



## **BUILDING TOWARD PEACE IN 2022**

### **MID-YEAR 2022 UPDATE**

2022 began on a difficult note when, on January 16th, the village was again the victim of an arson attack. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the main office building was badly damaged. Even under duress, even though there are those who seek to damage the mission of the Oasis of Peace, such attacks lead the community to a deeper commitment to the mission.

It was only two days later that the Minister of Environmental Protection, Tamar Zandberg of Meretz, came to visit. The village showcased efforts to combine peace-building with green, environmentally friendly solutions for energy-saving, waste management, and environmental education, including beekeeping projects, building updates, water management, and integration of environmentalist concepts into the Primary School curriculum. It was a powerful reminder that the mission of the Oasis of Peace continues to thrive, creating an example of equality and a shared society with potential global impact. This year has been full of milestones, building upon work that has been decades in the making.

## TOWARD A MULTICULTURAL FUTURE

“We are proud of all our students, of the progress they have made in every area and of their success in coping with the many challenges they have had to face in this period.” - Nadwa Jaber, First-Grade teacher

The **Primary School**’s Palestinian and Jewish educators continued refining and implementing the HOTAM (Education, Culture, and Tradition) curriculum, setting the standard for bilingual, culturally inclusive education in Israel. To build on their 2021 summer training, teachers and administrators embarked on a two-day planning retreat to Acre in February, at the mid-point of the school year.

School leadership identified three focus areas: strengthening language skills and ties between Palestinian and Jewish children, planning holidays for the three-religion school, and developing a pedagogy to serve the school’s future needs. The teachers work in groups, crystalizing working plans to be integrated into the school curriculum. 2022’s summer teacher-training will also focus on supporting an expansion to middle and high school grades in the coming years.

With the support of the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace, the Primary School’s unique bilingual, multicultural teaching model is able to integrate continuous improvement strategies to ensure the best possible outcomes for students.



Primary School teachers during their retreat in Acre.

In addition to the state-required curriculum, students at the Primary School take part in activities integrating art, music, and real-world experiences into the school day.

To help launch "Global Climate Scream" at the Oasis Art Gallery, sixth-graders created their own "recycled" art. While actively engaging in recycling and nature-based projects in the courtyard of the Oasis Art Gallery, the children internalized a lesson about their future on a changing planet and their ability to take action. Their art-making took place alongside featured professional artists Polly Fernhout Soffer (also a school volunteer), school art teacher Andres Gurwicz, and Nihad Dabeet, a Ramle sculptor who works in iron wire, Michal Mozes, an artist who works with recycled materials, Alex Erez, and the students' nature teacher Voltaire Shamshum. The American Friends support this kind of multi-disciplinary learning, underscoring the connections between ecological activism, biology and art, and the school's goal of stimulating positive action.



Students collaborate with professional artists to create art from recycled materials and learn about climate change.

The annual Space Day is a student favorite: a day of play, science projects, and group presentations. The result is a school full of children engaged in continuous learning about science and the universe together.



5th grade students took charge of decorations for this year's Space Day.



Student musicians share their hard work and talent.

The music program helps young people reach across boundaries and borders. Students of the Bellinzona Modern Music School won a prize from the Federica Spitzer Foundation for their documentary featuring students from the Primary School, *A Gig with Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom*. Recognition of Primary School students' capacities and skills is well-deserved.

Land Day, marked on March 30th, is an important opportunity for both Jewish and Palestinian students to learn the stories and histories of the region and, in developmentally appropriate ways, share ideas about how they personally plan to work together toward fostering their peace-filled shared society.



Students pose together in their classroom.

The celebration of Passover, Ramadan, and Easter in a collaborative environment prioritizing cultural sharing is a feature of each school year. Children learned about the Passover Seder meal, the traditions for breaking fast each night of Ramadan, and the traditions of Easter. During Ramadan,

the school children hosted an Iftar meal for their parents and each class prepared a presentation, skit, or game for the school community. The welcome spring sun provides a memorable time for outdoor activities for all.



Parents, students, and teachers celebrate April holidays.

These celebrations are also an example of the growing impact of the Parents Community, which was instrumental in the planning and execution of these educational activities. The American Friends continue to prioritize funding to encourage strong parent involvement in the school, so that the benefits of the unique curriculum can reach further across the community.

Building continues on the long-term playground project that began in early 2021 with support from the American Friends. This year, fourth- and fifth-grade children and their parents built the first half of the "challenge track" out of raised posts and ropes. The second part of the "challenge track" will be built by the third- and sixth-grade children and their parents in 2022, keeping the project on "track" for completion this year.



Students play on the Challenge Track

## Building Collaboration and Community for Peace

The **School for Peace (SFP)** has been conducting courses and seminars for Arab and Jewish youth and adults in Israel and territories of the Palestinian Authority since 1979. In the last two years, under the leadership of director Dr. Roi Silberberg, the SFP has prioritized providing more robust resources and networking opportunities for alumni of those courses, expanding the breadth of their Change Agents course to include more professional categories, and offering more University courses for students, all with fiscal support from the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace. There has been progress in each of these areas in the first half of the year.

In March, the School for Peace held its first-ever Alumni Conference. Lawyers, artists, mental health professionals, social workers, journalists, political and environmental activists, urban planners, and other professionals came together to find common ground in their work for justice and equality. Dr. Silberberg said conference attendees told him it “felt like coming home. Their engagement in the sessions showed us the vitality of our alumni community.” Another participant added: “It was a beautiful, empowering experience to walk into the hall and hear people speaking both Hebrew and Arabic, all of them working toward shared society.”



A conference participant shares her work with the group.

The conference included “getting-to-know-you” networking activities to stimulate collaboration across professional expertise, dialogue groups to deepen conversations and ideas surrounding peace-building discovered in initial Change Agents courses, and finally the presentation of 16 alumni projects, all of which were competing for grant funding from the SFP. While each group presented worthy and fascinating projects, the awards committee chose one outstanding project to receive the Dr. Nava

Sonnenschein Prize of NIS 16,000 (approximately \$4,500), along with seven other projects awarded grants of NIS 4,000 (approximately \$1,100) each.

The evaluation committee included Haifa City Councilwoman Ms. Shahira Shalabi of the Haifa Front; Retired Justice Limor Margolin-Yehidi and Member of Knesset Sami Abu Shehadah, chair of the Joint List's Balad party. In making their selections, the committee sought to identify the projects promising the greatest transformative impact and the best prospects for successful implementation, with preference to those involving cooperation with SFP course graduates or with other organizations identified with the goals and work of the SFP. The award-winning project, Bustan Nof Hagalil, was established in 2018 by a group of Arab and Jewish activists in the city of Nof Hagalil, a city that is today approximately one-third Palestinian. The aim of the group is to transform the city from one that is "mixed" to one that is "shared" through encounters, outreach, and work with the municipality. The other winning projects encompassed filmmaking, mental health initiatives, work with Bedouin youth, and shared beekeeping.

"That session was simply inspiring," said Silberberg. "It showed us how the School for Peace method leads to action for positive change." Because of the event's success, the Alumni Conference and Grant Competition will become an annual event at the SFP, with the support of the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace.

Through the Change Agents courses, the School for Peace trains people in diverse fields to become agents of change who will combat racism, promote equality and human rights, and initiate shared projects involving Jews and Palestinians. These courses have trained lawyers and jurists, planners and architects, mental health professionals, politicians, and journalists, and many more.

Most recently, the School for Peace conducted a Change Agents course for professionals in the performing arts, the first of its kind. Building peace and fostering equality requires systemic change, but it also requires a change in perspective, change that must reach hearts and minds. By activating professionals in the performing arts, including theater, film, and television, this Change Agents course intends to help improve the state of relations between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis, to change each side's deepest perceptions about the other. The course had 18 participants made up of Palestinian and Jewish women and men. It encompassed a dialogue between identities, with a theoretical level covering the historical dimension and the realm of art in the context of conflict, and a practical level in which participants produced individual or group works of art. Artworks created by participants during the course included short films, documentaries, community art projects, non-fiction writing, and more; graduates are

expected to go on to create multidisciplinary projects for change through the growing Alumni network.

With the support of the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace, further progress will be made on expanding the availability of the SFP's University courses, building upon 30 years of success at Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Ben Gurion Universities, and Rupin College.

### **Honoring the Rescuers**

Each year, the village commemorates International Rescuers' Day on March 6th with a ceremony in the Garden of Rescuers next to the Spiritual Center. During the ceremony, the village presents awards to remarkable activists risking their lives and their work for the sake of human rights. This year's awards went to Afghani journalist Atefa Ghaffoury and the Ta'ayush organization.



Award winners and Oasis of Peace staff enjoy the ceremony.

Hosted by Professor Yair Auron, the ceremony featured a musical performance by the Primary School choir. Honored was Atefa Ghaffoury, a journalist and advocate born during the first Taliban regime, she had to flee Afghanistan as the Taliban returned for a second time. The American Friends were also glad to support honoring Ta'ayush ("shared life" in Arabic). Founded in 2000 by a group of Arabs and Jews, Ta'ayush is dedicated to cooperation, non-violence, justice, and peace across Jewish and Palestinian divides. The Oasis of Peace creates alliances and cross-disciplinary collaborations with other groups working toward a shared society.





The Primary School Choir shares a song.

### **FEEDING THE SPIRIT**

When Einat Bezalel first visited the Oasis of Peace, she knew right away she had found her new home. She says, "I had not known such a place existed, even though I had been active for a long time in peace activism." With the support from the American Friends, she was recently appointed to take over as director of the **Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center (PSCC)**.

Bezalel was born in Nahariya, and lived on Kibbutz Ga'aton and Tel Aviv. She is a trained dancer, and she has performed with modern dance troupes all over the world. "The PSCC combines everything I love," she says. "It has people, culture, Palestinians and Jews coming together. I have been waiting for the chance to do something like this, to take on a project that is about equality and that reflects my political beliefs."



Sharing laughs at the annual International Women's Day event.

Bezalel has plans to retain the programming that has come before, such as the annual Iftar feast and commemorating International Women's Day (IWD). This year's IWD event was organized around the theme of "Women's Humor" and was attended by about 50 women. Noam Shuster, NSWAS member whose US tour was recently featured in the New Yorker, performed, as did the actress Khawlah Hag-Debsey, also a NSWAS member and the first Arab woman to be appointed to the management of an Israeli theater, the Nazareth Fringe Academy. Reaching for equality can be difficult work - this event gave these activists the chance to laugh and enjoy the company of sisterhood.



The NSWAS community enjoys a meal together during Ramadan.

Bezalel also envisions a cultural center that will be part of a larger, international network, envisioning "a space to export our ideas and form new connections with the art world." American Friends look forward to supporting Einat's vision.

### **Preserving a Spirit of Hospitality**

Although 2022 began with yet another arson attack, the midway point of the year is marked by an overarching commitment to welcome. The increased involvement of parents and wider community in the Primary School, the excitement of the School for Peace's first Alumni Conference, the visits of important government figures, the honoring of Rescuers near and far, and so much more contribute to the feeling that the Oasis of Peace is an oasis for all. In keeping with that spirit, the hotel was recently renovated to be a more eco-sustainable, accessible, and welcoming place for visitors.



It is in that spirit of welcoming that the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace thank you for your support this year and all the years to come. The road to peace may sometimes feel long, but it is better traveled with friends.