

# American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam Activity Report

## Life in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

### Strong and growing!

The community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and its model continue to attract Israeli families who wish to live together with Jews and Palestinians dedicated to a peaceful coexistence.

The village is currently finalizing the development plan of new plots for families to start building their homes in the coming months. 34 new families will soon join the village.



### Conference on Practical Models for Peace

In October, Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam hosted a conference organized by the School for Peace and Common Bond Institute. The conference brought together representatives of existing, exemplary, and successful best practices for healing and ending the conflict in the Middle East, from programs in each society to compelling joint efforts by partners from all sides.

It focused on engaged dialogue and deliberation by all participants, highlighting successful, practical models represented, and promoting action planning to support, advance, and expand them. The conference was very successful and attracted more than 150 participants.

## Primary School

### Reaching academic excellency

A year after implementing its new curriculum, the teachers are more than satisfied with the academic level of their students in all three languages - Arabic, Hebrew and English - as well as in mathematics and science. The majority of the pupils score higher than average on the governmental exams that are conducted in the 2nd and 5th grades. The students now learn both Hebrew and Arabic as first language together, in the same group and with the same teachers.

### Democracy month at the school

November is "Democracy month" in Israeli schools. For the occasion, the Primary School commemorates Yitzhak Rabin's assassination but also teaches the students about the Deir Yassin massacre.



This year, pupils talked about the significance of Yitzhak Rabin and his legacy related to peace. There was a memorial ceremony lead by pupils of the 6th grade. The 6th graders took charge, read a few words, and sang a few songs about Rabin and his legacy. Students also learned about the 1948 attack on the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin where more than 100 Palestinian villagers were killed.

### Learning about and celebrating each other's holidays and traditions

A lot of Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays occur during the first few months of the school year, and each class is responsible for preparing activities for the rest of the school. Recently, the children celebrated Rosh Hashanah; following the celebration in the school yard, children had a greetings-card making activity, using recycled materials and pine cones. The children also celebrated the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. This holiday refers to the story in which Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son to prove his faith in God. However God was only testing Abraham's faith and prevented him from killing his son and Abraham sacrificed a ram instead.



*Rosh Hashanah*



*Eid al-Adha*

Every year, the school also organizes festivities for Winter Day: for the occasion the whole school gathered and ate some soup, prepared by the 6th graders. Ira, 1st grade teacher, accompanied by Guy, Drama teacher, read the famous Israeli ancient story of "Honi Ha-Meagel" about the one year long lack of rain and a man who walked in a circle in order for it to rain.

### Linking practice to theory

Recently, the school introduce a new model: in addition to classes dedicated to learning art, music and sports, there are now extra classes where the children can practice them. There are 11 different groups of possible activities that can children can pick from. This fits the school's goal to teach the students to take decisions for themselves. Protection of the environment, basketball, soccer, animals care, drawing or music are among the available activities.



### The Zoo Lab victim of a fire

The Zoo Lab recently suffered from a fire due to a problem in the electrical board located in the Lab. At the time of the incident, no electricity was being used. The fire destroyed the roof and damaged walls and equipment in the zoo lab, and caused additional damage to a corner of the arts room as the electrical board was located on the wall between the zoo lab and the arts room.

About 20 animals (mostly rodents and birds) were killed from smoke inhalation. The smaller birds were able to escape to the outdoor cage. The number of casualties was somewhat reduced because the children had taken some of the animals with them for the summer break.

The damage is not covered by our insurance and so the Primary School will need to cover the costs in order to provide electricity to the mentioned rooms as well as to renew the animal corner. Funds are needed to rebuild the electrical system and remodel the animal corner. The school will also have to buy new animals to replace the ones who died during the incident.

## School for Peace

### Creating Change Agents

The School for Peace continues to implement its major “Change Agents” program with support from the United States Agency for International Development and the American Friends of NSWAS.

The **Women Journalists** group comprised 40 women from various backgrounds: from Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews, to Muslim and Christian Palestinian participants from Israel and the West Bank. They work for important Israeli and Palestinian media outlets like Haaretz, Kalkalist, Channel 1 of Israeli TV Mabat Sheni, Jerusalem Post, Y-net, NRG-Maariv, Palestinian National TV, Wafa, and Radio of Peace, among others.

The women journalists are further along into the program and they are already reporting stories in the media that advance peace. They are successfully internalized the information they gained from the workshops and are able to translate this knowledge into their culture, words and professional work. The participants are now working on developing projects, such as creating a video art about charged concepts or words to which people from both sides respond, or a documentary of checkpoints viewed from the perspective of a Jewish soldier, a Palestinian trying to cross into Israel and a Druz soldier.



*Women journalists*



*Environmentalists*

The **Environmentalists** course has attracted a large pool of applicants because of the lack of similar courses in environmental justice for Israeli and Palestinian professionals. While the participants range in age from 23-60, the Palestinian participants are much younger than the Israeli ones since it is a newer field in Palestine. They work in activist organizations, government, academia, environmental media, the environmental business sector, eco-tourism, academia, environmental law and NGOs.

There is a very good dynamic going on in the group and participants are taking initiatives outside the program structure to advance equality in the environmental sphere. For example, a participant invited the rest of her group members to an event on eco-feminist dialogue that she organized in Haifa, where eco-feminist theories and the relations between nature, culture and society in Israel were discussed.



*Up-and-coming politicians*

For its third group, the School for Peace and its partner Tawasul, recruited **up-and-coming politicians**: predominately in their thirties, who work primarily as assistants or consultants of Parliament members. The group represents a plethora of political parties and organizations. The hope is that these political leaders of tomorrow can succeed where the politicians of yesterday have failed.

The group's first binational dialogue workshop in Aqaba, Jordan was impressively honest and many core issues of the conflict were discussed openly, not only during sessions but also during breaks. Throughout the dialogue, the Palestinians from Israel attempted to bridge the gap between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians from the West Bank.

## Pluralistic Spiritual Center

### Focusing on smaller projects

Due to a lack of funding, the Pluralistic Spiritual Center had to put most of its programs on hold. There is only a part-time director working for the Center now. Adapting to this difficult situation, the Center has decided to organize lower-cost programs such as community events for members of the village, that also include educational activities. For example, last August, during the month of Ramadan, common *iftar* meals were followed by discussions and learning activities with themes like the significance of fasting in various religions and among different peoples, stories of the first Islamic leaders in comparison with modern leaders, or celebratory music in the spirit of Ramada and Eid al-Fitr.

Thanks to its director Abdessalam Najjar's expertise, organizations are also reaching out to the Pluralistic Spiritual Center for consultancy. Finding in the Center a home, an incubator and a source of help, one organization conducting large-scale encounters between Jews and Arabs requested a 6-month consultancy in order to crystalize their goals and work plan.

### Mediation in a multi-cultural context

The Pluralistic Spiritual Center has implemented a project in Acre for local Arab and Jewish leaders in mediatory thinking for dealing with phenomena of violence between the two populations in the city. The course comprised 13 weekly 5-hour meetings. Now that it has been completed, the group of leaders has decided to continue to work together in order to develop joint projects for the two populations on an equal basis, such as joint education.



*Community leaders in Acre with Abdessalam Najjar*

The Pluralistic Spiritual Center, with support from the US-based organization Mediators Beyond Borders, continues to work on the development of a curriculum for mediation in mixed Arab-Jewish groups. This curriculum will serve for training mediation instructors and will add another perspective to community mediation in multicultural societies in conflict.

## Peace College



The new Peace College is well underway establishing partnerships with top universities and colleges in the fields of conflict resolution and peace studies throughout the United States. Faculty exchanges, student exchanges, joint research projects, student teaching experiences at the Primary School, internships at the School for Peace, mediation programs at the Pluralistic Spiritual Center and Summer Institutes at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam are among the hosts of

opportunities being developed for international students and professionals to learn from the experience and knowledge of the "Oasis of Peace."

The initial application for the Master's degree program is being submitted to the Council of Higher Education in Israel in order to obtain a license of operation for formalized partnerships between Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and American institutions. The goal is to welcome the inaugurating class for the M.A. program in Peace & Conflict Studies by September 2013. The college is developing residential courses and intensive interactive web-based programs to prepare an international cadre of skillful, reflective peace builders to bridge relations on individual, group and community levels in a wide range of conflict scenarios. Professionals and students will explore theory alongside the real-life work of the educational programs at the "Oasis of Peace."