



# Midyear Report

## The Primary School

### A New Library and Computer Lab

After months of renovation and a year of planning and fundraising, the new school library and computer room are open! The UK Friends of the village and the Silman Family Trust accepted the project, propelling it from a long-distance goal to a fast-tracked reality. On February 27, 2017, members of the Silman family and some British friends came to the village to participate in the opening celebration. Students and teachers gathered to present them with tokens of appreciation and words of gratitude for their generous support. The students were so excited to meet and thank their guests whose generosity made this goal achievable.



This was a proud moment for the students who, back in November of 2015, had organized a petition and staged a demonstration to request updated computers. They got to experience the feeling of being part of change and learned that, together, their voices are an important part of change and that people are listening. Their petition is displayed on the wall of the computer room as a reminder of what is possible when people unite and focus their energies toward a common goal.

## Building on Success

The success of the student's petition has given them hope and a new, more ambitious goal. In December 2016, they created another petition to expand the Primary School to include middle school and high school. Guided by their teachers, the students thoughtfully wrote their proposal and submitted it to the community. It was a wonderful opportunity for students to learn about how much work and planning goes into operating their school. They collected over 400 signatures from students, family and village members and have submitted their request to the Municipal Council and the Ministry of Education. Their desire to continue to learn together in peace is powerful evidence of what is possible for the future of Jews and Palestinians.



## “Imagineering” the Future

On any given day, Primary School teachers must go above and beyond the standard expectation. Every lesson is a collaboration of language and a modeling of shared authority on top of the actual lesson itself. When it comes to teaching history, and dealing with current events, the teachers are tasked with addressing difficult subjects in ways that will be constructive for young students.

In November, when student council elections are held, the country commemorates two national tragedies; the Kafr Qasem massacre of 48 peaceful Palestinian villagers and the assassination of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin. It's an opportunity to discuss democracy, authority, tragedy, courage and, of course, hope. But how do they do that with a group of young students? Just use your imagination.



As a preamble to the student council elections, the school community came together to visualize a world where Rabin and Arafat lived to see a permanent peace agreement. Through imaginary TV news reports, students spoke about a peaceful reality with open borders, equal leadership and plans to jointly host the 2022 World Cup! John Lennon's “Imagine” was performed in English, Arabic and Hebrew to close out the program. It was difficult to return to reality and acknowledge that all the reports of a country at peace were their starting place for

hope and possibility. A few younger students cried. This powerful vision of a future that might have been and that could be is so important to be able to imagine. This generation of students will be the ones shaping our future reality, and the teachers at the Primary School want to be sure they can envision a just and peaceful society.

## Musical Bridge

Although music has always been a part of the curriculum, a more formal structure for music education has been introduced this year at the Primary School and the students love it. Three new, part-time teachers are in place and are expanding the program; beginning with learning the basics of music structure using vocals and keyboards, to specific regional instruments like the oud, darbuka and guitar. Students learn in small groups once a week for a focused lesson. Experiencing each other's culture through music creates opportunities for individual expression, facilitates language learning and builds common experiences across cultural boundaries.

***"It is exciting that here at the WASNS primary school we have a mixture of cultures. We are working to integrate the two cultures by teaching special Arab and Jewish songs. We are trying to create a***



***Western and Eastern ensemble with oud, keyboard, guitar, darbuka, flute and clarinet. The students are able to meet each culture through music."-Haim, music teacher***

## Growing, Changing, Adapting

The unique nature of the Primary School as the first and only bilingual, binational school in the country presents a multifaceted challenge when it comes to state funding, categorization and definition. To be affordable enough to attract a diverse socio-economic population of students from outside of the village, the Primary School has given up its status as a recognized



independent school and has been accepted by the Ministry of Education as an official state school. It was a decision that the community and school did not take lightly. The Primary School is neither 'Palestinian', nor 'Jewish', but those are the only two categories available for state

schools. Satisfying the bureaucratic requirements to make the switch was a lengthy and time consuming process. Ultimately, however, the increased funding received relieves some of the financial burdens for parents and for donors who care deeply about the school’s mission. Enrollment is up 25% for this year and the NSWAS community is so happy to be welcoming so many new families. To maintain the Primary School’s identity as a leader in Jewish-Palestinian education, they are working to define its category beyond the official school designation and have several applications pending. Being a pioneer is never easy but their success so far is undeniable. Teachers and administrators are currently working on a fully documented curriculum that defines the framework for a fully integrated school with a model for language education that outlines bilingual educational goals and how to build them into everyday lesson plans. Eventually, the Primary School’s curriculum will be formalized in such a way that it can be adopted by other schools.

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## Pluralistic Cultural Community Center

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### Watch The Garden Grow

On March 7, 2017, the Pluralistic Cultural Community Center was honored to host a “Day of the Righteous” celebration in association with Gardens of the Righteous Worldwide Network (GARWIO). GARWIO founder Gabriele Nissim invited Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam to represent the organization to commemorate the “European Day of the Righteous” that was



adopted by the European Parliament in 2012. This year the village recognized Regina and Christopher Catrambone of Italy, and Hamadi Abdesslem of Tunisia; present day rescuers whose actions have demonstrated the values of responsibility, tolerance and solidarity.

The Catrambones founded the Migrant Offshore Aid Station, (MOAS). Their organization has saved more than 33,000 refugees from the Mediterranean Sea. Regina Catrambone came to the event and spoke about her family’s organization and how their efforts to rescue refugees from the Mediterranean have grown from one ship to a network of cooperative organizations. Hamadi Abdelssem rescued 45 Italian tourists during the attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Hamadi was unable to attend the

event but sent a video clip, in which he spoke of his appreciation for being recognized in this way by a joint Palestinian/Jewish village.



On behalf of GARWIO, which provided funding for the event, the PSCC was honored to receive a senior member of the organization, the well-known senior Italian journalist Antonio Ferraro. Children from the Primary School prepared a song for the event and the proceedings were televised in Italy and publicized in one of Milan’s oldest newspapers, the *Corriere della Sera*.

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Professor Yair Auron, village resident, humanitarian scholar and director of the program at NSWAS explained why he prefers to use the term “rescuer” rather than “righteous”,

***“Here in Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom, we have decided to use the term ‘rescuers’ rather than ‘righteous’, since ‘righteous’ is a term with moral, philosophical or religious significance whereas the act of rescuing other human beings can be determined factually and those who act to save others deserve to be honored.”***

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## School for Peace

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### Daring to Dream

Real change happens in society when we revolutionize the way we think. Considering that there is another way forward is the first step toward envisioning what that new reality looks like. At the School for Peace, the participants from the first, EU sponsored Up-and-Coming Politicians course have formulated their culminating projects aimed at projecting innovative ideas into the status-quo of political rhetoric.



Working in teams, participants outlined practical plans to go along with their visionary ideas. Moving forward, this group of Palestinians and Jews with political aspirations will take what they have learned at the School for Peace and inject it into their careers as the leaders and

policy makers of tomorrow. Strengthened by the partnerships they made with each other and the School for Peace, these future politicians are eager to change the political landscape of the country.

The second group of Up-and-Coming politicians is already underway. The group met at NSWAS after a five-day workshop in Aqaba, Jordan where they engaged in an intensive and meaningful dialogue that addressed many of the barriers the two groups must overcome before they can come together.

***“It took me some time to understand that first of all I have to listen. I will, of course, take the stories I heard here with me. The most important thing we received from this workshop is the personal connections we made.”***

## Voices of Reason

What happens when the natural growth of a population is not addressed or acknowledged by government policy? This predicament has become the de facto focus of the School for Peace Urban Planners and Architects Change Agents course. The recent demolition of unrecognized Palestinian villages like Umm al-Hiran and Qalansawe has brought this issue to the forefront of the discussion. After having visited these places and speaking to the residents, course participants pinpointed the problem and found that they could no longer be silent in the face of injustice.

In addition to protesting the demolitions, course participants and graduates alike have joined together to create a joint forum of Palestinian and Jewish urban planners. In an open letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, signed by 280 city planners, the joint forum calls for an end to the demolition of homes and villages.

***“Natural growth on the one hand, and lack of planning on the other, has forced the Arab population to build without permits on a massive scale. The demolition of these homes, constructed out of distress in the absence of equitable planning, violates morality and basic civil rights...House demolitions are not the answer to building without permits. We demand an immediate end to the policy of house demolitions and call upon the authorities to advance worthy and fair planning policies—together with local communities—through which housing construction will be regulated and the needs of the population will be met.”***

This collaborative stand, made possible by the School for Peace’s efforts to bring Palestinians and Jews together to realize their shared future, is one of the many ways Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is helping Palestinians and Jews to build a path toward peace.

