

## Mid-Year Impact Report 2020

This mid-year update is written in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with its global shut-downs and financial insecurities, and in the shadow of the regional threats of annexation of the Jordan Valley and the Palestinian Territories.

The Oasis of Peace model of shared living created between Arabs and Jews based on peace, and mutual respect has sustained the community during both of these threats

### The Primary School (PS)



Beginning in March, the children studied from home during the Corona virus lock-down and only returned to school in May. Closing again for another two weeks because of a positive test, the school re-opened with one week of the school year remaining. Children were greeted by the most fantastic sight - *new playground equipment* (see below), dedicated in loving memory of the Little Lori purple playground, whose earlier playground was home to 25 years of Primary School students! More equipment will be added this year.

During the last three months registration for the new school year with 85 applicants for the 34 spaces for Kindergarten was completed. All available places for the two classes of each grade 1-6 have been filled. Several years of study have gone into the question of growing into a bilingual, multicultural middle school; the planning stage for this is likely to begin this year.

Like families around the world, some parents were furloughed from work and had great difficulty paying for tuition and transportation. Parents who could afford to keep one child in school, spoke about needing to take the second child, or both, out. After trimming PS costs where possible, donors have been instrumental in supporting an unbroken education for such families. A scholarship fund has been initiated to support 50 Jewish and Arab families facing extreme financial hardship to help pay for their school tuition and transportation.

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### Beekeeping (the Honey Path)

Fifth and sixth graders choose one special, yearlong elective subject: the Honey Path Project, Music or Visual Arts. Unexpectedly popular, the Honey Path taught both responsibility and environmental connections through beekeeping. Organized by two School for Peace graduates, one Jewish and one Palestinian, seven hives (along with protective clothing) were brought for the students to care for. During the weekly class, they observed the bees and their environment, learned not to fear the bees, practiced exercising self-control, patience and understanding that harvesting honey takes time! They followed the bees online during COVID closures, and happily returned after the two-week closure.



### Year-end and looking forward



There were no “usual” year-end celebrations and ceremonies to mark the end of the school year. After the most recent two-week closure, only four days were left before summer vacation. The graduating class practiced their performance once; only parents – socially distanced- were allowed to attend. Each grade had a small party with their homeroom teachers and staff had a small gathering at the end of the last day. We have always known how to be multiculturally, bilingually flexible and creative; Today, we look forward to the 2020-2021 school year with the

confidence that virtual or real-time, it will be a year of growth and strengthening.

We are, again, planning the (deferred) national conference our new curriculum, reaching out to educators from other elementary schools and universities; developing a teacher-training program specifically for teaching Arabic and Hebrew as a second language and initiating planning for a middle school and eventual high school.

### **The School for Peace (SFP)**

Both the Occupation and the threatened annexation Palestinian territory provided the backdrop for the SFP’s change-agents courses for environmental justice and for lawyers, both continued online during the COVID-19 outbreak. Youth Encounters will remain “on hold” for the time being. The opening of the new course for Leaders of Mixed Cities with participants from Ramle, Lod, Jaffa and Beer Sheva, was postponed until June 19<sup>th</sup> and is currently meeting in the Fred Segal Peace Library, following government guidelines for public gatherings.

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There is now a YouTube channel for the School for Peace. All links to programs and lectures in have English subtitles.



#### Building Impact: A Community of SFP Graduates

We currently have thousands (!) of SFP change-agent graduates including urban planners; mental health professionals and facilitators; lawyers; women in social media; educators; young politicians; and leaders from mixed cities. The SFP has provided support, along with the Arab Center for Alternative Planning, for ongoing joint change-agent projects.

Senior SFP staff provided virtual training sessions on mentoring with Shaira Shalabi, Deputy Mayor of Haifa.

#### Emergency Conference Against Annexation

In June, SFP graduates of the Urban Planners, along with the Arab Center for Alternative Planning, initiated and then held an emergency conference on the West Bank annexation plan, allowing the SFP to reach a wider national and international audience, and engaging more people involved in our work.

Petition to End the Occupation - Arab and Jewish graduates of the SFP program for Architects, Planners and Engineers, along with Finger on the Pulse, initiated a petition against the annexation signed by more than 300 planners. International professionals working in the field were updated on the effort and invited to engage as well.

Jewish and Arab graduates are working together on a new project in Acco called, “Place Making”, identifying and transforming derelict public areas, creating spaces for shared relaxation and recreation enjoyed by Jewish and Arab residents of the city.

#### Mental Health Professionals

Three hundred and sixty graduates of the facilitators training courses began networking with members of Psychoactive, generated initiatives including online meetings with youth at risk in

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the Arab community; developing a hotline (lost employment; needing medical care) in the Bedouin community in the south; training Arab college students to teach Arabic to Jewish students; and working with parents whose children are imprisoned promoting the rights of Palestinian children and youth in the occupied territories. SFP graduates are provided with online support for advocating social change in the time of COVID-19.

Graduates from the Leaders of Mixed Cities

Graduates from the Leaders of the Mixed Cities program focused on developing ways to raise funds for disadvantaged youth without computers so they can take part in the on-line classes; developing an on-line "internet café" for Jews and Arabs living in the mixed city of Nof Hagalil; and developing strategies coordinating volunteers to provide medical and food supplies to those in need. One graduate is leading a group of young Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel in a new project called Bustan Hagalil, a new community of Jews and Arabs in the Galilee based on shared living.

The SFP Research Center

The School for Peace in conjunction with the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, the Walter Lebach Institute for Jewish-Arab Coexistence through Education at Tel Aviv University, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, conducted an international conference on "Constitutionalism, Constitution-Making and Sovereignty – A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective". The conference was held following the passing of Israel's "nation state law" specifying the nature of the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center (PSCC)

Before the COVID-19 closedown, the PSCC held its annual ceremony honoring rescuers who risked their lives to save others during times of conflict. Taking place in the Garden of the Rescuers on the European Day of the Righteous, the PSCC honored the Latrun Monastery, the Cordia family from Hebron and Mrs. Bella Freund from Jerusalem: Israeli and Palestinian rescuers who saved people during years of the conflict. Through Zoom, there were a number of events, conversations and meetings: with Professor Abdel Rauf Hijazi from Hadassah Hospital, resident of the Oasis of Peace, speaking about Corona virus and his research in the field; with Umar Agbariya, resident of the Oasis of Peace and director of "Zochrot", lecturing on the 1948 Massacre of Deir Yassin.



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### Cinema in the Community

Cinema in the Community, usually held in the Spiritual Center, moved to online screening and discussion. "Leah Tsemel, Lawyer" was followed by a discussion **with** Leah Tsemel-an Israeli lawyer - and the film's director Rachel Jones. Leah Tsemel is an Israeli lawyer who has represented Palestinians in Israel for fifty years. The film, "Working Woman" dealt with sexual harassment and sexual assault at work. A short film called "The Mirror" was screened, followed by a discussion with directors, Daniel Schwartz and Abir Zaibak Hadad. In the film, an Israeli challenges her grandparents to compose an agreed-upon version of the unspoken story of a large crystal mirror taken from a home in the Palestinian village of Zaranoga, conquered and destroyed in 1948.

### Oasis Art Gallery and Museum



At the current Exhibition "Shabab", as with all Oasis Gallery exhibitions, Jewish and Palestinian-Arab artists were invited to meet and present their work to one another (a small miracle in a region of Arab/Jewish separation), answering questions from the visitors who come from across Israel and abroad. We are delighted to introduce the four artists below:

Aseel Egbariah, a fourth-year student of multidisciplinary art at Shenkar College was raised in Kufr Qara' in Wadi 'Ara, works in paint, print, sculpture, and drawing, using symbols reflecting Palestinian identity:

*"I ...belong to my culture, my language, my people and who I am. I want my work to represent the daily complexities and an ongoing strategizing process of 'being part of a national minority in my homeland—a Palestinian in the State of Israel'".*

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Klil Wexler, a graduate of Bezalel Academy, works with installations, sculpture, drawing and painting. Raised in Ben Nun, Wexler is an extracurricular educator with special populations and at-risk youth, and created a work echoing the physical experience of walking in the ruins of the village Lifta,

Shade Tawafre, born in the Galilean village of Maghar, studying art in Sakhnin College and Tiltan College, uses art to express his belief in humanism and rejection of violence in all its forms. While Shade's physical disability hinders contact with others, Gallery visitors were encouraging as he spoke about himself and his artwork.

Shani Aviv, born in Azaria (Latrun area) studies multidisciplinary art at Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and the Arts.

*“During my childhood, I learned values such as loving the country, the land, the landscape, and especially non-compromising Zionism during my teenage years. I understood that these (country, land, non-compromising Zionism) are symbols of a great conflict living inside me.”*

This experience, for the mixed Jewish and Palestinian-Arab artists and Gallery visitors, gave voice to questions that led to a rich dialogue among all present.

*“Is the status quo that has existed so far between all religions still stable? Has the security situation in the State of Israel succeeded to undermine the coexistence that has been going on for centuries in the city of Ramle? And what happens to history when it is defined only by destruction?”*

*Who decides what to save and what to destroy? Who decides what to share and what to hide? What are our responsibilities as citizens? How do we learn from the past for a common and respectful future?*

*How do we make decisions regarding the differences in the way the other looks, or how he believes? Can we accept these differences?*

*What is peaceful resistance or action? Who is permitted to define it?”*

Shade and Shani who met through the exhibition, are making plans to cooperate on future projects.

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### **Humanitarian Aid Program (HAP)**

HAP was developed by residents of the Oasis of Peace as their response to critical and unmet medical needs in both Gaza and isolated villages in the occupied West Bank. It is entirely staffed by medical and civil volunteers, and funded by donations from the Oasis of Peace members and AFNSWAS donors. Dr. Haj Yahya, a member of the Oasis of Peace and of Physicians for Human Rights, continues to be central in providing medical treatment, equipment and materials to be sent to Gaza.



Originally, the support for Al-Shifa (Gaza's largest hospital) was intended to help purchase new hospital beds. However, due to Israel's ongoing closure of the Gaza Strip and a debt crisis of the Palestinian Health Ministry, the hospital is currently suffering from a 50% shortage of medicines required for patients suffering from chronic diseases such as kidney disease, diabetes, gynecological diseases and cancer (see: [Gaza health ministry warns of 'unprecedented' shortage of medicines, medical supplies](#)). The Hospital director made it clear that this took greater priority and received special permission to ship the medicines through the border. On July 23, with the help of Mobile Clinic Director [Dr. Salah Haj Yahya](#) of [Physicians for Human Rights](#), we were able to send the medicines directly to the Gaza Hospital.

In addition, the Arava Institute of the Negev appealed to us for cooperation in providing a water generator to the Nasser Medical Center in Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest hospital. The WASNS HAP committee, headed by Anwar Dawood, approved the donation of \$10,000 towards the project. A description can be found in the Jerusalem Post (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/joint-israeli-palestinian-effort-donates-water-generator-to-gaza-hospital-636569>) The machine converts air to water, producing about 5,000 liters (1,320 US gallons) of clean water per day. Due to the salinization of the depleted coastal aquifer, procuring fresh water is a severe problem in the Gaza Strip.

### **The Big Picture**

Schooling, learning about "the other", preparation for change, nourishment of the arts, and support for medical needs all have happened in this time of isolation, of economic uncertainties and viral fears. For making all this and more possible, we and the thousands of Jews and Palestinians touched by all of these programs, thank you - deeply, generously and abundantly.

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