



AS IT IS

## Breakdancing Helps Young People in Gaza

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In the Nusseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, young people perform dance moves that were once criticized by some as immoral. This kind of dance, known as breakdancing, is now seen as a way of helping young people deal with years of war in the Palestinian territory.

The moves - with names like top rock and down rock - are part of a training program by Gaza instructor Ahmed Al-Ghraiz. He says he uses dance as a way to help children get over fears and release tension.

The 32-year-old Ghraiz has studied how to deal with trauma. He spent seven years in Europe, where he and some friends put on breakdancing shows to support the Palestinian cause, including Gaza.

In the beginning, people in the camp rejected breakdancing and its hip-hop culture. But Ghraiz showed how dance could bring out some of the day-to-day problems experienced by their children and help them deal with their experiences.

"Some children come to me and say they are tired, they look withered, which means they neither rest enough nor have a deep sleep. I found that some used to cut themselves, and others avoid social activities," Ghraiz told Reuters.

He added that "such sport and such moves" support mental and emotional health.

Dance is used around the world as a helpful activity alongside traditional support, such as counseling, to ease anxiety, depression, anger and post-trauma difficulty.

In 2022, UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, said nearly 500,000 children in Gaza needed mental health support. Children make up about half of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinian population.

"We get afraid, we stay at home, and we fear the noises, from the drones and wars," said 11-year-old Jana Al-Shafe. "Our mental health changed with breakdance. We get entertained when we come here and play with our friends and change our mood," she told Reuters.

Breakdancing is generally believed to have been developed among Black and Latino dancers in New York in the 1970s. It became popular worldwide with the rise of hip-hop culture. The dance will be included for the first time as a sport in the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

I'm John Russell.

*Nidal Almughrabi reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**trauma** – n. a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time

**wither** – v. to become dry and weak — often used figuratively

**anxiety** -- n. fear or nervousness about what might happen

**drone** -- n. a type of small aircraft that flies without a pilot

**mood** -- n. the way someone feels : a person's emotional state