



## THE ASTRID LINDGREN MEMORIAL AWARD

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### TAMER INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION

#### **In towns, villages and refugee camps**

A group of children are sitting round a table in the library in Ramallah. The librarian starts to tell a story: "Once upon a time, there was a fisherman who was no longer able to catch any fish." A child continues: "He told his son that they had no money." And so the story continues from child to child. When it is over, each child illustrates its sentence and the story becomes a book that is put on the shelf for other children to read.

At the same time, in Hebron, eleven librarians are studying classification, computer science and creative writing. And in a village nearby, thirty women are listening to a reading of Selma Lagerlöf's *The Changeling*. A big discussion breaks out. Was the mother right or wrong to be nice to the young troll?

These are some examples of the activities carried out by the Tamer Institute for Community Education, an independent organisation working in the West Bank and Gaza. The organisation, which has received aid from sources including Unicef, Save the Children and the Anna Lindh Foundation, was founded in 1989 and is based in Ramallah.

#### **The vision of the Tamer Institute**

In Palestine, dates have been one of the most important foods since time immemorial. A Tamer is a person who passes seeds from a male date palm to a female date palm to fertilise it and create new life. In the same spirit, the Tamer Institute logo represents a red poppy sprouting up through stony soil.

Children and young people make up more than 60% of the population in the Palestinian areas. With the assistance of books, the Tamer Institute wants to help young people grow and develop, give them identity and self-esteem, stimulate them to think and use their imagination, create and communicate. It encourages not only reading but also the ability to express and communicate personal experience. Books become a springboard to individual knowledge-seeking and creation. Children have the opportunity to write their own stories and perform as storytellers. They can create pictures, plays, theatrical performances, radio programmes and films.

The Tamer Institute visits children and young people in villages and refugee camps and encourages them to form groups in which they can communicate their thoughts, dreams and hopes to each other. The idea is that this will also enable them to develop their identity, their self-esteem and their moral consciousness. Ultimately, it involves understanding the meaning of concepts such as democracy, human rights, cultural diversity and respect for people who hold different opinions.

The target group is broad: children and young people from six years of age. The oldest young people are 21. The Tamer Institute also wants to influence adult communicators of literature. For example, the institute trains librarians itself and works with teachers and parents.

#### **A wide range of activities**

The library in Ramallah is the Tamer Institute's resource centre and functions as the hub of a large network of local children's libraries, currently more than seventy, which also work with each other. In addition to distributing books, the Tamer Institute coordinates and initiates various activities such as storytelling and reading aloud, workshops for authors and illustrators and psychosocial literary activities for children traumatised by the experience of war.

The Tamer Institute has a permanent staff of 10, but there are also 40 coordinators in the West Bank and 13 in the office in Gaza, plus nearly 200 volunteers. Many of these people have been active in the organisation ever since they first encountered the Tamer Institute's books when they were children.

#### **The National Reading Campaign**

Since 1992, the Tamer Institute has conducted an annual National Reading Campaign. The aim of this is to reach out to refugee camps and remote, exposed areas where the school system does not work. The campaign culminates with National Reading Week in April. During this week, a number of reading promotion activities are held at various locations throughout the country. In 2007, National Reading Week had a slogan that powerfully encapsulates the ambitions of the Tamer Institute: "With words we overcome walls".

During the reading campaign, there is a recurring writing competition, My first book, for children aged 8-15. In 2007, 140 contributions were submitted. The best are published in a special series of books. Reading passports are also handed out. They look just like a real passport and holders get a stamp for every book they have read. This is a clear symbol of the idea that there are no borders for those who can read books. As Astrid Lindgren herself said: "Good children's literature gives the child a place in the world and the world a place in the child."

A third feature of the reading campaign is I donate a book, in which young people collect books for distribution to needy libraries or directly to children and young people.

The reading campaign gets bigger every year. The number of activities has multiplied and in 2008 the reading campaign reached around 52,000 children and young volunteers collected as many as 14,000 books. In February 2009, the Tamer Institute also put together 4500 emergency packs of books, exercise books and pens, which were distributed in schools in Gaza in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

#### **Publication by the Tamer Institute**

Very few Palestinian children's books are published. Therefore, the Tamer Institute started publishing books itself in 1993. So far it has published just over 130 books, including translations. The translated authors include such varied names as Meshak Asare from Ghana, Henrieta Siksek from the USA and Björn Sortland from Norway. The Tamer Institute also produces educational material for children who cannot go to school on account of the political situation. In addition, it publishes the small magazine Taif, which contains articles on authors, books and illustrators.

#### **Youth groups**

The Tamer Institute also has separate youth activities. Among other things, the youth groups produce their own newspaper, Yara'at, which publishes pictures and stories created by children and young people. Another project is The small continent, in which young people learn about their own

country's geography and history. This work has also resulted in a number of books. A third project is the international Read Write Now, which is aimed at young adults. The Tamer Institute works with reading promotion organisations in Egypt and Spain on this project.

The youth groups organise local meetings at which subjects such as human rights and critical thinking are discussed on the basis of the Tamer Institute's basic values and with the help of books. Summer camps and cultural evenings are also organised in the West Bank and Gaza. Events include reading aloud, storytelling, theatre, poetry, dance and music.

### **Cross-border cooperation**

The Tamer Institute's working methods, in particular the annual reading campaign, have also inspired the neighbouring countries. This has resulted in direct cooperation with Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. For a number of years, they have together implemented the reading promotion project Arab Children's Literature and Reading, supported by organisations including the Anna Lindh Foundation. In 2005, the Tamer Institute was awarded the newly-established Medchild Award for Best Practise by the Medchild organisation, which rewards successful work in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award**

For its exceptional reading promotion work, the Tamer Institute for Community Education has been awarded the 2009 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. The jury's reasons are as follows:

With perseverance, courage and resourcefulness, the Tamer Institute has stimulated Palestinian children's and young people's love of reading and creativity for two decades. Under difficult circumstances, the Institute carries out reading promotion work of an unusual breadth and versatility. In the spirit of Astrid Lindgren, the Tamer Institute sees the power of words and the strength of books, stories and the imagination as important keys to the courage to face life, self-esteem and tolerance.

### **FACTS**

Name: Tamer Institute for Community Education

What: Reading promotion organisation

Where: In the West Bank and in Gaza

Founded: 1989

Nominated for ALMA: since 2004

Core values: The Tamer Institute works on the basis of four core values: 1) Employing the resources inherent in the population. 2) Knowledge and education are the most important building blocks for society. 3) Young people are an important force in the construction and development of society. 4) Small groups and local rooting are important. The initiative for change must come from those concerned.

Vision: The Tamer Institute works for a Palestine in which children and young people can develop their knowledge and skills in a safe, democratic environment and thus realise their dreams.

The Institute's vision is good education for all, access to information, freedom of expression and a situation in which children and young people feel valued and heard. Its dream is a Palestine in which children and young people can play, learn and develop together, sharing ideas and experiences and expressing themselves artistically in writing, dialogue and art.

Activities: Reading promotion work in the form of writing workshops, storytelling and drama classes, reading campaigns, publication of children's literature, training of librarians and publication of a newspaper with young people's own stories, reflections and texts.

Publishing: Since 1993, when the Tamer Institute began publishing books, over 130 titles have been published.

Works with: Diakonia - Sweden, Anna Lindh Foundation - Sweden, Consulate General of Belgium - Jerusalem, Belgian Technical Cooperation - Jerusalem, Book Aid International - UK, British Council, CC NGO/EFA, Frankfurt Book Fair, French Consulate, French Cultural Center, Goethe Institute, Heinrich Böll Foundation, IBBY, Welfare Association, Arab Fund of Arts and Culture, Consulate General of Sweden/SIDA, Riwaq center for Architectural conversation, Bologna Book Fair, Movement for Peace MPDL, Spanish Agency for international development AECI, Save the children - UK, UNESCO, UNICEF, Children's Literature Committee.

For further information: [www.tamerinst.org](http://www.tamerinst.org)