

Dear Friends,

It is Spring in our small green village: a time when colorful flowers are everywhere to be seen; a time to nurture the relation between man and earth, nature and soul.

As we enter the 2nd quarter of 2018, the Communications and Development office wants to share some news about the community and its educational work.

The Primary School is growing!

We began the year with great optimism. For one thing, the school is growing: We organized an open day in Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom for families of potential new students, to which and about forty families came from all around.

After registration for the coming year opened in January, 54 Arab and Jewish children enrolled for the two 1st grade classes that will open in September 2018. In order to reach a good national and gender balance, we still lack a few Jewish girls.

For the first time, we will also achieve a national balance (an equal number of Jewish and Arab students) in the kindergarten – in recent years, the early educational system has a majority of Palestinian students.

We continue to recruit small children for the nursery and the kindergarten for the next year in order to continue opening this important framework to serve new families.

To our pleasant surprise, this year we will not be facing objections from the nearby Gezer Regional Council. We have managed to reach a three-year agreement with the Council to accept 15 Jewish students under a special

permit. This is not an ideal solution, but is an important achievement that will stabilize the system in the near future.

Meanwhile, we have started the planned teachers' training course for teaching the Arabic language. Eyas Shbeta will be teaching the course.

Program for the Curriculum development

As part of our five-year plan, we are in the process of producing special study materials for Arab and Jewish students in bilingual and bi-national schools like ours, or schools that wish to address the subject of peace education, multiculturalism, democratic education and more. The materials produced by the administration team are now in the experimental stage.

Special permission was given by the Ministry of Education to document our methodology and write the syllabus. There will then be an opportunity for the materials to be evaluated and approved for use in other schools as well.

As part of our efforts in curriculum development, we are seeking to strengthen the teaching staff and especially to invest in the training of new teachers, building the school community, and balancing the hours between Arab and Jewish teachers. Eventually, we would like to establish a coalition of bilingual schools in the country.

Program for Music Education

The Primary School's music program is developing nicely. Already there is a singing troupe and a choir. Currently all the music teachers are Jewish, so it's a priority for us to recruit a Palestinian music teacher to our team next year.

Just recently, our young musicians participated in the ceremony at the Garden of Rescuers (see below).

At the end of March, we began with great excitement to build a permanent **performance stage** in the school grounds, with a special contribution from

the British Friends Association, as well as assistance from the French Friends Association.

We already plan to celebrate this year's 6th grade graduation and the end-of-year class parties on the new permanent stage with its professional lighting and sound system, as well as to use the space for community events in the future.

Other news from the Primary School

In the holiday period, the school principal, **Carmela Ferber**, is traveling with a special delegation of principals to Estonia to represent us on a learning trip called "Learning Cities" in cooperation with the Mateh Yehuda Regional Council. We wish Carmela a fruitful learning journey.



Great news about the students' achievements in mathematics: the school has reached the finals of the Ministry of Education mathematics championship thanks to the math team led by teacher Rami Mahanga. This achievement was published in the press and on the website of the Ministry of Education. According to the Ministry of Education website: "Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom reached the finals in the Mathematics Championship of the Ministry of Education. Of the 1,050 schools from all around the country that participated

in the championship, 100 schools were chosen to advanced to the finals. Together with commending them for distinguished learning and excellence, the Council's Head of the Education Department, Niv Bar-Guy said, "We hope that they rise up and succeed in the competition, but it is important to remember that victory is only a bonus, while the process is the main thing."

We wish the students and the team success in winning the championship an thank Carmela, Reem and our teachers for leading the School forwards.

A busy period for the School for Peace

This has been a very fruitful period for the School for Peace, with many projects underway.



Change Agents Courses

Two cross-border Palestinian - Israeli courses have opened, one for mental health professionals, another for social workers, have opened, thanks to

funding from USAID. Both courses began with sessions held in Aqaba, Jordan.

The courses have 42 participants and include Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The opening of the courses involved months of intensive recruitment and preparation, for a program that will last for three years.

The third group of the European Union funded program for Up and Coming Politicians met in February. This is the final year of the program, which focuses on building the various projects of the graduates.



Ophir Fichman and Ranin Odeh

Graduates of the architects' program met to promote a new idea, the Jewish-Arab Forum for Planners led by the architect Ophir Fichman from Tel Aviv and architect Ranin Odeh from Nazareth. After a preliminary meeting with Nava Sonnenschein and Samer Swed, they have held steering committee meetings in Haifa, attended by eight Palestinians and Jews.

In March, a new group was opened: the Forum of School for Peace Graduates from the Shared Cities Leadership Courses. The group is composed of graduates of three courses, including WAS-NS's new municipal manager Ahmad Balaha, who is himself a graduate of one of the courses.

Social Media Skills for Women

Thanks to a donation from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and additional supporters, the SFP has initiated a new course for women dealing with social media. The voices of Palestinian and Jewish Israeli women are not sufficiently heard in the field of Arab-Jewish relations and the conflict.

In Israel / Palestine, where public opinion is heavily influenced by both social media and conventional media, the arena is dominated by militant men who dictate a violent and aggressive discourse.

Participants will acquire practical skills for creating social media materials such as videos and posters in order to promote these in the media. Top women journalists have already supported the course and will participate as lecturers.

Programs for Youth

At the end of March, a youth encounter project took place for groups from Givat Brener and Kalansawa high schools. Fifty eight young people participated in the meeting.

The new board of the WAS-NS educational association has decided to reinforce and encourage youth programs in order to influence the next generation. Although the cost of workshops and accomodation is relatively high, the desire for youth programs is rising. We want to meet this demand

both by promoting new ideas for working with youth, such as youth leadership, social involvement on the issues of human rights, refugees and commitment to world peace, and by raising money for these programs.

The Nadi Youth Club

Laila Sarah Mazer, a volunteer from Switzerland, works with the small children in the Nadi (the youth club), along with three group leaders. About thirty children participate in activities that include sports, art and life skills.

Yasmeen bar shalom (student from the village) started theater group for the youth.



Within the Nadi, a Spanish chef, Samuel Perea (founder of *Cocina por la Paz*) visited us from a project called "Cook for Peace". He brought paintings and letters from children from Spain with a message for peace.

The Nadi children wrote to and drew pictures for Spanish children, and invited them to visit.



Media and Publicity

As part of our work in the communication and development office, we are trying to increase the media exposure of the village in Israel and around the world. After a few months of work, BBC Witness produced a 9-minute [audio feature](#), broadcast on BBC World Service, and a 4-minute video feature for [BBC World](#) . Both traced the develop of the community over 40 years and showed it as it is today. Dr. Nava Sonnenschein and Daoud Boulus were interviewed for the program.

Yedioth Ahronoth (Israel's most popular newspaper) places [Samah Salaimé](#) and Amit Kitain members of Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom on its [list of 50 most influential social activists](#) of 2017.

We are proud of our members and of their significant achievements in every field. They are a proof that living and developing a joint Jewish-Palestinian community based on equality and peace serves to advance also social, economic and scientific excellence.

Beatrice Guarrera, journalist for *Terra Santa* magazine, wrote an article in [Italian](#) and [French](#) about the event of the International Day of Rescuers .



Samah Salaime, Director of C&D, and **Nava Sonnenschein**, Director of the School for Peace, traveled to the UK in February for an intensive week. They met with members of the British Parliament, the Deputy Foreign Minister for Middle East Affairs and visited Community Centers. At a meeting of the Board of Oasis of Peace, UK (the British Friends of WAS-NS), they presented the needs of the educational system and developments of the community. The journey was very successful, resulting in important new contacts among potential supporters and British officials, advancing the scope for new partnerships, future delegations and fundraising opportunities.



Muna and Eden at a German school

In early March, **Muna Boulos and Eden Zohar** set out on a tour in Germany organized by the German Friends Association. On the itinerary were visits to colleges, schools and interested groups. During the two months before the tour, the Communications and Development staff helped to train and prepare these two young people, spending time with them, exposing them to programs for visiting groups and to meetings with journalists. In addition, Muna has completed a course of the School for Peace at university.

Muna and Eden returned from Germany with new experiences. They had become acquainted with many young Germans, confronted difficult questions and made new discoveries. The learning was mutual: "I wouldn't have believed it possible for something like [WAS-NS] to exist!" was a sentence that Eden and Muna heard many times on their tour. After all, they were presenting a different kind of news from that which normally emerges from our troubled region. By sharing their own life experience, they were able to show

that mutual respect and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians is possible.

New activities at the Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center

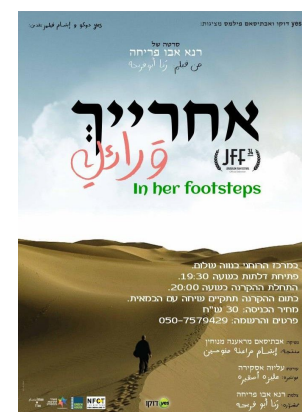
Hezi Shuster, who for the past few months has directed the PSCC, has organized a series of successful events around social and cultural issues.

Besides offering these activities for the community, he has managed to attract a steadily rising number of participants from nearby towns who never visited the Spiritual Center before.

In recent months, the focus has been on the works of Arab and Jewish authors, and film directors, with the launching of books and the screening of films, mainly on the subject of relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Another issue – mobilisation to prevent the **deportation of migrants** is of concern to us and was also a subject of one of the PSCC events. Israel has about 30,000 asylum seekers and refugees. The board of our association of educational institutions issued a [communiqué](#) to the media and appealed to the Israeli government to rescind the decision. It may be helpful if friends from around the world pressure the Israeli government and the embassies of Rwanda and Israel to stop the deportation.

We screened a film "[In her Footsteps](#)". about a Palestinian Bedouin family inhabiting a Jewish town in the Negev. Although the family have lived there peaceably for 20 years, the municipality refuses to grant permission for the mother, a cancer patient, to be buried there, on the basis that a Jewish town has no obligation to bury a Muslim. The film confronts this racist position.





Alganesh Fesseha addressing the audience.

As part of **International Rescuers Day** on 6/3/2018, we remembered historical and contemporary rescuers. For the former, we honored [Palestinians who saved Jews in Hebron during the riots of 1929](#). In his recent book on the subject, Prof. Yair Auron tells stories of heroic acts, where individuals risked their lives to rescue their neighbors of the other people. Such cases, which occur in many conflicts, are rarely remembered or documented.

In recognition of a case of contemporary rescue, we honored **Dr. Alganesh Fesseha** for her work with African migrants whose lives are imperiled by traffickers.

Dr. Alganesh Fesseha also participated in the [Women's Day rally in Tel Aviv](#) against the deportation of refugees from the state.

This month we will start a project in collaboration with **Van Leer Institute** on Arab-Jewish literature to encourage the reading of texts in Arabic and

Hebrew. The project will expose participating families to the language and culture of the other people. As part of the project, we will translate texts from Hebrew into Arabic and conduct "Talking Circles" on subjects related to literature under the shadow of the national conflict.



Rita Boulos leading a group visit

News from the Visitors' Center

Activities of the Visitors' Center increased during the last three months. About 1,200 visitors visited the village in a large number of groups. The majority came from the USA, Sweden, the UK, Germany and Israel. Among these were tourists, pilgrims, students and peace activists. Among the groups were formal delegations.

One of the most impressive of these was a group of 85 Anglicans from South London and East Surrey, led by Bishop Christopher Chessun and the Very Revd. Andrew Nunn. The group was welcomed by Visitors Center director

Rita Boulos, and heard presentations by Daoud Boulos and Samah Salaime. Before departing, they expressed their warm thanks, enthusiasm for the inspiring example of the village, and said they hoped to bring groups in the future.

Municipal council and community

Eyas Shbeta completed his tenure as the general manager after ten years of service. During this period he worked dynamically to develop the village in numerous fields, including land issues, the expansion of the village, the acceptance of new families and coordination with the Mateh Yehuda Regional Council.

The Association's board of directors, headed by **Anwar Daoud**, recently chose attorney Ahmed Belha from Jaffa to fill the important role of municipal manager. Belha is a recognized political activist in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, where he has served as a member of the city Council. He continues to be responsible for projects in Arab neighborhoods. We wish him success in his position while he continues with his other social and political pursuits.



Ahmed Belha and Anwar Daoud - village expansion meeting

In February, we moved forward in the process of accepting the new families and our young women and men from the next generation. They have been allocated plots in the future stage of the expansion and have signed formal contracts with the village. This was certainly a joyful and exciting evening that symbolizes growth and optimism in developing our peace village.

At a general meeting in March, the operating budget of the village and the hotel was approved. At the meeting we also discussed and approved a small budget for a business venture initiated by three young people, and decided to begin a process of examining our vision for future educational and cultural activities. Do we want to develop additional educational facilities, such as international school, a larger youth center, a new early childcare center, a regional Arab-Jewish cultural hall? Because if we are planning the future, we must start to envision it now, and we have many dreams.