IC NEWSLETTER

IC Spirit • WINTER 2023

Billy Eidi, Pianist,
Returns to his Roots

'A Greener Tomorrow'
Getting back to nature in the Preschool Playground

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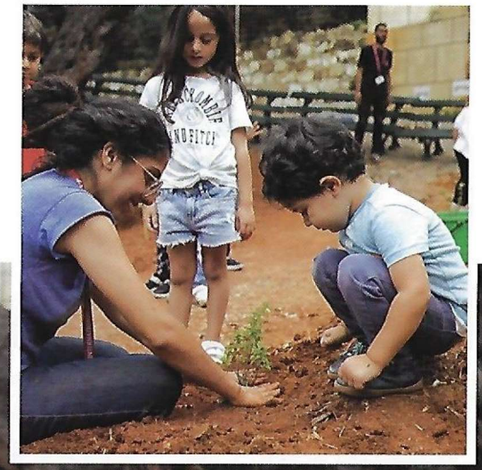
Getting back to Nature in the Preschool Playground

Despite the small stature of its students, the faculty, staff and parents of the Ras Beirut Preschool dream big. They have huge ideas for remodeling the Preschool Playground and, thanks to knowledgable, experienced and qualified IC parents, they are now turning those ideas from dreams into reality.



"We want more nature!"

Dr Ghada Madhoun, Preschool Director, pondered her playgrounds as she made her way across them, greeting students and teachers as she went about her busy day. With her background in Engineering, she was constantly mulling over ways to make outdoor play more engaging for her students. She wanted to cater to different aspects of their development, not only their gross motor skills, but also their creativity and their ability to appreciate nature. So she began to plan. Teaching walls, gears and mud kitchens were added, but she wanted more.

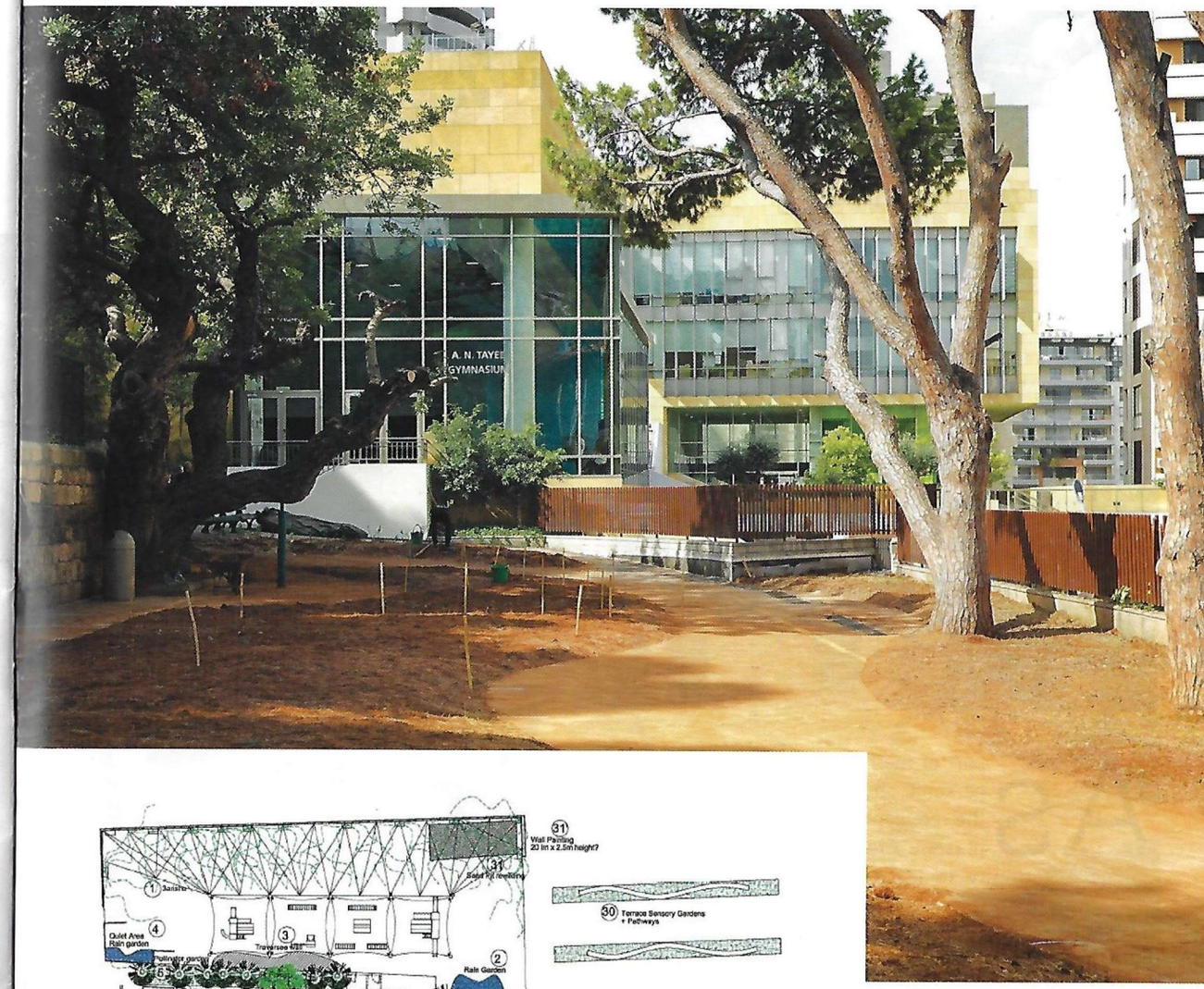
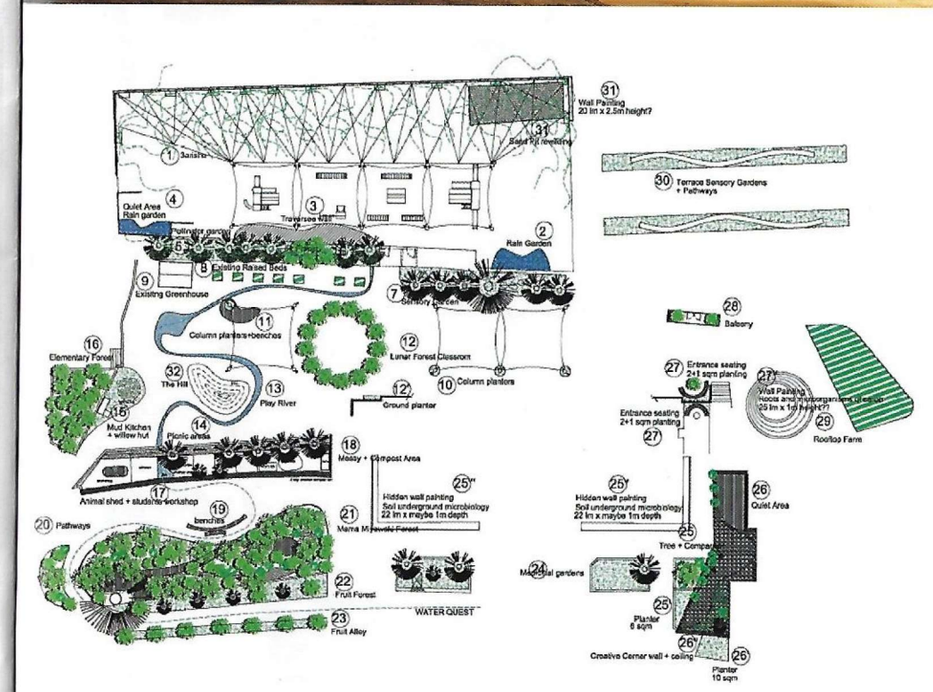
Dr Madhoun knew that input from parents would be invaluable, so she called a meeting and asked for parent volunteers, many of whom turned out to be IC alumni. An IC alumnus herself, Dr Madhoun remembers two big sand playgrounds, one lower, one upper, where the Preschool building now stands, with a lot of equipment on the playground. "We used to enjoy it a lot. There was a hill, and as middle schoolers we used to climb up and down. It was dangerous, but fun! Back then, it was just trees and forest. You could see flowers, you could touch, so it really was outdoor play."

At the parent meeting, a common theme became clear. "We want more nature!" Their ultimate dream was to have a forest back on site, but that would take 60 years. "No it won't," came a voice from the crowd. "A Myawkai forest will actually take three." That voice belonged to Mr Adib Dada, IC parent and founder of The Other Dada, a regenerative consulting, architecture and innovation practice aiming to change how we inhabit the earth. Mr Dada met with Dr Madhoun and the working group several times to go over their ideas and work out exactly what they wanted.

A rainwater garden and water quest to engage the senses so students can hear water and relax. A hill in the middle of the playground and an active climbing wall for physical activity and a little bit of risk. The fast-growing Miyawaki forest to teach kids about what happens to deciduous trees in different seasons. Sensory stepping gardens with plants that give different smells and textures so children can go barefoot if they choose.

The lunar garden, an outdoor classroom enclosed with plants and trees instead of walls. A rooftop farm where students will plant fruit and vegetables which will be used in the preschool kitchen. Chickens! And a work area where students can go and observe their behaviour and collect the eggs. A 'messy area' with a pond, fish and turtles. Fruit tree alley, a medicinal garden, hidden murals, hanging vines, picnic spots and more.

"It started so small. Add some mud kitchens, add some art areas," Dr Madhoun shared. "But this is a major change in the environment itself, in the ecosystem, and it aligns perfectly with our sustainability goals as a whole school." The hive mind and the enthusiasm of the staff and parents, combined with Mr Dada's knowledge, grew the project, like a forest, into what it is now. By creating an interactive environment that fosters student wellbeing, self-driven learning, and helps students connect to nature in the city they aim to raise a generation ready to take better care of their environment and wellbeing than we've done so far. "We never really thought it would happen, but Mr Peinado was very enthusiastic about it. He advocated the need for this kind of learning environment, and the Board was also enthusiastic and supportive."

Plans have been finalised, planting has begun and whilst it just so happens to be on the Preschool playground, it's going to be used by all the learning community at IC. "I am very excited!" said Dr Madhoun at the end of our meeting. Frankly, readers, so am I!

9 major areas including
31 interventions
to be executed in 3
phases
covering a total of
1500 sqm