



## AMERICAN FRIENDS OF NEVE SHALOM/WAHAT AL-SALAM

### Mid-Year Impact Report 2014

## HOW THE AMERICAN FRIENDS ARE WORKING TOWARD PEACE IN 2014

*Each educational program at the Village furthers the causes of peace and mutual understanding. The overarching topic at the **Spring board meeting** was how the American Friends can help raise the necessary funds to support NSWAS in promoting a culture of peace.*



Photo by Abir Elzowidi

**BACK ROW, FROM LEFT:** Herb Adelman, Rima Mahmoud, Gordie Fellman, Sarah Burns, Judy Dubin, Adeeb Fadil, Deb First, Gordon Webster, Nava Sonnenschein, and Ted First.

**FRONT ROW, FROM LEFT:** David Matz, Hanan Fadil (Adeeb's daughter), Chris Brodie, and Bob Fenton. **NOT PICTURED:** Abir Elzowidi, Operations Manager.

The **Spring 2014 board meeting of the American Friends** was a well-attended, day-long strategy meeting full of vigorous discussion that led to plans for funding the initiatives and programs that make Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam a model for peace-building. (See the following page for a list of action items.)

Eleven AFNSWAS board members gathered in Boston,

where they were hosted at Brandeis University by board member and Brandeis professor of sociology **Gordie Fellman**. Also in attendance was **Bob Fenton**, development coordinator at the Village, who spoke about how the American Friends and NSWAS can work together to bring more funds to the peace-building programs that define the Village.

Finally, the Spring board meeting was the inaugural meeting chaired by new board President **Judy Dubin**. Just as Judy was welcomed and celebrated, so too did the board recognize the outstanding achievements of its outgoing President, **Gordon Webster**.

## SPRING BOARD MEETING: Plan of Action

The Board and staff made great strides in developing ways to support the peace-building programs of the Village. The board's commitments lie in the following areas:

- A robust enhancement of programs at the School for Peace, including: youth encounter workshops (and concomitant facilitator training), new Change Agents courses, and funding for a research publication that will demonstrate the long-term effectiveness of these programs.
- Enabling longer and more frequent Massa-Massar youth leadership workshops at the Pluralistic Spiritual Center.
- Increasing funding for Nadi, the summer camp held at NSWAS for West Bank Palestinian children. The camp is often the first experience these children have of non-military Israelis.
- Upgrading NSWAS facilities, including the installation of a fire sprinkler system in the Friendship Library, and general repairs to the Primary School building and playground.
- Creating and sustaining outreach programs that will provide our supporters around the country a chance to meet one-on-one with board members, our development director, and representatives from the Village. These meetings will provide our friends a chance to learn about the direct impact their gifts have on the life of the Village.

## GLOBAL IMPACT: A Village Founder Speaks at a Major Symposium



"We are the only community where Jews and Palestinians decided to live together in equality, in sharing power positions," **Nava Sonnenschein** told the audience at the Slomoff Symposium at the University of Massachusetts at Boston — an annual gathering of some of the world's foremost thinkers and activists. "But we wanted to have an impact on the rest of the population. Over the years, about 65,000 participants have participated in our conflict-resolution programs."

Nava, director of the School for Peace and one of the founders of NSWAS, was among a highly specialized and well-known group of experts; other panelists included **Charles Sennott**, founder of the international-news website *Global Post*; the prolific author and peace activist **Padraig O'Malley**; Drew University professor of Islamic Studies **Christopher Taylor**; and **David Matz**, AFNSWAS board member and the founder of the Department of Conflict Resolution at the McCormack Graduate School at UMASS-Boston.

While in Massachusetts, Nava also spoke at The Mediation Group, an organization in Brookline that works with groups, individuals, and nations to mediate and resolve disputes. Nava spoke especially about the visionary work being done at the World Peace College.

During her whirlwind visit, Nava gave a presentation at the AFNSWAS board meeting and met with two Boston-area supporters, who were delighted to meet Nava; speaking with her offered them a chance to see a direct connection between their support and on-the-ground peace-building efforts.

"I look forward to continuing to work with the colleagues I met in Boston," Nava says. "Their process of [effecting] change in inter-religious conflicts parallels the conflicts we address at the School for Peace."

## PRIMARY SCHOOL: Celebrating Passover and Easter

In keeping with the Primary School's unique commitment to learning in two languages and several narratives, the students marked Passover and Easter together with an activity-centered afternoon outdoors.

Teachers and children were engaged in several activities ranging from crafts to quizzes to the highlight for many children: the chance to make their own matzoh.

This unleavened bread recalls the speedy escape of the Jews from Egypt, as they didn't have time to wait for the bread to rise. The students formed the balls of dough into a round shape, and the teachers put the bread on a hot surface for them. After a few minutes, the bread was finished and tasty.

As they learned the exodus story, students asked about Moses: "Whose prophet is he?" "Which religion does he belong to?" This degree of curiosity, and freedom from assumption, is one small example of the impact of the School's groundbreaking educational approach.



### PRIMARY SCHOOL: Expanding the Mission

As the Village expands, making room for more families, there has been an increase in the number of children. These new students, plus the desire to ensure that the Primary School is available to meet the demand from the many non-resident children from surrounding villages, means that the School will welcome up to 100 additional children over the next several years, keeping two teachers per classroom. Soon-to-be-published research has found that the school's full-time bilingual program has resulted in highly successful outcomes in terms of the children's mastery of both Arabic and Hebrew. This unique aspect of the Primary School model, along with the rest of its innovative curriculum, will remain central to each school day. This is why support for Israel's first and only bilingual, bi-national school is so urgently needed.

## THE HUMANITARIAN AID PROJECT: How One Family Holds On To Hope

**Nada A.**, only 16 years old, suffers from a rare genetic condition that simply cannot be treated by the limited medical facilities in Gaza, her home. When her condition began to deteriorate the only option left to her parents was to get their daughter to an Israeli hospital.

While this may be the only option, it is by no means a simple one: getting a Palestinian child into an Israeli hospital is fraught with difficulties. Even when the family has secured the funds to pay medical costs, and gained the approval of a hospital, permission to travel to Israel is not guaranteed. In Gaza, families awaiting permits are sometimes told their request is successful only an hour before their appointed departure time; this leaves families like Nada's waiting anxiously with packed suitcases until the last moment.

Once in Israel, Nada and her mother, who has a permit to accompany her daughter, are faced with the problem of dealing with the hospital administration in Hebrew, a language they do not speak.

For the past several weeks NSWAS resident **Rita Boulos** (at right) has been helping the family with the logistics of the hospital stay; Rita translates, and helps complete, all the paperwork, and acts as the intermediary between the doctors and Nada's mother. Nada's father, a journalist, had heard of the work of the village's Humanitarian Aid Program (HAP) and sent an email to ask for help.

The HAP began in the wake of the second intifada, bringing health care to villages in the West Bank. During the early 2000s, entire villages were cut off from health services. Residents of NSWAS continue to help by conducting medical treatment days with volunteer doctors, and by supplying clinics.



Rita Boulos saw that HAP was the right response to this family's need. The relationship between Rita and Nada's family has grown to be a personal and friendly one. They stay in touch by telephone, especially on holidays. And whenever there is trouble in Gaza, Rita phones to see if they are all right. One of the significant outcomes from HAP is the gradual building of trust and relationships, based in practical and experienced assistance, between Jews and Palestinians across the borders. This is especially important for Gaza. This relationship with Israeli Palestinians and Jews is

often the first or only connection with "the other side of the fence" for isolated Gazans.

With some difficulty Nada's father succeeded in obtaining a permit to join his wife and daughter at the Israeli hospital. Unfortunately, he arrived to the news that Nada would not be having surgery, as it was too much of a risk to her life. Suddenly finding themselves with some time on their own, Nada and her parents took the opportunity to visit al-Aqsa mosque (above) in Jerusalem, something which is otherwise impossible for Gazans. This respite was a welcome one, but, after nearly a month in the hospital, Nada's future remains unclear.



## PLURALISTIC SPIRITUAL CENTER: Hosting a Special Group of Adventurers

In addition to its many ongoing programs, the **Pluralistic Spiritual Community Centre** (PSCC) hosted members of the **JITLI** program last week. As preparation for their upcoming summer camp trip around Israel, a select number of young counselors were touring the country.

JITLI is a teen leadership institute that works with Palestinians, Arabs, and Jews from all over the world in an effort to break down stereotypes and build lasting relationships among the world's future leaders.

The group of counselors included Jews from San Diego, and Sha'ar Hanegev, Israel, and Muslims and Bedouins from Segev Shalom and Lakiya (both in Israel).

Their time at the Village consisted of an extended tour, a presentation by **Dafna Karta Schwartz** about the history of the PSCC and the Village, a dance workshop, a language awareness workshop, and a lesson on making the traditional Palestinian meal of bread pockets with spinach.

The day concluded with a small musical ensemble (friends of the JITLI organization), which consisted of two Jews and two Arabs playing together, taking the audience on a musical journey that reminded them of what unites rather than divides. The music served as a bridge and common language, meant to guide the JITLI participants on the rest of their trip.



## PRIMARY SCHOOL: Good Deeds Day 2014

Shortly before Purim, the School organized its second Good Deeds Day. Just in time for Spring, many of the students cleaned up the flower beds surrounding the newly refurbished and extended greenhouse. The first and second graders were given flowers and herbs to plant all over the school, and some pupils helped with the vegetable patch in the Kindergarten. It means a great deal to the children to spend these hours making their campus a more beautiful place.

Good Deeds Day is an initiative of the NGO Ruach Tova which celebrates the simple idea that everyone can do something good.

## TESTIMONIAL: Human Rights Lawyer Michael Sfard

In March, the School for Peace (SFP) began work on a book-length collection of interviews with graduates of SFP's courses in conflict resolution and leadership. **Nava Sonnenschein** is working with **Deb Reich** (translator of a previous book published by the SFP) to translate these interviews into English.

Here is a portion of one of these interviews. The speaker, **Michael Sfard**, took a course at the SFP in the late 1990s. Today he is a human rights lawyer whose firm *"represents several Israeli human rights and peace organizations and Palestinian communities, plus individuals who have been injured by the Israeli regime in the West Bank or Gaza. I am also a legal consultant to Yesh Din: Volunteers for Human Rights, to the settlement monitoring team at Peace Now, and to Breaking the Silence, among others.*

*"The bottom line, without exaggeration, is that the course I took at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam unequivocally changed my life. It is the reference point for all my development as a human being and certainly as an Israeli. I was just out of the army; I was twenty-two."*

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**Each participant in an SFP course will have a different experience; but all will have a deeper understanding of the complexities of the conflict and a greater appreciation for the work of peace-building.**

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*"In the course that I took, there was a practice of trying to understand that while I am looking at something and seeing it as square, the person sitting next to me is looking at the same thing and seeing it as round. My job is not to blame him for having terrible eyesight, but to try to understand that he sees it differently. This is something you don't understand until you notice it, until a day comes when you see the light. One fine day you understand that different people can see the same reality differently and that we don't necessarily have to decide that one person*



*is wrong and another is right. People can live together in that reality and see it differently, and that's what's important. It's less important to try to find out what really happened because the very fact that they see reality differently has implications for their living together. It took me a very long time to accept this; but after you accept it, it really does change the way you look at all relationships between people, and I take this with me wherever I go.*

*"In 1998, I was called up for reserve duty in Hebron. I refused to report for duty and went to jail instead. From that point to defending conscientious objectors was not much of a leap, and it already seemed very natural.*

*"I am a lawyer now. My profession deals all the time with different narratives. We deal all the time, nonstop, with stories. I think this greatly helps me to understand the situation, because sometimes the sense that you are right can blind you. You feel so strongly that you are right that you cannot really step into the shoes of your opponent, which is a loss, because you are unable to fully understand. In my profession, if you stay in the third person you won't be able to see things the way the other side sees them, and you also won't be able to properly appreciate the strength of the other side's case.*

*"Both in practice and ideologically, the School for Peace course influenced me enormously."*