

The Edward Said Public Library

The Edward Said Public Library is a home away from home for children, youth and adults in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, where Israeli siege and occupation makes daily life particularly hard. Since library branches opened branches in Gaza City and Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip) just four years ago, and a third branch in the besieged East Jerusalem community of Silwan two years ago they have been a source of joy, learning, and community.

The majority of people living in Gaza are under 18 and their young lives have been marked by deep poverty and Israeli violence. They live with the memories and the constant fear of Israeli bombing raids. They are isolated from the rest of the world, including the rest of Palestine, by Israeli prohibitions on travel.

In Silwan, every child is affected by the constant presence of violent settlers, Israeli police and soldiers, the destruction of homes and community buildings, and the frequent nightly raids and arrests of friends, family members, and children themselves.

The Edward Said Public Libraries offer safe, quiet places to study, read, and relax, along with an ever-growing list of activities, including:

- Creative writing
- Discussions of books and social issues
- Storytelling and folklore
- Art, music, drama lessons
- Literacy games
- Training in life skills and job skills
- English classes and academic support
- Computer classes and internet access
- Field trips
- Classes for parents to support their children's education and mental health

The heart of any library is books, and all three libraries now have thousands of books available to borrow or read at the libraries—from picture books for toddlers to the gorgeously illustrated *Usborne Encyclopedia* in Arabic to Harry Potter in both Arabic and English. The libraries have become a refuge for thousands of young people living in very harsh and limited circumstances. Literature and internet access take them to faraway places and make it possible for them connect with people, places, and knowledge all over the world.

All three libraries plan to expand the number of books, activities , and staff in the coming year to meet the ever-growing demand in their communities. The 2023 budget for all locations is \$68,540.