



“DREAM BUS” MOBILE CHILD FRIENDLY SPACE IN GAZA

Palestinian Red Crescent

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Girl receiving support at PRCS Dream Bus
Photo credit: ICRC

ifrc.org



Photo description: PRCS Dream Bus facilitator with children in Gaza
Photo credit: ICRC

Background

In Gaza, children have been severely impacted by hostilities. This includes death, injury and disability, separation, trauma, loss of school, health conditions, and a loss of routines and play.

Aid into Gaza remains insufficient, with multiple challenges, including a lack of fuel to receive aid shipments on the Gazan side, several communications shutdowns, and stringent restrictions – safe and unimpeded passage for humanitarian actors to bring lifesaving support into Gaza is critical.

The Palestinian Red Crescent has been providing assistance. This includes programming specifically for the protection and mental health of children.

Who was Supported and How

Launched with support from the Swedish Red Cross, the [Dream Bus](#) was born out of urgency and innovation. As violence escalated and safe spaces vanished, PRCS asked a vital question: What if we could bring a safe space to the children, wherever they are?

Drawing inspiration from PRCS's "open studio" concept, the Dream Bus was created to make recreational and psychosocial activities mobile — reaching displaced children and communities sheltering in schools, camps, and temporary housing. Every stop is a spark of color in a grey landscape.

When parked, the bus can be fleshed out into carefully designed “corners” that are made to invite children to explore their imaginations:

- Hakawati (Storytelling)
- Crafts and Drawing
- Theater and Puppet Play
- Cinema and Book Club
- Games and Play

Outside, a foldable screen allows for open-air screenings, giving children — many of whom haven’t seen a cartoon in months — a chance to laugh, dream, and simply be kids again.

Facilitators involved in the Dream Bus receive training on a variety of topics to help ensure their capacity to support children. For instance training on:

- Sign Language
- First Aid and Psychological First Aid
- Play Therapy Course
- Training from Theater Day Association
- Dealing with losing cases training
- How to Deal with Children and Child Activation Courses

Successes

The Dream Bus approach has led to a number of successes.

- **Enhanced children’s healing and connection through a foundation of child protection and Mental Health and Psychosocial.** For example, each activity is carefully curated and delivered by facilitators with backgrounds in mental health and child protection. Personnel undergo specialized training to ensure a trauma-informed approach — a vital component in communities affected by displacement, bombings, and the psychological weight of war. Alongside the Dream Bus, PRCS deploys its Psychological First Aid (PFA) teams and leverages a referral system, ensuring children with deeper mental health and protection needs receive the support they require. Parental engagement is a subtle but powerful part of the model — with caregivers expressing emotional relief and observing positive behavioral shifts in their children.
- **Supporting children to restore their childhood.** In communities where ambulances are often a symbol of death and destruction, PRCS has reimagined the vehicle into a source of joy. The impact has been clear and includes: children returning to their tents smiling and energized; caregivers expressing relief and gratitude; and local communities requesting the Dream Bus for their areas, often beyond PRCS’s capacity.
- **Child participation:** One of the most compelling features is how children shape the Dream Bus experience. Their drawings, stories, and voices guide the facilitators. In one exhibition, children whose parents were prisoners or martyrs drew maps of evacuation routes and images of both hope and horror. Mothers, too, shared drawings of their children — some alive, some lost — capturing the deep emotional toll the war has taken. Facilitators also observe children’s preferences

and adapt activities accordingly — for example, expanding arts or theater components based on participation levels.

- **Integration and innovation:** The Dream Bus doesn't operate in isolation. It integrates with broader PRCS programming:
 - Education and child protection initiatives, especially through partnerships with UNRWA schools.
 - Rehabilitation services for children with disabilities.
 - Health education through PRCS's dedicated department for community mental and physical health.
 - Integration ensures that children receive a continuum of care, from recreational relief to more structured psychosocial or educational support.

Children no longer run from the sound of a siren – they run toward the Dream Bus.

- Dream Bus Facilitator, Palestinian Red Crescent

Challenges and Difficulties

The key challenges in delivering the Dream Bus include:

- High security risks, particularly post-bombardment.
- Resource shortages (e.g. materials, transport, mobility needs).
- Limited funding for expansion or regular follow-up visits.
- Growing demand from communities beyond current capacity.
- Possible safeguarding and referral challenges (e.g. limited service providers, reduced access to specialized support, and stigma).

Lessons Learned

- 1- **Mobile, child-friendly, and safe spaces are vital** to support children's resilience and healing.
- 2- **Trained facilitators make a tangible difference** when applying a trauma-informed and participatory approach.
- 3- **Strong community trust in PRCS** allows for greater access, safety, and acceptance.
- 4- Child-led content and **continuous feedback loops** enhance relevance and impact.
- 5- **Integration** with wider MHPSS programming ensures a continuum of care and sustainability.

The Dream Bus is not just a program — it's a lifeline. It is what happens when creativity meets compassion, when mental health support is delivered not in clinics but through crayons, stories, and songs.

It proves that even in crisis, play is a right. Joy is resilience. And a single bus, painted in hope, can carry a nation's most vulnerable passengers toward healing.

- Staff, Palestinian Red Crescent