



**St John of Jerusalem
Eye Hospital Group**

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Mobile Outreach Programme

Report to the Knights Templar

December 2020

It gives us great pleasure to update you on the work of the Mobile Outreach Programme. Each year the outreach programme allows us to help the most marginalised communities in the Palestinian territories by bringing our care to communities. Last year it reached over 10,000 people and despite the disruption that COVID-19 caused, has helped over 4,000 people to date.

The St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group is the only charitable provider of expert eye care in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It has been treating patients regardless of their ethnicity, religion or ability to pay for almost 140 years and employs 268 people. Its flagship hospital in East Jerusalem supports almost 50,000 patients and performs over 3,600 major operations each year. People travel from all over the country to access its services. Along with this we have hospitals in Hebron and Gaza, together with clinics in Anabta and Muristan. The St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group's vision is to transform lives by saving people's sight in a region that has faced decades of conflict and inequality.



The Mobile Outreach Programme works in some of the most isolated communities in the Palestinian territories to bring quality eye care. In 2019 it reached over 10,000 people. The programme is made up of two teams, one in the West Bank and one in Gaza, each delivering essential screening with specialists to diagnose existing or potential eye conditions completely free of charge. Those with acute diagnoses are referred to our hospital in Jerusalem for further treatment or surgery.

Why mobile outreach?

People in the occupied Palestinian territories are ten times more likely to go blind than in the West. The politics of the region means that isolated communities are often left behind when it comes to medical care. We've found that there are three principal contributing factors for such a high incidence of poor eye care:

- **Poverty:** Poverty is both a cause and consequence of blindness,¹ but by helping restore people's sight we are potentially improving the lives of individuals and their families which in turn can promote the stability and economy of the region.²
- **Geographic isolation:** The physical and economic isolation and frequent outbreaks of conflict in the Palestinian territories have all led to high levels of poverty. Over the last decade, internal and external barriers have caused significant constraints in economic growth and business investment. This in turn has resulted in high rates of unemployment.
- **Accessibility:** Access to quality eye care is vital for everyone but obtaining treatment in the Palestinian territories can be a complicated process. It's not uncommon for patients to have to navigate numerous movement restrictions such as the Separation Wall, the permit system or poor transport access – not to mention the restrictions imposed because of COVID-19 lockdowns this year which are in full effect as we write.

There is also another contributing factor. Genetics plays a devastating part in potential eye problems in this region. The need to preserve cultural traditions and retain property within the family has led to almost half of all marriages in the Palestinian territories being intrafamilial. Unfortunately intrafamilial marriages increase the risk of a number of eye conditions such as cataracts caused by a genetic fault inherited from parents causing the lens to develop abnormally. As a charity we are committed to extending our care to communities that would otherwise be unable to benefit from our services, and ultimately this is the reason we provide the Mobile Outreach Programme for those that live in the West Bank and Gaza areas.

59-year-old Hassan from Aqraba in the West Bank, has suffered from diabetic retinopathy for many years, but thanks to the Mobile Outreach Service his condition is managed by regular check-ups followed by occasional treatment at the Group's other centres.

Delivering essential services

The Mobile Outreach Programme is made up of two teams, one in Gaza and the other in the West Bank. Each delivers specialist screening to diagnose existing or potential eye conditions completely free of charge. Up to 2018 we had two teams in the West Bank but due to the ending of USAID funding in 2018, coupled with the physical restrictions caused by the COVID lockdown we have scaled back operations to one van. This is the van that the Knights Templar's funding helped us purchase. Additional treatment for people in these hard-to-reach regions is either subsidised or completely waived. This is made possible by the way we channel fees generated by

private patients at the Jerusalem Hospital to create a financial surplus which funds our charitable activities. Currently we provide four days a week outreach clinics, two of which are run at Kofur Aqab Clinic, twenty kilometres north of Jerusalem. The Mobile Outreach Programme also provides a Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme which addresses damage to the blood vessels of the light-sensitive tissue in the retina. There is no cure for this condition but the sooner the condition is diagnosed the easier it is to treat.

Bringing primary care treatment to those in need

High standards of healthcare is a fundamental human right,³ yet today there remains a significant disparity between the healthcare systems in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Established in 1982, the Mobile Outreach Service brings free medical aid to these remote and disadvantaged communities, and provides essential screening, health education treatment and referrals. Inequality significantly affects these communities and creates an on-going burden of health care problems.⁴ For example, it's not uncommon for children to irreversibly lose most or all of their sight from glaucoma, yet in most cases simple eye drops could save their sight. Good eye care enables children to attend school, training as teenagers and to eventually secure employment as adults. One of the cases we dealt with last year involved Hala, a three-year-old girl, who came to a clinic with a range of issues (congenital anomalies, retinopathy, squints and cataracts). Her parents had avoided seeking treatment because they couldn't afford it. We assured them they could access care without needing to pay and referred them to the Jerusalem Hospital for follow-up treatment. Her conditions would almost certainly have resulted in blindness in both eyes had her parents not brought her to one of our outreach clinic sessions. This is precisely why the Mobile Outreach Programme brings eye care treatment directly to the communities most in need. These are people who would otherwise be unable to travel or deal with the physical restrictions. By providing this dependable and expert service we significantly reduce the incidences of people failing to access referral mechanisms for treatment.

“St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital’s Outreach Programme allows us to reach the most marginalised communities by taking our care where it is needed most. Your generous support enables this to happen”

Naser Masarweh, Mobile Outreach Nurse

Another example of the programme’s spirit of innovation is the Education Sessions we provide. Here patients and their families are taught about the causes of common eye conditions and how to safeguard against them. Staff inform them when medical care is needed and how people can manage their conditions. Educational leaflets are distributed to communities and staff spend time with individuals experiencing specific eye conditions. This, in effect, generates a cascade effect allowing those who have already been given information on their eye conditions to pass on the knowledge to family members and immediate community which contributes significantly towards reducing rates of avoidable blindness.

Case Study



This is five-year-old Mohammad Dareen. He's from the Qabalan village near Nablus. Two years ago his mother noticed that he had problems focusing his vision. She was worried because she didn't know what was happening to her child and travelling outside the village, or going to the city of Nablus were simply not possible for her. The Mobile Outreach clinic gave her the opportunity to bring Mohammad to have his sight tested where he was diagnosed with a bilateral congenital cataract. He is scheduled for surgery to have it removed later this year at our Jerusalem Hospital. After which he will fully recover and be able to get on with his life.

The cost of providing the Mobile Outreach Programme

The overall cost of providing the Mobile Outreach Programme is £234,820 for the current financial year. As mentioned above, in 2018 the US Administration made the decision to cut substantial USAID funding which resulted in a total loss of funding to us of £500,000. Financially this was a tremendously difficult time for St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital, but thanks to the Knights Templar's generosity we were able to replace one of the vans and continue a reliable and dependable service for the residents of the West Bank.

Mobile Outreach Programme Costs 2020	GBP £
Payroll & Related Costs	203,043
Medical Costs	5,444
Vehicle Running Costs	24,445
Other Running Costs	1,888
Total Costs	234,820

We are immensely grateful to the Knights Templar for its exceptional support over the years. We sincerely hope that you will continue to support the work of the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group and we look forward to keeping you updated on our work over the coming year.

Charlie O'Doherty
Trusts and Philanthropy Officer

References

¹ World Blind Union, 2016.

² Kuper, 2008.

³ Physicians for Human Rights, 2015.

⁴ World Health Organization, 2012.