

STEP FORWARD

REPORT ON THE *STEP FORWARD* TRAINING COURSE FOR YOUTH LEADERS IN GAZA DELIVERED VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING FROM LONDON

28 April – 4 August 2011



Background

The *Step Forward* programme for youth leaders in Gaza was delivered by British-Arab Exchanges (BAX) in collaboration with the British Council in London and the Palestinian Territories. It was a response to a request from trainers working with the non-political charity Sonaa al-Hayat (Lifemakers) in Gaza, which delivers courses to young people in universities, schools, clubs and camps. These trainers wanted to enhance their own training skills, to be more effective in supporting young Gazans in developing life and leadership skills.

Participants (in Gaza)

The seven participants were Gazan professionals who give their spare time to run the Sonaa al-Hayat youth training courses.

Ahmed Abdel Wahab
Mahmoud Elbatta
Mahmoud H. Tafish
Mohammed Rantisi
Mamdouh Ferwana
Heba Anas
Abeer Al Masri

Training facilitators (in London)

Judi Conner, training consultant and coach, JCA
Griff Griffiths, coach, Cocomotion

Objectives

By the end of the programme, participants will have

- Experienced a range of new training tools and exercises
- Practised and developed their coaching, training and thinking skills
- Identified and made progress on their personal goals
- Developed teamwork with their training colleagues
- Experienced new ideas for course content and structure
- Extended their English language skills

Session themes

1. **Goal-setting**
2. **Coaching skills**
3. **Creative thinking skills**
4. **Leadership and proactivity**
5. **Communication skills**
6. **Building resilience, inner resources**
7. **Team and community building**
8. **Training design, action learning methods**

Training approach and content

Each *Step Forward* session was designed to focus on a specific training theme, and offer new ideas to expand the participants' own toolkit of training exercises. There was also time in each session to coach the participants on their own goals – mostly their goals as a team – which was also a way of demonstrating a non-directive style of training.

Goal-setting

The first session started by looking at the purpose and ground rules for the course. The focus was then on how to set strong, compelling goals, looking at exercises for goal-setting, and group coaching for participants. The group was invited to work together in co-coaching pairs/threes to support each other in developing their goals over the next fortnight.

Coaching skills

Participants were introduced to core coaching skills and models – including the GROW model, and a 'clean language' model. They took part in exercises to develop listening skills, and effective questioning.

Creative thinking skills

This session included coaching on the group's team goal. Participants were encouraged to look back on what they have achieved so far, and ahead to the achievement of their vision. They looked at ways of encouraging creativity/innovation, and dealing with obstacles and internal blocks.

Leadership and proactivity

Participants looked at leadership requirements and models, and tried out exercises to encourage proactive (rather than reactive) behaviours. They looked at exercises to encourage self-awareness and the development of a personal brand of leadership.

Communication skills

Group coaching on leadership was followed by reflection on what we mean by communication skills, and why and how these can be developed. There was also further work on listening skills.

Building resilience, inner resources

After group coaching on leadership and work towards their training goals, the participants worked on ideas to build inner resilience, including exercises on developing powerful language, proactive behaviour, and setting boundaries.

Team and community building

The group looked at non-verbal communication between team members, the role of team exercises and of facilitators, and group behaviours. They discussed the obstacles to good team and community building, and there was further group coaching looking ahead to the months beyond the end of this course.

Training design and action learning methods

In the final session the group reviewed approaches to learning and course design. They also tried out action learning together, examining a particular challenge faced currently by one of the participants. This required the practice of strong listening and open-questioning skills, and was intended to help provide a way of continuing the team's work together in the future.



Feedback from *Step Forward* Participants

The feedback given here is based on the five feedback forms that were returned.

Rating:

Participants were asked to rate how helpful the course had been, from 1 – 5 (1 being not helpful, and 5 being extremely helpful).

All five gave the course a 4 ('Very helpful')

Main benefits

All felt their training skills had been enhanced, and they'd learnt new methods, techniques and exercises to use.

Two valued meeting and learning with people from another culture.

Two said their English language skills had developed.

One spoke of benefiting from the work on goal-setting, how to be a good listener and leader, and how to keep asking "What else?" when examining options.

Another valued the setting of team goals, and developing coaching skills.

What other content they would have liked?

Individual comments:

More exercises, and practice in using them

More checking by the facilitators that everything was well understood

More work on creative thinking and how to pass that on

More on leadership

More depth on each topic, and more on developing assertiveness and self-confidence

What did the facilitators do well?

Individual comments:

Spirit of co-operation and integration

Good session management, clear explanations, good listening, encouraging and accepting

Motivators, clear course structure, follow-up, engaged the participants

Gave examples to help us understand

Patient

What could the facilitators do better?

Understand our language difficulties!

Allow us more time to talk amongst ourselves about course content

More follow-up in between sessions

Better if they could come and be face-to-face in Gaza

Would you like more of this type of training?

All five: Yes

Most would like the same topics in more depth, and would prefer face-to-face training

What will you stop doing as a result of this training course?

Using traditional training pattern (directive teaching approach)

Interrupting a speaker

Training without a clear plan or goals

Saying "I can't succeed"

Interrupting when listening to others

What will you start doing as a result of this course?

Will use coaching approach with my students

Listen carefully

Think differently in setting goals and next steps

Ask myself "what else?" (when exploring options)

Focus more on the team goal

Positive thinking – I will try until I succeed

Speak only when the other stops talking!

Implement the new exercises

Use the teamwork skills we learnt

What will you continue to do as a result of this course?

Build teamwork in our group

Commit to the 'stop' and 'start' ideas above

Positively face challenges

Build the trainers' team

Keep smiling

Commitment

Manage time well

Miscellaneous comments

I was proud to participate – valuable benefits

It was a unique chance to communicate and co-operate with UK friends to help make our community a better place to live in.

It was a great experience I will always remember

Would you like further contact with British-Arab Exchanges?

All: Yes

Feedback from *Step Forward* Facilitators

The London facilitators found the Gazan participants engaged well with the course, and they were impressed and challenged by their vision for Gaza and commitment to their training work. They found them eager and thoughtful students, who were already experienced trainers in their own right. A notable feature of the group, too, was their

good humour, open-mindedness and positive approach, given the harsh and constricted environment they are living in.

There were a number of physical challenges. Most notably the video conferencing did not always provide a clear picture or sound, and the line sometimes went down mid-session. In addition, the course was conducted in English, and the facilitators did not speak Arabic, so it was often challenging for the participants to follow comfortably – and time was needed, during each session, for translation or paraphrasing, and discussion of the course content. It was then hard for the facilitators to know whether discussion between the participants was relevant to the course or not. Not being in the same room made it harder for them, in London, to sense what was happening within the group in Gaza.

However, the positives outweighed the negatives, and judging from the positive participant feedback, this proved to be an effective way of delivering training when it is physically impossible for outside trainers to go in person to Gaza.

One of the highlights for the facilitators was the way the group responded to group coaching, even at this distance, and developed a clearly-defined picture of what they have achieved so far, and what they are aiming to do through their work for Sonaa al-Hayat.

Summary

Step Forward was a successful, innovative and practical response to an identified need: to provide outside training and wider perspectives for Gazan youth trainers. The videoconference facility, for all its challenges, provided an access to resources that Gazans have previously been denied through their limited contact with other countries.

Sonaa al-Hayat is continuing to recruit more volunteer trainers, to meet the needs of the young people of Gaza, by giving them the resources to develop their aspirations, life skills and leadership potential for the future. In eight sessions over four months, a lot of ground was covered, but the project points to the need for further and ongoing, support of this kind for Gazan youth trainers.

British-Arab Exchanges and Sonaa al-Hayat are most grateful to the British Council for their essential support in this venture, and hope to find ways of taking this exploratory project forwards.

Judi Conner

Facilitator for British-Arab Exchanges, September 2011