

The Baqaa' Mobile Clinic, Hebron



Jawaher Jaber stands between nurses Abeer Ezeer (left) and Hiba Jaber (right). Ms Jaber accommodates in her home, a mobile clinic run by CARE which is funded by the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO). The mobile clinic provides basic health care to families who live in a part of Hebron that is cut off from the main town by the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba. (Photo: David Silverman/Getty Images for CARE/ECHO)

The urgent need for a mobile clinic in a small outlying village on the outer rim of the town of Hebron in the West Bank became evident when the villagers of Baqaa' began experiencing increasing difficulties in reaching their usual health services: a hospital and a clinic in Hebron.

The obstacle that lies between them and health services in the town of Hebron is a fence on one side that was built to protect the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba, and a bypass road on the other side. Jumping the fence is not feasible and the bypass road is restricted for Palestinians. Therefore, the trip from Baqaa' to Hebron for ordinary villagers involves a 25 km detour and a wait at a checkpoint. It used to be a half hour walk, 20 minutes on a donkey or a 10 minute drive, if you had a car.

With these restrictions the now isolated Baqaa' community was finding that they were wasting precious hours to get even basic healthcare needs attended to. Children's colds, sore throats, fevers, bronchitis, twisted ankles, anemia and hay fever all required too much time and effort to address. Reaching the clinics in

Hebron also exposed villagers to violence. Hebron has a high level of settler violence that is now monitored and recorded by the UN and Israeli authorities.

When CARE became aware of Baqaa's isolation and health predicament they worked with the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) to find a solution. As building permits are difficult to obtain in this area of the West Bank – CARE's staff, with local community leaders chose the home of Jawahar Jaber, a middle aged Palestinian mother who willingly volunteered her children's room for the clinic.

"Two mornings in a month, I wake the children up early so that we can fold and put away their bedding," says Jawaher, a down-to-earth, middle-aged Palestinian mother. "Then, when the doctor and nurses arrive we're ready to open our doors to those who need help."

By midday a medical team and patients fills most of Jawaher's house with happy chatter. In the cramped courtyard, one young mother cuddles her three week old baby, while another comforts and kisses a feverish toddler. An elderly couple waits for blood pressure checks and prescriptions are collected from a screened window.

"It's very central and we all need healthcare" says Jawaher, as she nudges one of her beautiful daughters out of the way so she can show the children's bedroom, an immaculate cubicle with a plain floor that can be cleaned easily. "This is where patients are examined", she proudly explains.

The Baqaa' mobile clinic provides basic health care and medicine including mother and child health for about 60 extended Palestinian families—nearly 1,000 people. It's also a place to chat and exchange information. Patients include Jawaher's husband. "He suffers from a bad neck injury and the only place we can get pain killers easily, is this mobile clinic."

Dr Alla'eden Shalalda, a doctor who works at the mobile clinic, notes: "People tend not to pay much attention to their health until there's a crisis. If they were not so physically cut off in Baqaa', I'd feel much happier. We do the best we can."

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