

RIGHT TO PLAY
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

Circle of Hope: Play and Learn for Well-being Program

Funded by AFAS Foundation

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Circle of Hope (CoH) was implemented from October 2025 to June 2026 across five Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) in the Middle Area, Khan Younis, and Rahaf governorates of the Gaza Strip. In partnership between Right To Play and the Tamer Institute, the program combined play-based learning, remedial Arabic literacy and numeracy, contextualized storytelling, psychosocial support, and child protection measures through 42 two-hour sessions across 6 months.

Implementation took place in a volatile humanitarian context marked by displacement and security interruptions. Despite these constraints, the program reached 1,066 children (537 boys, 529 girls) across three age groups (5–6, 7–9, 10–12 years), sustaining access, routine, learning, and psychosocial support in an unstable context. 459 children were identified as having a form of disability, including 65 children who required urgent accessibility support.

The program focused on community engagement to address needs, rehabilitate TLS spaces to withstand the winter season, conduct caregiver awareness sessions, and provide various facilitator trainings to strengthen child-friendly environments.

MAIN FINDINGS

CoH demonstrated evidence of promise of positive outcomes across facilitators, children, and caregivers. The program focused on strengthening the capacity of local facilitators to deliver engaging quality play-based approaches to support children's holistic learning and psychosocial well-being. Through training, coaching, and peer support, facilitators developed the knowledge and skills required to support children effectively, 79% of facilitators (22 from 28) demonstrating adequate knowledge and understanding of play-based learning approaches.

Notably, caregivers reported improvements in their child's confidence (78%), focus and working memory (52%), and self-awareness and communication skills (50%). Caregivers commonly described children as bolder, calmer, happier, and as being better able to express their feelings and show kindness to others. The program strengthened caregivers' social connectedness (52%), with many reporting reduced stress, increased application of learning at home, and reassurance that their children had regained a sense of normalcy.

The partnership between Right To Play, Tamer, and the local community was central to the program's success, enabling safe and needs-relevant support for children across the strip.

REACH

1,066 Children

Males: 537
Females: 529
Children With Disability: 459

1,278 Caregivers

Males: 262
Females: 1016
People With Disability: 203

28 Facilitators

Males: 5
Females: 23
People With Disability: 5

81% Attendance Rate Across 5 TLSs

FACILITATOR OUTCOME

The program strengthened facilitators' confidence and capacity to deliver quality play-based learning and psychosocial support. Facilitators frequently attributed this to participation in the monthly Communities of Practices and ongoing coaching by Right To Play. Evaluation findings showed that 82% of facilitators were able to identify appropriate play-based methods to support children's learning and development, while 75% of the facilitators were able to correctly identify positive self-care strategies to manage stress. Overall, **79% of facilitators (22 from 28) demonstrated adequate knowledge and understanding of play-based learning approaches.**

Facilitators reported an improvement in critical skills for supporting children in emergency contexts including greater confidence in managing groups, adapting activities to children's needs, and responding to trauma-related behaviours with empathy rather than discipline.

"The training experience was a real turning point in my career journey. I learned in a deeper and precise way how play can be a powerful tool for education, expression, emotional release, and in making a meaningful psychological difference in a child's life, especially after crisis." - Raneen, CoH Facilitator



Strengthening caregiver wellbeing: 84% of caregivers reported feeling better able to support themselves so they could better support their child.



Promoting child safety: 85% of caregivers reported feeling confident teaching children how to say "no" in unsafe or uncomfortable situations, while 77% reported feeling able to help their child distinguish between safe and unsafe situations.



Supporting children's mental health: 78% of caregivers reported feeling confident in helping their child cope with fear and anxiety, while 69% reported being better able to recognize behavioural and emotional changes following stressful events.



Supporting home learning: 77% of caregivers reported feeling confident supporting learning at home by using available resources, while respecting the balance between learning, play, and rest.

CHILD OUTCOME

Children maintained an overall **attendance rate of 81% across 1,066 total children**, despite ongoing displacement and relocation. CoH supported improved access to learning in a context where **46% of caregivers reported having no alternative education provision**.

Facilitators and caregivers also reported positive changes in children's social emotional skills, a critical foundation for holistic learning and well-being. Particularly, children showed improved concentration, greater confidence to participate, and clearer communication and self-expression. Facilitators reported children also showed early signs of improved foundational literacy, particularly in writing and Arabic vocabulary.

Observations from CoH reflect the evidence on the interconnection between children's social emotional skills, psychosocial well-being, and learning. As children developed greater emotional regulation, confidence, and a sense of safety, they were better able to engage in reading, writing, numeracy, and other creative learning activities.

CAREGIVER OUTCOME

CoH contributed to positive outcomes for caregivers through increased knowledge, reducing stress, and encouraging social connection. Through six thematic sessions focused on a) mental health, b) supporting children under stress, c) child protection and safety, d) home learning, e) caregiver well-being, and f) interactive child-caregiver risk and security sessions, caregivers reported gaining practical skills to support their children to cope with fear and anxiety, respond to unsafe situations, provide child home learning, and improve their well-being.

One month after completion, **85% of caregivers reported applying skills learned through the sessions two or more times during the previous week**, demonstrating how learning translated into practice. Beyond skills development, CoH also served as a social, relational, and informational access point, with 48% of caregivers reporting that it helped them connect with other families and services. CoH was well received: **96% of caregivers said it made their daily lives easier by ensuring their children were in a safe environment, while 99% said they would recommend it to others.**

SUCCES STORIES FROM THE CIRCLE OF HOPE PROGRAM

Turning Pain into Creative Writing



Maryam, 11 years old, from Rafah, was often isolated and struggled to fully integrate into activities. Signs of sadness and absent-mindedness were noticeable, and she sometimes refused to engage in games or participated without enthusiasm. Through the psychosocial support sessions, facilitators focused on providing a safe space for expression, releasing feelings connected to loss and difficult experiences, building self-confidence, and encouraging creative writing through vocabulary building. A turning point occurred during a session addressing loss and departure. Maryam insisted on reading what she had written in front of her peers. Through sharing her experience, she expressed feelings connected to loss and fear that she had been carrying. Following this experience, Maryam began to show greater ability to express her feelings and interact with others positively.

As her vocabulary improved within the Arabic literacy portion of the sessions, she also discovered a talent for creative writing, which became an important outlet for expression and emotional release. During a parents' session, Maryam's mother expressed her gratitude and confirmed the positive changes she had observed in her daughter at home. She shared: "*My daughter waits for the session time impatiently. Her psychological state became better, but until now I am not able to face the sadness in her eyes as I know she is still hurting.*" CoH Facilitator, Shireen, reflected: "*Maryam was carrying great sadness beyond her age, but when a safe space and support were made available to her, she was able to turn her pain into words. Today, she is more able to express herself and interact with a group.*"



Self-Regulation and Positive Peer Engagement

Majed often found difficulty regulating his emotions and engaging kindly with his peers. During the first sessions, it became noticeable that he used inappropriate words when frustrated, entered into fights with other children, and needed time to calm down before reintegrating into a group activity. He also showed a learning gap when concentrating in Arabic literacy and numeracy tasks. Majed was referred to receive additional specialized support early on, which strongly contributed to his improvement later in the program. Through psychosocial support and foundational education sessions, Right To Play technical staff and Tamer facilitators worked with Majed through structured activities that helped him express his emotions in healthy ways while building communication and social skills for positive interactions with his peers.

Through evidence-based, play-based learning approaches, Majed became more engaged in learning and applied new skills that improved his behaviour and interactions with his peers. With time, Majed became calmer and more regulated when stressed, more committed to the rules of the session, and more respectful of others. His focus and ability to learn also improved, and he began participating with enthusiasm by cooperating with his classmates and confidently sharing his insights. CoH facilitator, Aya, reflected: "*Majed moved from a child who found difficulty controlling his temperament when engaging with others, to being an active and integrated child inside a group, showing a spirit of cooperation and positive competition in a remarkable way.*"



KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Focus on peer learning and Communities of Practice for facilitators:** Ongoing peer support and coaching through Communities of Practice were critical to facilitator confidence, feeling heard, ability to adapt, and the quality of sessions for children.

2. **Provide structured facilitator toolkits and guides:** While flexibility is essential with the context, facilitators preferred having clear routines, session guides, and on-hand practical resources that provided consistency when they faced periods of crisis, stress or uncertainty.

3. **Focus on strengthening facilitator-child relationships:** The trust built between facilitators and children was a key driver of early evidence of promise on holistic learning and well-being outcomes, demonstrating that safe adult-child relationships are themselves protective interventions.

4. **Integrate facilitator well-being support into programme design:** Facilitators experienced many of the same stressors and traumatic events as the children they supported, highlighting the need for both group-based and individualized 1-on-1 psychosocial support or referral services.

5. **Strengthen support pathways for children with additional learning, protection, and psychosocial needs:** Programs should combine differentiated educational support, disability accommodations, and effective referral mechanisms to ensure that children requiring specialized services receive timely and appropriate support in parallel and beyond the program timeframe.

6. **Ensuring adequate resources and infrastructure:** Facilitator creativity enabled program continuity despite challenges, but sustainable implementation requires sufficient materials and infrastructural preparedness measures, particularly before winter season.

7. **Continue integrating psychosocial support with foundational learning:** Educational progress was closely linked to strengthening social emotional skills and psychosocial well-being, reinforcing the importance of integrated education and psychosocial support interventions.

8. **Reduce learning barriers through the provision of educational materials:** Access to basic learning materials i.e. notebooks and contextualized storybooks used in the classroom is essential. These support caregivers in home learning by reducing their financial pressures, and providing child with references out of class.

9. **Integrate parent-child participation:** Parents preferred having their children in sessions to practice new techniques together. They reported better recall and feeling emotionally closer to their children, highlighting the value of shared learning in future programs.

> ***"One of the most meaningful moments for me was seeing children who were once withdrawn, afraid, or unwilling to participate begin to smile, express their feelings, and eagerly wait for the sessions. Through Circle of Hope, children found a safe space to play, learn, and connect with others, and I learned how to better understand their needs and support them through difficult circumstances."***
>
> PSYCHOSOCIAL FACILITATOR