the activities regularly, whenever she would feel afraid, and I could see her talking to herself and doing the breathing exercises. Sometimes I do them alongside my daughter, and sometimes I do them myself, to calm me from the stresses of managing the household. Thanks to BLP my daughter has a more positive outlook on life now, and she is enjoying school more.

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#### **42. Moving from one camp to another camp**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to have so many nightmares about a missile falling onto our home and killing me and my family. Or sometimes the nightmare would be about a bullet killing me. In real life there was a missile which passed right over our home and my uncle's home in Gaza. It barely missed us. I came from Khan Younis Refugee Camp in Gaza 5 years ago with my mother, my brother and my sister. When I came to this school I felt so happy about being able to learn how to read and write, but what makes me most happy is all the different exercises we do with the counsellor and the teachers like inhaling deeply and exhaling from my nose, and playing in the rain. It really makes me feel calm and relaxed. Hopefully my dad can come join us soon, but he is not allowed.

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#### **43. Recurring Dreams**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to have a nightmare which kept on repeating: I was walking alone in the middle of the night, my home was demolished and there was nobody, nobody, in the whole world. I was alone. I would be very terrified when soldiers would come in my camp and I would cry a lot. I didn't like to go to school at all, I started school late. But, I started to like coming to this school more after there were breathing activities and making a circle with other kids in the rain. It feels good, and I

stopped feeling scared. Now I dream about walking outside in the street and seeing people, like during the Eid holiday when I see my family and friends everywhere.

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#### **44. Searching for a cure and security**

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

A few years ago, my daughter would wake up from nightmares she was having almost daily. She would not talk to me about her dreams, but would shout and scream. I would try to sit there and help her, but she would react violently and I could hardly control her. At school, this resulted in her misbehaving in class, and being withdrawn from the other students. She would often sit alone during the breaks without any friends around her. The school would contact me frequently about the worries they had about her behaviour. Then, my daughter was invited by the counsellor at the school to discuss her nightmares in a group and individually. In these sessions she learned a number of different exercises and activities. The counsellor told me that it was important that I allowed my daughter to practice these at home, so I started to sit and practice them alongside her. Eventually the nightmares went away. Her behaviour improved significantly and she became much more social. She started to make friends. The school stopped contacting me regarding her misbehaviour. But then during the 2014 war, things got worse again. My daughter witnessed her brother being killed in front her and this distressed her deeply. Everything in my daughter's life changed and I could see her fall into depression again, with her nightmares returning. I went to the counsellor to seek help. The counsellor agreed to help and they sat down together to practice the exercises and discuss her situation. This helped her, and now for the past year and a half she has regained her positive attitude on life and become more social with others again. As my only daughter, her wellbeing and psychosocial health is what is most important to me, and I'm relieved that BLP has assisted her through some difficult times.

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#### 45. What's Left from the Past

(Mother of BLP II Participant, West Bank)

I used to always be so worried about my son. He was having so many recurring nightmares, where he would wake up screaming and crying. As a mother, I knew that he was grieving the death of his brother who suddenly died from a choking incident. I also knew that he was terrified from the presence of the military in the camp. The military is always here and it's very scary. While we always prayed together when he'd wake up screaming from a nightmare, it didn't help that much because he started to lose focus in school and then he wasn't doing well in his classes. What worried me even more is that he also became violent which made it challenging for him to engage and play with other children. He joined the BLP programme and started to receive a lot of support from the counsellor and from his teachers in form of one on one and group counselling sessions, in addition to relaxation exercises. I then saw that finally his grades started to improve because now he is focusing more and doing much better in school. As a mother when I started to see him to interact more with other kids and playing with them and feel more at calm, it made me feel more at ease. The most important change is that he is very responsible and very aware that nobody hurts themselves. He no longer has violent tendencies and is very friendly. I also participated in a group relaxation session with my son, but I still wish that my son would be more open with me.

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#### 46. How to get rid of nightmares

(BLP Beneficiary, Male, Gaza)

Before I went to see my counsellor I used to be very sad and afraid, and I used to cry a lot. I would have a nightmare that someone was killing my mom, dad and all my siblings. I would go to my mom and would hide in her room because I couldn't sleep. I had these dreams because my father because he is very sick and I feel stressed from this and always worry about him. I spoke a lot to my counsellor about my nightmares and she really helped me. For a while, they went away completely, especially because I would imagine a big cake before I went to sleep. Recently my nightmares came back, but I learned how to use different exercises to make them go away. I speak

to my mind and think of my safe place...the arms of my mother and father. I really feel safe and know that they are not going to leave me.

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#### 47. Bringing a smile in a storm (Teacher, Gaza)

A few months ago we were introduced to BLP by the Counsellor and NRC in a training session. In the workshop, we learned about how symptoms like nightmares can be related to stress and trauma, and were introduced to a series of exercises including stress and release, and balancing activities, to help us relieve stress and tension. At first, when we saw these exercises we laughed, and it was the same when I first introduced them to my students...they laughed as well. But over time I've seen that these exercises are more than just fun. In my own classes, I can notice the difference, both in myself and my students. Using the activities at the start of each of my lessons, I now notice that my students are more calm and relaxed, and concentrating more on what I'm teaching. Importantly, I'm also noticing that my lower achieving students seem more motivated to learn, and are participating in class more. All of this is allowing me to spend more of my time on teaching the students, and I feel more relaxed than before. Now when others now walk by my classes, they make comments to me about how focussed and relaxed my students are compared to before. I'm hoping that after months of using these techniques with my students, it will result in improved achievement for all of them.

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#### 48. Stress and Relaxation

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

Before I was worried and I was afraid, a lot actually, very much. In my heart I felt it, my heart was always very worried. I was afraid from life and from how I felt. When teachers weren't using the breathing and relaxing techniques, I would feel worse. My brother and I have been chased by soldiers and it really frightens me. My favourite activity is the balancing act, because it really helps me relieve all the stress inside my body. Right now I feel more calm, and I don't feel afraid all the time any more. When people I didn't know would come to see me, I would be afraid, but now, you don't see me afraid, I am ok. I am still afraid of snakes but I think it will be better.

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**49. A point to go forward** (Teacher, Gaza)

My job as a teacher is not easy. I come to work early in the morning to prepare for the science classes I teach. My students have a lot of needs and I feel I have a lot of pressure to teach them well. Then, at the end of the school day I go home and have to take care of my family. All of this means I have a lot of stress in my life and sometimes I would take it out on my students or my family at home. Through BLP, we were taught relaxation and balancing exercises by the counsellor. I started to use these exercises on myself, particularly in the mornings to help me face the demands of the day in front of me. I could see that it was helping me to feel more relaxed and calm. Now I feel I have more control over the stresses I am facing and can handle them better. I am even now using it with my students. When I start the day with them I use these exercises to help them focus and concentrate on what I will be teaching them. I can see it is working with them as well!

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**50. My hopes for my son**

(Mother of BLP I Participant, West Bank)

My son is quite an active, talkative child with a lot of energy. He talks so fast that people cannot even understand what he is saying sometimes. At home, he is also a violent child, who tends to punch and hit his siblings when he is playing with them. At school, his energy means that he lacks the ability to concentrate, and this means when it comes time for exams he often rushes through them, rather than taking his time. He also is somewhat fearful of the dark, and refuses to sleep with the lights shut and the door closed. He says this is because of experiences he has had of harassment of the Israeli soldiers on the way to/from school. Recently, he has been learning new exercises at school in both the morning assembly and in between classes. These include breathing and balancing activities. They are intended to make the students feel more relaxed and calm, and I can see they are having an impact on him. He has become more calm and less violent at home, and more focussed in the classroom at school. He has even started telling me to use the exercises myself, whenever I get angry and want to hit him. While he still suffers from many problems, I can see some improvement, and I hope it will continue.

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**51. Our children need our support**

(Counsellor, Gaza)

In 2012, my school was selected to be part of a new activity called Better Learning Programme. I was trained by two international experts and returned to my school to implement the programme with a group of eight students. The focus of the programme was on nightmares and I was to select these students based on their nightmare frequency. I have to admit, when I returned to start the activities, I did so half-heartedly, and saw it more as a task to complete than something which I really believed in. So instead of going to all classes to introduce the project, I only went to a couple. Yet just from those two classrooms, a number of students came to see me. While completing the pre-screening exercises, they described to me various challenges and concerns they were facing in their lives, and I began to realise how little I actually knew about the needs of the children in my school. For example, one described how she had seen her brother killed, and another who was really violent at school, revealed the challenging home situation she faced at home. Over the course of the group and individual sessions, the students and I grew very close, and I also built a strong relationship with their families. It forged a bond between all of us, which we keep to this day. We have maintained this relationship through the difficult times we have faced together, including the 2014 war. Some have even come back and asked for more assistance after the war, and I did the best I could to support them, remembering what I could from the original BLP programme. Because of BLP I feel I can be much better counsellor to my school and community.

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**52. The perfect teacher** (Teacher, West Bank)

Our school is located very close to a number of Israeli settlements and the students come to school with lots of stress because of this. As a teacher, I can see the strain and pressure it put on them in the classroom. While I believed I had some techniques for managing my classroom, the focus for my efforts was really on engaging them academically rather than working with their emotional needs. Then, earlier this year, the counsellor and I received two days of training on teaching students techniques to relieve their stress using relaxation, breathing and balancing



activities. Since that time I've been using these techniques in the classroom. I can see it has helped to build a stronger relationship with all my students, and they are more open in discussing with me some of the emotional challenges they face. It makes it easier for me to identify specific needs, and to work with the counsellor or others to address these concerns. Using these techniques has also helped the students to become more cooperative and now I often start my lessons with these techniques as an icebreaker to maintain their focus and energy. The students keep asking for more activities like this, and it has really helped me as a teacher to make my school a safe place for all our students.

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### 53. The little angel

(Mother of BLP I Participant, Gaza)

At school my daughter is a model student. She is calm, performs well, and quite focussed. But at home she is a different person. She has a twin brother and other siblings and she constantly fights with them. She is particularly rough with her twin brother, and I try to manage the situation by giving her a piece of chocolate to calm down but it doesn't seem to work. Then my daughter, at her school, was introduced to a series of calming and relaxation exercises, such as breathing, stress and release and balancing activities. She was also told to imagine and visualise a safe space in her

mind, which she decided would be the sea. Now when she starts to get in fights with her brother, she stops what she is doing, and does some of these activities with her brother. It seems to work in calming both of them down and ending their fighting. Now my daughter has a way to deal resolve her disputes with her siblings in a way that does not end in more trouble.

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### 54. Scared (BLP II Beneficiary, Male, Gaza)

I used to have these nightmares of someone chasing and wanting to kill me and my family. In these dreams, there would be rockets flying all around me, and so I would constantly be running. These nightmares made me scared and afraid to leave my house. I would not go out without someone with me because I was scared of being attacked. I couldn't really share my feelings with anyone. When I heard about the nightmare group from the counsellor, I came and saw him to tell him I was suffering from these nightmares. Now that I have started to participate in the sessions, I don't feel as afraid as I did before. I still have nightmares, but they are not as frequent as before.

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### 55. Energy to learn

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to feel exhausted and tired after the breaks at school because I would often run around and



then come back into the classroom I would have no energy. Also when I would go home, I didn't feel as if I had any energy left to do my homework. Then my teacher taught us to do exercises like breathing and balancing, and we would use them into the classroom. We would practice doing them after the breaks and whenever we were lacking energy in the classroom. These exercises help me to feel relaxed, but also they give me new energy. After doing, them I feel I am more able to listen to my teacher and to follow his instructions. I am also doing them at home now before I start my homework.

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#### **56. The strong girl**

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

There are some girls at school who bully other girls. For example, they pull their hair. They were mean, but I was too afraid to do anything about it. I started to do the exercises, like the breathing, the balancing and the relaxation activities. We did them with our counsellor, and I also practiced these at home with my brother and sister after I taught them how to do them. I now feel more confident, and not as afraid of these girls. When they do mean things to me or other girls I now am not afraid to talk to the counsellor about what they are doing, and asking her to help with my problems.

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#### **57. My fears because of the vampire settler**

(BLP II Participant, Female, West Bank)

I used to be really afraid. This is because one day, I saw our neighbour shot in front of our house. And also there is a settler, who we call the vampire, who has kidnapped my brothers and other children several times. There were also many night raids on houses at that time and I remember us having to leave our house many times in the cold or the rain. One time, I was forced by the soldiers during one of the raids to go upstairs with them, apart from the rest of my family and I was scared that they might do something to me. We would beg with the soldiers to let us back in the house but they would keep us out for hours at a time. These incidences started to effect my sleep and I began to have nightmares about settlers coming into our house and burning it down...which I knew was happening in real life as well. I would wake up screaming that our house is on fire, and I felt like I could smell smoke in the air. My mom would try to calm me down and tell me that it was just a dream, but it was hard to go back to sleep. During that time, the counsellor came to talk to our class about nightmares and traumatic symptoms. Afterwards I went to go to see the counsellor about my nightmares and fears. She taught me exercises to feel more calm and relaxed. When I did the exercises I start to feel that there is nothing wrong with my life and they helped me to feel less afraid.

I noticed that my emotions would change on the emotion scale after doing them, and I would feel more happy. Now, when I see the vampire settler following me, instead of screaming, I use the breathing exercises to calm myself down and feel less scared. I try to remember what my counsellor taught me about thinking positive thoughts in these moments, and by doing so, imagine that it is the vampire who is afraid of me, rather than me who is afraid of him.

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**58. I am more confident and strong**

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

After the war, I was really worried whenever I heard a loud sound or noise. I became really nervous and anxious. This is because the place where my family lives was targeted by a lot of bombing. I came to the counsellor to ask her to help me. She came to all the classrooms and introduced us on how to do the balancing and relaxing exercises. I started to practice these whenever I started to feel stressed, and I noticed I would feel more calm and happy afterwards. They help me to feel better about the challenges I am facing and help me to continue doing what I need to do. I now use the exercises all the time, in and out of school. I know the rockets are still near us, but now I am not as afraid as I was before...I am more confident that I can continue to live my life.

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**59. Stress and fear**

(BLP I Participant, Male, West Bank)

I used to feel a lot stress and fear, particularly when I go to sleep. I was afraid of the trees and leaves which move in the dark with the wind. I also would feel tired often because I work in the supermarket with my father after school. It meant at school I often lacked energy and was not that motivated. Then I learned to do the breathing and balancing exercises that my teacher taught us. I feel more active now, with more energy and concentration at school. I can now do whatever the teacher asks me to do.

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**60. Nightmare stories**

(BLP II Participant, Male, Gaza)

A year ago, I was having dreams that my brother was dying. Then a few days later this actually happened. This made me really sad. I then started to dream that my parents were dying as well. Because my previous dream had come true, I became really worried and would wake up to check that it was in fact a dream. I even would walk outside my room in the middle of the night just to see if my parents were alive. The school counsellor distributed information about BLP to my parents, and held a session with them. He also went around to our classrooms and encouraged us to come see him if we were suffering from nightmares. I decided to go see him after my parents told me to do so, and did the pre-screening tool. I started the sessions recently. In these sessions we've started to talk about our nightmares and been practicing the stress and release exercises. We've also learned how to respect each other, behave appropriately, and keep our nightmares confidential. This has made me feel a bit better but I still suffer. Last night for example, I woke up again with a bad dream and could not go to sleep for some time.

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**61. The counsellor helped me**

(BLP II Participant, Male, West Bank)

My father used to beat my mother every night – hitting her and pulling her hair. This made me feel sad and afraid, because sometimes my father would also hit me as well. The fear would cause me pain in my stomach and I would start to cry. Then my father and mother got a divorce. My father remarried, and I stayed with him and his new wife. My stepmother would beat me as well. The only time I would feel happy is when I would go to visit my mother once a week. The counsellor found out about this situation and he went to see my mother. He promised her that he would start to work with me at school., and I started to meet with him and some other children on a regular basis. The focus of these sessions were to deal with our nightmares, which I would have as well about ghosts trying to kill me. We drew out our nightmares and the counsellor taught us some exercises for breathing and relaxing whenever we feel scared and afraid. This was to help with our

nightmares. I feel happier now because the counsellor has helped me to feel more relaxed and calm. Whenever I do the exercises they help me to feel less afraid. Sometimes, however, my father still beats me.

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### 62. Basma and the War

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

During 2014 war, the Israeli Air Force attacked our house and destroyed it. We had to flee to the schools for shelter. For weeks, planes were everywhere in the sky, and they were bombing everything around us. I was afraid and panicked, feeling that they wanted to target and kill me. After the war, I started having nightmares about an Israeli soldier running after, and trying to kill me. Then one day in school, the counsellor asked the students if we were having nightmares. I raised my hands, and then over the next few weeks, I started to learn different exercises from my counsellor including breathing and stress and release. These made me feel relaxed and reduced my nightmares. I continue to use these exercises at home with my siblings, and practice them when I am angry or upset. Now I feel happier and I see myself walking on the seashore.

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### 63. Explosion (BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

During the war, I remember that every time we heard rockets our family would try to quickly hide. We could hear the bombs going off around us everywhere and the loud screeching noises outside. It was scary. Earlier this year, the counsellor and a teacher came around to all our classrooms and told us that if we were feeling stressed or worried after the war, there were some activities and exercises we could do to feel more calm. They demonstrated these activities to us. Afterwards, the teacher started to do these exercises in our class everyday. Because I still felt worried, I came down to see the counsellor and I told her about my fear of loud noises and the planes circling overhead. She sat with me and taught me some more exercises to practice. Now I use these activities all the time. I have even taught them to my brother and sister at home. When I hear the noise of planes training overhead, I no longer feel as afraid as I did before.

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### 64. Innocent Smile (Counsellor, West Bank)

All of the students in this school have suffered very heated and violent incidences which have gone on with the occupation. Some students at this school are cousins or siblings of martyrs, and others are martyrs themselves. When I first started working with a BLP II group, it was clear that they were indeed suffering from the inside. Throughout interviews with their parents, they expressed how some were very introverted and others were violent. When I started working with them, there were some things they had in common. They were all excited and had a high desire to have the opportunity to speak about their nightmares. As grade one students, they all had wild imaginations, but the other common factor they shared was fear. All their nightmares, whether continuous or singular different nightmares, expressed fear. Many of their dreams involved knives, the occupation's military presence and dreams of death. The most apparent change noticed after the BLP II sessions were completed, was the reduction in the number of nightmares that students were experiencing. Students are now expressing themselves more, to their parents, their teachers and even their fellow students. They are even expressing how they are personally enjoying the relaxation and breathing activities. Their relationships are improved and their colleagues noticed this. The most important change is the general emotional stability of the child, which in turn led him to also be open about their feelings and what their needs are. This really strengthens the relationship with me as a counsellor and empowers me to help resolve their issues.

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### 65. The care of my counsellor

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

In the war, the rockets were everywhere around us and we were stuck at home for week. I was afraid to go anywhere alone, and I clung to my mother everywhere she went. I was glad when school opened up again after the war, and I wasn't stuck at home anymore. On return, I remember the counsellor and teachers told us to not worry anymore about the war, but at that time, they didn't give us any suggestions on how to deal with the stress we were facing. So we kept these feelings inside. This year, however, the counsellor and the

teacher went around and taught us the relaxation and stress release exercises. The counsellor also encouraged us to come and speak with her any-time about concerns we had. I decided to go and see her and tell her about my worries. She was very patient with me, and listened to my fears. The exercises are helping me to feel more calm and relaxed now. I am now doing the exercises everywhere...I have even taught them to my friends in the neighbourhood. Through these exercises and the on going relationship I have for my counsellor I feel as if I now have a better way for organising my life...the exercises and my counsellor have helped me to deal with any stress I face, and because of that I'm now doing better in school.

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**66. Hopes for Urud** (Counsellor, West Bank)

Urud, one of the children I worked with in BLP was suffering from fear last year. I discovered through the sessions, that she had witnessed earlier in her life a fight between her father and her uncle. She could remember the place where this fight happened...a space next to the bathroom in their house. After witnessing this event, she grew very fearful of losing her father. It widened her imagination – and she would recreate the episode in her mind and in her nightmares, so that the fight became one with knives, blood and killing. She would relive this episode all the time, and have nightmares about it at night. Through BLP, her nightmares disappeared. This was achieved through her participation in the eight sessions, along with close cooperation and communication with her mother. For example, I discussed Urud's dreams and fears with her mother, and advised her that it might be good for them to move so that she does not continue to see the space which the fight between her father and her uncle occurred. Her mother listened to this advice, and they moved to a new house a few months back. The sessions allowed her to open up about her fear to her teachers, her parents and to myself. While she still fears losing her father, she now has ways to distract herself from this.

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**67. My imagination**

(BLP II Participant, Male, Gaza)

I see and hear things all around me, not only in my dreams. I feel there are evil spirits following

me, and surrounding me all the time. This makes me scared, even to go to the bathroom by myself. But I didn't tell anyone about this, not even my parents. Then the counsellor came around and introduced our class to the nightmare group. I decided to go see the counsellor and tell him about my dreams and visions. He invited me to be part of the group, and I've been attending for the last couple session now. In the group, the counsellor has given me some exercises to be calm and help me to participate a bit more in the school activities, like the morning assembly. The group is helping a bit, but I still have bad dreams, like the one I had last night, where I dreamt by brother was walking on the Israeli border with strangers.

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**68. A day of a working woman**

(Teacher, Gaza)

The days are long for us as teachers and as mothers. This creates a lot of stress in my life, trying to juggle the demands of what my students need in the classroom, with my responsibilities at home. Often I go home and my children demand many things of me. In the past, I couldn't deal with everything they needed, and would often yell at them and sometimes snap and hit them with a stick. Afterwards I would feel bad. Earlier this year, I went to training run by NRC on the Better Learning programme. I learned about the balancing, relaxation and stress relief exercises. I started to practice them myself, at the same time that I was using them at the school. In particular, I started to do these activities at the end of my days at the school, before I would go home. I noticed when I did them, I could handle my children better, and felt that I had more patience and time for them. I feel I am better able to now balance the multiple demands and challenges I have in my life.

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**69. The scary nightmare**

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

I used to have nightmares about a group of people chasing and trying to kidnap me. This dream used to make me wake up in a sweat, and I would need to go to the bathroom often in the middle of the night. I didn't tell anyone about this dream, not even my parents, but it would happen almost every day. This nightmare would stick with me during the day when I would attend school, and I would



often lose concentration and become scared reliving my dream. The dream also made me very afraid of the dark, and I would refuse to leave the house at night. Then one day, the counsellor invited me to participate in a group to talk about my nightmares. When we first started talking about our dreams in the group, I could feel my heart pounding really hard and I would tense up. But the counsellor taught us a number of exercises that we could use like talking to ourselves and breathing/relaxing to relieve this stress and get rid of these bad thoughts. Eventually this nightmare went away and has since not come back. I am better able to concentrate and focus at school, and I'm not afraid of the dark. Now whenever I start to have bad thoughts, or start to feel stressed, I remember the techniques which my counsellor taught me, and afterwards I feel the stress leave my body.

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#### **70. Happy Rozan**

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

One day I was going to drop the rubbish with my cousin. On the way a cart hit my cousin with a big thump, and he got injured badly. After that moment, I could never forget what I had seen, it was painful feeling and it made me afraid. After that, I started to have nightmares about a car about to hit a little girl, and me trying to save her, but failing to do so. More recently, I learned some exercises from my school counsellor like the safe place and I am now not anymore afraid. At home, I also lead my siblings in doing the exercises whenever they feel afraid. I see myself now happy, playing with my brother, there is rain and I am free and flying in the air.

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#### **71. Challenging myself** (Counsellor, Gaza)

I must admit, when I started BLP, I was sceptical about the programme and its focus on nightmares. To be honest, I did not think that children's nightmares was an important concern for me to focus on, nor did I think that many of the children at the school faced this issue. I sat through the first training with this idea in my head. I returned to my school and reluctantly administered the pre-screening tool. I was surprised to discover that out of four classes of Grade 3 students, 20 students suffered from nightmares quite frequently. Realising that this was in fact a problem, I decided

to continue with the programme and learn how I could help these children. Following the manual and the subsequent training, I learned about how to run both group and individual sessions with these students. Through these sessions the children opened up to me about their nightmares and the way which they were related to the war. The manuals also gave me some practical exercises and activities I could then teach to the students to cope with these nightmares. This was different to before, where while I would advise students to think of a safe space, I had nothing other than that to tell them. I can see that the programme really helped these eight students, and that they are much happier and calmer than before. I see them using the exercises all the time and unlike other things I've taught them in the past, they enjoy doing these activities more. I think this programme worked so well because I already had a strong relationship with my students...they were willing to speak and confide in me about their nightmares. Seeing their improvement, and the fact that I now have a stronger relationship with the children I worked through in the BLP programme gives me an immense sense of satisfaction.

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#### **72. Severe fear and worry**

(BLP II Beneficiary, Female, West Bank)

I used to be very scared, all the time. When I used to go to sleep I would feel that there's something under my bed which is going to pull me down and kill me. I would think it's a skeleton. And if the lights were off, I would imagine a soldier standing in the dark, wanting to kill me. I would sleep at about 4am, and my mother wouldn't sleep at all, because of me, but I would be really scared. Then, I started to talk with the counsellor, and started to feel better. She would ask us to always imagine the thing we most love whenever we didn't feel good. My safe place is with mother, because when I enter my mom's room it is safe. I think I know what to do if I feel afraid, and I am ok now that I don't meet with the counsellor anymore. I feel confident no matter where I go.



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### 73. Expression

(Mother of BLP II Participant, West Bank)

My son used to be an introvert. Sometimes we'd call his name and he wouldn't answer...he would just there spaced out, as if he's in another world. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and find him standing over my head. He would be in fear, and would leave me in fear. I didn't know what to do except pray with him and for him. But I didn't feel that this was an appropriate way to approach what he was going through. When the BLP II activities started in his school, I really started to notice my child who was very closed up, become more calm and relaxed, and more comfortable expressing what was worrying him. First he started to tell me about his nightmares, and we'd talk about them, and this was very important to me because it would give me the chance to understand his fears to try and resolve them. His participation in the programme's relaxation and expressive drawing activities were of true value. It is really wonderful that his academic performance this year has already improved, I really hope that this programme continues, especially for us too as mothers, because we too suffer and need support.

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### 74. The optimistic mother

(Mother of BLP I Participant, Gaza)

My son, who is in the fourth grade has suffered from nightmares for sometime. I noticed though that after the war, these nightmares become worse and more frequent. He began to dream that the war was happening again and that people were coming to kill him. These dreams would terrify him and he would wake up tense. He became scared of the dark. I tried to support him, but I didn't really know how to cope with his needs. Because I was helpless, I didn't let him know that I was worried about these nightmares. For nearly two years after the war, I saw my son suffer more and more, and nothing seemed to work. Then NRC ran a session on nightmares as part of the Parent Club. We learned about the symptoms of trauma and how we as parents can help our children using different exercises. I tried these exercises, like the stress and release activities on him when he would wake from his nightmares and I could see that they were working. For the first time, I feel have some way to help my son with his fears and nightmares.

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**75. The nightmare**

(BLP II Participant, Girl, West Bank)

When I was in the 4th grade I used to have nightmares about someone running behind and trying to kill me, or settlers coming and trying to kidnap me. I would wake up and my mother would try to calm me, but she could not really help. Sometimes I would go back to sleep only to wake up again in the same night with another nightmares. Then, I started to participate in sessions with my counsellor at school. She taught me exercises I can use when I am having nightmares – such as the safe place and talking to my mind. I would use these exercises before going to sleep and convince myself that I was in a safe, loving home. I would also recite the Koran. These activities helped me to get rid of my nightmares and sleep better at night.

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**76. Dreams and nightmares**

(BLP II Participant, Male, Gaza)

I have a dream where I'm being buried alive by an evil spirit. I try to escape but I cannot. I have other dreams, including one where the war starts again and my house is destroyed. These dreams make me scared and I often then think about them again during the day. They effect me all the time. For example, when my father asks me to go out during the evening and the electricity goes out I become scared and run home as quickly as I can. I heard about BLP from one of the teachers at my school. I volunteered. I've learned from the sessions to be more confident and to respect our environment. My parents have also been invited to come speak with the counsellor. I've started to feel a bit better but the nightmares are still there.

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**77. School is my safe place**

(Mother of BLP II Beneficiary, West Bank)

I live in a community where there are five checkpoints next to our mosque and near our house. This makes it dangerous for us to move around our community. We have seen young Palestinian boys killed in front of our eyes. We suffer at the checkpoints on a daily basis, and the soldiers harass and taunt us when we pass. It makes me nervous to send my children out of the house to school, and I wait with worry each day for them to come home. Sometimes the soldiers make

it hard for me to return home after I've gone shopping and make me wait for hours to pass through. Settlers have even come and occupied the house next door to us. We live in fear that they will attack us one day. Additionally, the checkpoints are making it difficult for us to survive. My husband has lost his job because often the soldiers do not allow him to pass through the checkpoints. All of this makes me feel stressed and hopeless for my children's future. I end up shouting at my children all the time, and my children ask me why I was always shouting at them. Additionally, the situation of feeling as if we were living in a prison made my children nervous and hyperactive, and I did not know how to deal with them.

Then last year, I was invited to a series of meetings with the counsellor at the school. The counsellor discussed with me and the other mothers, how parents can help their children through the crisis using 'sports exercises' and deep breathing. We learned that when we do these exercises the mind will be more active. The counsellor taught us how to talk with our children when they have fears or bad thoughts, for example telling them pleasant stories, taking them for an excursion in the garden, doing knitting with them. We also practiced imagining a safe space in our minds, and calming ourselves and our children this way. At first, when we practiced these exercises as a group we laughed because we did not think they would actually work...but over time, we could see how some of these activities could support us as mothers. These sessions have helped me to decrease the stress I feel. While they were maybe intended for us to use at home with our children, I feel they have benefitted me even more. When I feel angry or depressed these days, I use these exercises and feel more relaxed afterwards. I have learned how to better deal with the pressures and stresses of living in the crises. I am more aware of my children's emotions and needs, and have new activities I can use to support all my children at home, not only my daughter at this school. When my children feel trapped at home, I let them draw and express their feelings this way. When I come to school, I feel I can release the worry I feel. The school has become the only place where I have some support to deal with the conditions we live in. All we need now is security to ensure that we can travel safely around our community, and send our children to school without worry.

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**78. From a firefighter to a counsellor**

(Counsellor, Gaza)

In the past, my role as a counsellor at the school was fairly limited. Teachers did not ask me to help them with students' psychosocial needs as they were largely unaware of what these problems looked like, nor did they really understand the impact these issues might have on students' learning. Instead, they would come to me to resolve issues of violence or conflict amongst students. I was a firefighter rather than a counsellor! Then the teachers were made aware through the BLP of the ways in which traumatic stress can have impacts on students behaviour and their academic performance. They also learned about how nightmares can be a product of this. This new knowledge opened the doors to teachers coming to me with concerns about students facing nightmares, and gave me access to working with students with more severe psychosocial needs. Now we have a better system for working with each other, and having a common understanding of how a students' wellbeing is connected to their learning and behaviour. I am now a better resource and source of support in the school, not only for the teachers, but for the students and parents as well.

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**79. Sports are not only for entertainment but also for treatment** (Teacher, West Bank)

As a teacher, I see the stresses that surround the children at the school. Many of them face the ordeal of crossing Israeli checkpoints and live next to or have to pass settlements on their way to/from the school. They also live in households facing social and economic problems. I've worked here for seven years, and seen that there has been a real need to provide students with support to reduce the anxiety and stress they face in their lives, and to make school a safer space for them to be. In my role as a sports teacher, I've always believed that engaging students in play and recreation can help with this, but I've never had any evidence to support this belief. Earlier this year, I was introduced to the BLP I exercises by the school counsellor. I started to use the balancing, breathing and stress and release activities with the students in my classes and during the morning assembly. While the students saw these as fun, recreational

activities, I knew that it was also a scientifically based treatment for the stresses they face on. The students have really enjoyed learning these activities and now come to me and their teachers all the time asking if they can learn more of them. Parents have come to me and said that they are noticing their children are less angry and violent than before, and I can see that in general many of the students are more relaxed. These exercises are helping students while they are at school to forget, momentarily, the problems which exists outside. Now, I am hoping that with further training, I can introduce students to the theoretical part of the programme and explain to them how these exercises connect to their mind and emotions.

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**80. Behaviour modification**

(Father of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

For a while, I have observed that my son is quite violent. I didn't really know what this was caused by. Then I attended a session of the Parent Club where I learned more about how trauma has impacts on children, and how it can result in things like nightmares and even violence. It was then that I began to notice that my son was having these nightmares, and so I decided to speak to the counsellor. My son is now working with this counsellor on his nightmares. I can see that now my son is less violent than before. I am not hearing from the school as often about his misbehaviour and I'm also not hearing from my son as much about how other students are fighting with him at school.

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**81. My unique daughter**

(Mother of BLP II participant, West Bank)

My daughter has normally been a strong and confident girl who has always done well in school. Then a couple years ago, her father, who she is really close to, was diagnosed with a back injury. He started to need to go to hospital all the time and had to stay at home, instead of going to work. Seeing her father sick made her very worried, and she started to have nightmares about someone coming and killing her father. She would imagine seeing his blood pour out in her dreams. At that time I did not know about these nightmares, and all my daughter would tell me was that she was exhausted and could not sleep well. I would tell her to pray and read the Koran in an effort to get

her to sleep better...but this did not seem to help. Her fear and nightmares began to effect her personality and achievement and she started to do less well in school. Her teachers began to notice that she was daydreaming in class and was less focussed. Then last year, the school principal invited the parents of the sixth grade to a session to talk about children's nightmares. There the counsellor discussed about the symptoms of trauma, including nightmares, and how to identify if our children might be suffering from trauma. Afterwards my daughter and I went to see the counsellor and discussed her situation. The counsellor, after speaking with my daughter individually, then invited her to be part of the nightmare group. In the group she learned techniques for dealing with her fears by imagining and drawing beautiful things before she goes to bed. She would come home and show me the different relaxation exercises she learned. From her sessions with the counsellor, I came to learn about my daughter's nightmares, and how they were related back to an incident, a while back, where one of her uncles fought with her father in the house, and threatened to kill him. After these sessions, her nightmares have become much less, maybe once a month. She is still afraid of losing her father one day, but tries to maintain a more positive outlook on things. As a mother, I've also learned how important it is to help my children to have a positive view of life. I've enrolled them in summer activities to distract them from their fathers' illness. As a result of all this, my daughter has now improved again academically.

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### **82. Before and after my nightmares**

(BLP II Participant, Female, West Bank)

Before I used to be scared, I would dream about earthquakes and volcanos, and the world being ugly and grey, like it was judgment day. I would dream that soldiers kidnapped my whole family. I would search and search for them and when I would find them, the soldiers would take me too. After that my counsellor gave me very good exercise, especially the relaxation exercise. She taught me how to turn a scary dream into a comedy, like coming out as a hero in the kidnapping dream, or candy would come out of the ground in the earthquake dream. I liked the group sessions, because there I didn't feel alone

and I really liked that my friends participated with me. It would make me feel better, because I felt assured that I wasn't the only one who felt this way. Now I know what to do when I have nightmares, and how I can make them go away.

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### **83. A mother's experience**

(Mother of BLP II Participant, Gaza)

My son was an excellent student until the war in 2014. After the war, though, I started to notice that my son started to suffer from regular nightmares. He would wake up screaming and shouting. He wouldn't tell his father or I about his dreams, so the only way we could calm him down was to take him into another room. All of this began to have an impact on him academically, and it also made him more stressed. He would become very anxious about going to bed. Recently, I attended a session about nightmares as part of the parent club. There I learned some practical approaches for helping my son with his nightmares. I started using the stress and release and breathing activities at home with him, and could see that it helped to calm him down before he went to sleep. My son also started to work with the counsellor in sessions to discuss his nightmares. This has helped him to open up and talk about his fears. He has told us that he is scared of his room and wants to sleep somewhere else. Now he is beginning to open up to us about his dreams, and I have some ways to help him through his fears.

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### **84. My goal is here** (Teacher, West Bank)

In the past in my classroom, I would struggle to engage the students who were lazy or control those who were more hyperactive. These groups of students would often struggle academically because they lacked concentration or focus on what I was trying to teach them. Last year, the counsellor of the school sat with a group of teachers under the tree in the playground and introduced us to a series of exercises – such as breathing, relaxation and stress and release – that we could use in the classroom with our students. After that session, I returned to my classroom and started to use them at the start of my lessons. I noticed that my lazy students, after doing them, had more energy, and those who were hyperactive were more relaxed and focussed. This has helped me to improve the

academic results of all children in my classroom. While these activities are useful, I do not believe they are not enough for reducing the stress the students they face because of the circumstances in our community. As teachers we continue to need more training and support for this.

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**85. Attracting others' concentration**  
(Teacher, Gaza)

As an experienced teacher, I have a number of routines for my managing my classroom. These include stopping the lesson and looking silently at the students who are misbehaving, yelling at them, or asking a child to come up and sing something in front of the class. While these methods work, I am always looking for new techniques. In March, I attended a training workshop on BLP I and learned a number of different exercises and activities I could use in my classroom like stress and release and breathing exercises. Afterwards, I introduced these activities to the students in my classroom and they seemed to really like them. I could see it helped to motivate and energise many of my students, and importantly, it also made the learning process a bit more fun for all of them. We couldn't do the balancing activities due to a lack of space, but now almost daily I use the other BLP exercises to help to motivate and engage my students in the lesson. For me though, while improving my students wellbeing is important, what is most critical is to then see the impact it will have on their examination results. I am still waiting to see if this will be the case.

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**86. How can I help her?** (Mother of BLP II Participant, Female, West Bank)

My 11-year old daughter would wake up at night and tell me that she's really horrified. She would dream about death, and I would pray with her and for her, but I wasn't seeing change. She was actually getting worse. This was also affecting her school work. Her academic performance was getting worse, and when I followed up with her teachers and counsellor they were telling me that my daughter constantly shows signs of fear, stares into space, is not focussed, and is even unresponsive sometimes. At home I saw this too with her. She would lock herself in her room and cry for hours. All of this started happening after

the army barged into our house and searched the place apart. I could see just how terrified she was during and after the event. Even me as a mother, I was terrified by this. Until now, I continue to try to speak to her about this day but she is still in shock. I understand this fear because when I was 14, a thief came into our home and until now I still feel afraid sometimes. After going and speaking to the counsellor, she began to participate in some sessions with her. Her teachers are telling me now that she is a little more focussed and little more responsive in class, and I am very happy about this. Her nightmares also decreased but I still think she needs more sessions and more time to start feeling better. I'd like to help her as well, but sometimes I struggle.

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**87. Freedom** (Mother of BLP II Participant, Female, West Bank)

My daughter is 12 years old and I was always so worried about her. She wouldn't even talk about what is keeping her up. When she'd wake up in the middle of the night after a nightmare, I would tell her to pray but she still couldn't go back to sleep. She wouldn't sleep alone and turning off lights was out of the question. She joined the counselling sessions with her counsellor last year and since then I've started to see a change in my daughter. She wasn't introverted anymore and was expressing her fears to me. She starting to tell me how the presence of the many soldiers around our home would make her feel so terrified. After learning the different BLP relaxation exercises, she started to teach her siblings how to do them, and they'd do them together. It was really nice. What I've noticed most is that now she is more joyous, and she even likes to go and visit her friends. This change is important for me because I like my daughter to be independent. She needs to have a social life. Her thoughts cannot be taken up by fear I...want her thoughts to be positive.

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**88. From stress to calm**  
(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

I like to watch movies that are full of action and violence. Afterwards I sometimes get worried and disappointed from watching them. I also get nightmares from them sometimes. Then at school, my teacher introduced us to stretching, breathing

and balancing exercises in the classroom. She explained we could do at home when feeling scared or stressed. She also explained that doing them exercises could make us more calm and relaxed. After trying these activities, both at school and at home, I'm feeling more relaxed and a bit more satisfied in my life. At school I feel that when I do these exercises, they take a weight off my mind, and I can concentrate better on the lesson.

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### 89. My easy going son

(Mother of BLP I participant, West Bank)

My son who is the fourth grade, has typically not liked going to school. He was an average student who did not feel that successful at school. Then earlier this year, he was taught some new balancing exercises by his teacher. He told me that one day when they were practicing these exercises, one of the students fell down. All the students started to laugh and pretend to fall down as well. From that day, he started to come home from school with a new outlook. He would come home and show me the exercises he had learned and would laugh while doing them. Doing these exercises in his classroom has given him improved motivation and interest in school. I noticed that he started talking about his teacher in a more positive way and that their relationship had grown stronger. As a mother, it is relief to know that my child is happier and safer at school. I hope now that he is enjoying school more, he will also be more motivated to do better academically.

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### 90. Resisting the occupation

(BLP II Beneficiary, Female, West Bank)

I live in a part of town where the settlers constantly harass us. One Saturday last year, I joined my grandfather in his shop when the settlers came. In front of my eyes they destroyed the shop and hit my grandfather over the head with an iron bar. He was rushed to hospital and the policemen that came to the shop afterwards to interview me. I told him everything I saw, but they did not believe me. My mother told me after I went home that night that I should not have said anything to the police, because now they will retaliate against our family. This started to make me fearful and in the nights after I could not sleep. I started to have dreams of the police coming and

attacking my family...almost every night. Then I began to participate in sessions with my counsellor at school to talk about my nightmares. She taught me some relaxation and breathing exercises. I use them every night before I go to bed now. I don't have nightmares anymore. I also use the breathing exercises when I am on my way to and from school to make me less afraid, and this helps me to reach school safely each day.

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### 91. Improving my life

(BLP I Participant, Female, Gaza)

I am very sensitive person, who does not like it when people get upset or angry with me, whether it is my teacher, my friends, or my family. Whenever I know that someone is cross with me, I get stressed and sad myself. For example, when I go home from school after a day where I have had an argument with a friend or been yelled at by the teacher, I feel very down. I go home, and sit quietly and refuse to do anything. Then one day, the teacher at school taught us some new breathing, stretching and balance exercises that we could do when we were feeling stressed or sad. We practiced them at school and I started using them at home. When I'm doing the breathing exercises, I imagine myself on the sea, and it makes me so happy that I start to cry tears of happiness. I feel myself being able to deal with my sad feelings better. It is helped me to feel less stressed, and more confident to speak with the people who are upset with me about their feelings. As the youngest in my family, I've taught the exercises to all my older brothers and sister and they really enjoy it. Now each morning, before we go to school, we do the exercises together before we leave the house.

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### 92. The positive change in my daughter

(Mother of BLP II Participant, West Bank)

For a long time my daughter has been withdrawn and shy. Perhaps this is because the two siblings closest in age to her are boys. At home, she let her brothers bully her and lock her in her room without saying anything back. She would not help out with any of the household chores or visit relatives on the weekend. And in school, she would sit in her chair all day, and say nothing to the other children around her or her teacher. During break times, she would sit by herself and not play with

any of the other children at school. She would tell me she had no friends at school. At night, she refused to sleep by herself and would only sleep in my bed. Then last year, the school had a meeting about the Better Learning Programme. In this meeting the counsellor discussed how children have nightmares and how we as parents can assist them with their dreams. Afterwards I went to talk to the counsellor more about my daughter's problems and the counsellor agreed for my daughter to be part of the group she was running to deal with children's nightmares. In the group she learned to do exercises that help to relax her and she also was asked to draw out her nightmare which was about snakes and spiders. She followed along with the activities of the group mainly because she really liked the counsellor. She thought was kind. After the sessions my daughter has become more social and willing to participate more in activities at school and at home. At school she has become more motivated to do her homework and complete the tasks asked of her. This has helped her to improve her achievement in all subjects. At home, she is now talking more with me, and even asking me to do some of the exercises with her as well. She is asserting herself with her brothers and telling them how she feels when they bully her. And she is willingly participating in community activities after school. Overall my daughter is showing greater interest in life.

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### 93. Safe place

(BLP II Participant, Female, Gaza)

Sometimes, I used to sit with my aunts at house, who like to talk about scary events and nightmares, After that, I started to see nightmares about a woman who is coming out of grave and want to kill me. I started also to imagine dead bodies with open eyes similar to the images we would see from the last war. Because of the war I hate darkness and green lights. Then, one day, when the school counsellor asked about if anyone had nightmares I raised my hand. She invited me to join her groups for practicing breathing, stress release and the safe place exercises. After practicing the exercises I felt more relieved. My nightmares are now less.

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### 94. Scary dreams

(BLP II Participant, Female, West Bank)

I get very scared from snakes. My brother really scares me with them and puts small ones in bottles, shoves them in my face, and mocks me with them. This would terrify me. I wouldn't sleep in my bed; instead I would sleep on the floor. I would dream of zombies and snakes, I would wake up crying and would wake up my mom and dad. They would check the house to make sure everything was ok but I still would sleep in their bed. When I started to go see the counsellor she would help us with the breathing exercises, and told me that I was the princess of a candy castle. I don't have any more nightmares, only sometimes, but I know what to do now.



## 7.3 EVALUATION SCHEDULE

Date	Location	Activit(ies)
Tues, Oct 25	East Jerusalem	Ritesh arrives in PM Interviews with NRC internal and external stakeholders (via Skype prior)
Weds Oct 26	East Jerusalem	Inception meetings with NRC senior management and NRC Education/M&E team Key stakeholder interviews with NRC key partners (MoEHE, Ramallah and NMFA)
Thurs Oct 27	West Bank	Visit to school Key stakeholder interviews with NRC key partners (UNICEF) and interviews with BLP internal team members
Fri Oct 28	Gaza	Travel to Gaza from East Jerusalem Interview with BLP Roving Coordinator and Technical Advisor (Skype) Initial meetings with key BLP staff in Gaza
Sun Oct 30	Gaza	Visit to school Interview with PSS partner of MoEHE
Mon Oct 31	Gaza	Visit to school Interview with MoEHE
Tues Nov 1	Gaza	Interview with MoEHE Visit to school (cancelled due to UNWRA strike)
Weds Nov 2	Gaza	Visit to school Interview with UNRWA Community Mental Health
Thurs Nov 3	Gaza	Visit to school Interview/discussion with BLP Gaza Team at NRC
Fri Nov 4	East Jerusalem	Return to East Jerusalem, debrief/catch up with team in office
Sun Nov 6	West Bank	Visit to school Observation of BLP training in Hebron
Mon Nov 7	West Bank	Visit to school Discussion with NRC Education team
Tues Nov 8	West Bank	Visit to school
Wed Nov 9	Ramallah	MSC Selection Panel with NRC and external stakeholders based in Jerusalem/WB
Thurs Nov 10	East Jerusalem	Findings/ToC workshop with relevant NRC Education staff Ritesh departs in PM

## 7.4 KEY STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Within NRC	External to NRC
Palestine Education Core Comptency Specialist (Camilla Lodi); Roving BLP Capacity Building Advisor (Karam El-Shanti); Education Coordinators (Jamil Sawalma and Asad Ashour); Head of Programme, Palestine (Martino Costa)	Head of UNICEF Education and Co-Chair of EiE Working Group Education Senior Programme Advisor NMFA Head of Community Mental Health UNWRA Gaza Director of Counselling, MoEHE Gaza Director of Counselling and Special Education, MoEHE West Bank Field Follow Up Department MoEHE West Bank BLP Consultant from Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies INEE Director and former NRC Adviser

## 7.5 EVALUATION PROTOCOLS

### 7.5.1 MSC INTERVIEW/RECORDING GUIDE

*Introduction: I am here today to discuss with you the participation you have had in the past in the Norwegian Refugee Council's Better Learning project. As part of this project a number of activities occurred, some of which you were personally involved in as a parent/teacher/counsellor/leader in this school. I would like you to think back on that experience and some of the changes that you witnessed because of this project – either for yourself personally, your child/the children you work with, or the school community as a whole. These changes can either be good ones or bad ones, but need to be changes that are important to you. I am collecting a number of stories from individuals at your schools and others, and they will then be reviewed by an external evaluator who is working with Norwegian Refugee Council to advise them on how they can best build and improve on their activities to date.*

Do you the storyteller:

- Want to have your name on the story (tick one)      Yes     No
- Consent to us using your story in publications/reports (tick one)      Yes     No

#### Contact Details

Name of person recording story \_\_\_\_\_

Name of storyteller\* \_\_\_\_\_

Project and location \_\_\_\_\_

Date of recording \_\_\_\_\_

**Your school was involved in the Better Learning Programme supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council. As part of this, there were a number of activities that occurred in the school. Thinking back on some of the activities that had occurred, what were three significant changes, either positive or negative, that resulted from this?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Of these changes, which would you say has been the most important change to you personally and why?**

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TURN PAGE OVER

**Now I would like you to tell me the complete story about this change. In doing so, describe what things were like before NRC came to your school, how the change was brought about, and what things are like now. Try to tell the story in this sequence and I will write down what you have said and then read it back to you after for you to add/correct any details of what you have stated.**

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**What title or name would you like to give to your story?**

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## 7.5.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR NRC STAFF/MASTER TRAINERS/AREA SUPERVISORS

(Note: not all questions were asked to all individuals, as not all equally relevant)

- 1) How long and how have you been involved in BLP?
- 2) In your opinion, what would you say have been some of the biggest successes to date from BLP?
- 3) When thinking about these successes, what have been the factors that have been critical to achieving these outcomes?
- 4) What have been some of the biggest challenges that you/and or the team have faced in designing and implementing BLP to date? Which of these challenges does NRC have control over, and which of these are more contextual in nature?
- 5) In what ways does the unique context of Palestine (and Gaza/WB) influence how BLP has been designed and implemented?
- 6) As BLP has developed within over the years, what have been some of the key changes that have been made to the project?
- 7) At present which organisations/agencies have the biggest influence on psycho-educational provision to vulnerable children in Gaza/West Bank? Why?
- 8) How has BLP aligned with NRC Programme Policy, the INEE Minimum Standards and INEE resources to ensure relevance to best practice in the field at the moment?
- 9) Do you believe BLP is targeting the right beneficiaries at the moment? Are there children who you feel deserve to participate in BLP (or BLP II) but miss out at present or/and are there children who are part of the BLP II groups and you feel do not fit the selection criteria? Why? What can be done to solve this issue?
- 10) What would you say has been NRC's comparative advantage in running a psycho-educational support project such as BLP to date? How might the organisation build off that success in the future?

## 7.5.3 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) How familiar are you with BLP? What do you believe the project has sought to do?
- 2) Based on your observations and knowledge of BLP, what would you say have been some of the biggest achievements of it to date? Why are these achievements so important to the children of Palestine?  
*(ONLY ASKED IF MSC STORY NOT COLLECTED FROM THIS INDIVIDUAL)*
- 3) In the context of ongoing conflict within Palestine, and the institutional challenges faced by MoEHE/UNWRA, how well do you think the successes of BLP can be sustained in the medium to long term? Why/why not?
- 4) Are there particular groups of children where NRC has shown particular success in regards to BLP in your opinion? Why might that be? Are there particular groups where NRC has not shown success? Why might that be?
- 5) At present time, when it comes to the specific learning needs of children in Palestine, what do you believe those needs are? How well do you feel a project like BLP can address these concerns? Explain.
- 6) In working with NRC, what would you say is unique or novel about their approach in the education sector? Why do you think they can work in this way?

- 7) At present time, what do you believe are the biggest challenges facing the donor community, education service providers and/or implementing partners in continuing to support the psycho educational needs of children in Palestine?
- 8) What evidence, do you feel would be most convincing in demonstrating to donors and other agencies that there is importance in addressing the psycho-educational needs of children affected by conflict? How would such evidence need to be gathered?
- 9) How does BLP fit into the MoEHE/UNRWA Palestine education strategy framework?

## 7.6 INITIAL SAMPLING FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL AND BENEFICIARY SELECTION

Project Type	Principal or deputy	Teachers	Caregivers	Children	Counsellor
Method(s) and time required	Interview (30 Mins)	Individual MSC story collection (20 mins/each) and FGD with counsellor afterwards (30 mins)	Individual MSC story collection (30 mins/each)	Group MSC story collection (one hour per group of four)	Individual MSC story collection (30 mins) and FGD with teachers afterwards.
Gaza 2013-2014 BLP only UNWRA participating school	1	2	4	8	1
Gaza 2014-5 BLP only UNWRA participating school	1	2	4	8	1
Gaza 2015-6 Improved Education UNWRA participating school	1	2	4	8	1
Gaza 2015-6 BLP only MoEHE school	1	2	4	8	1
Gaza 2015-6 Improved Education MoEHE school	1	2	4	8	1
West Bank 2014-5 Improved Education UNWRA school	1	2	4	8	1
West Bank 2014-5 Improved Education MoEHE school	1	2	4	8	1
West Bank 2015-6 BLP Only UNWRA school	1	2	4	8	1
West Bank 2015-6 BLP Only MoEHE school	1	2	4	8	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>9</b>

## 7.7 SELECTED DRAWINGS FROM STUDENTS AS PART OF MSC STORY COLLECTION

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Before BLP



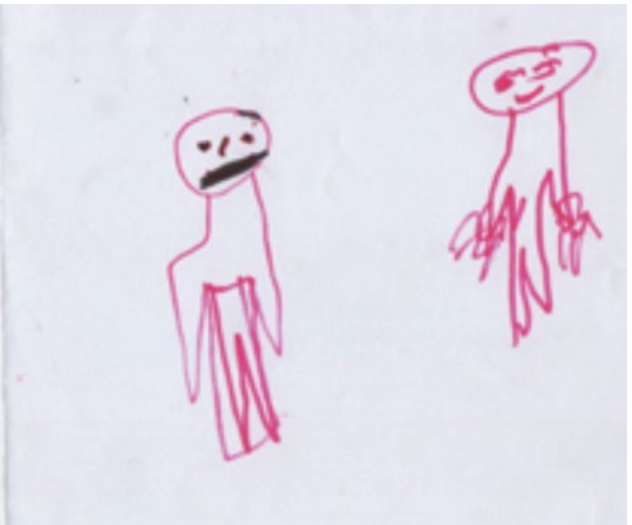
After BLP



Before BLP



After BLP







**NRC**

NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

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