



YEAR END 2023 UPDATE

Primary School



New Nursery Building

The infant and toddler set finally have a building to call their own. After several years, first in a temporary structure and then in the volunteers' housing, an older, long, single-story building right across from the primary school was renovated for the nursery. This building is thus now a part of the WASNS educational complex, and it will benefit from the inclusion, including that of the guard who sits opposite.

With two separate rooms, the nursery can now create different schedules and activities for the infant-to-young toddler group and the pre-kindergarteners. The pastel-colored walls and wall decals create a bright environment for the children, and they now have furnishings and shelving designed to their heights and needs. This will enable the nursery to take in more children than previously.

Says nursery teacher Nur Najjar – Elhuda: “It’s wonderful. Its new, inviting and radiates calm, and it feels like we opened the year on the right foot. Everyone is happy with the situation.”

The outdoor play yard will be soon finished and fenced in, and there are plans to turn a second building into a play room with “Gymboree” style equipment.

Protecting Young Minds

At the start of the fall semester, there were 190 children enrolled in the NSWAS Primary School; 108 were Arab and 82 Jewish, and there were 96 boys and 94 girls. Because the school is both binational and bilingual, it faces unique difficulties when it comes to navigating these students' feelings about war. But it is also uniquely

positioned to succeed: for the past three years, the SFP has been leading intensive teacher trainings on cultivating empathy and healthy dialogue in the classroom.

Even so, the reality of war has been challenging. The Primary School has been forced to close intermittently due to danger from nearby rockets. And it is generously lending class-room space to students from Tal Shahar, a nearby moshav (agricultural community), who do not have air raid shelters at their own school. Because instruction is in-person, safety drills are now part of the weekly lesson plan; children learn where to go if they hear a siren, how to behave in shelters, and how long they must remain there. Walking to school is no longer an option for many because they are unprotected on the roads.

But there is a lot to inspire hope, too. The new students from Tal Shahar have joined a few Primary School classes and have been invited to participate in special active recess breaks that promote dialogue and understanding. The school has committed more resources to mental health, adding mindfulness sessions to the curriculum and offering psychological help from specialists in children's mental health. And the children are not only sharing their perspectives peacefully, they are serious about ending the violence on all sides, as this excerpt from a Jewish student's letter-writing exercise shows: "Dear people of Gaza, I cannot, and probably will never, understand the suffering that you go through. I really believe that one day this conflict will end and we shall live in peace without resentment and hatred. I wish all the best things in the world would get to all human beings. With love and with deep understanding that you too deserve only good."

Everybody's Talking About the New Language Center



The Language Center, which opened its doors in March of last year, is now fully operational, with each class having two lessons a week – one in Arabic, one in Hebrew. The focus is on spoken language, with the aim of ensuring each child will be able to easily converse with all the other children, in either language. To advance the project, the Arabic teachers worked all summer on a program to improve the spoken language skills of the children.

Thanks, in part, to the Language Center and in part to the updated lesson plan, the school has greatly reduced the amount of time the children spend in separate, single-language lessons, so that the classrooms are more cohesive and the Arab and Jewish children spend more time in one another's company.

The teachers will continue to meet with facilitators from the School for Peace. The aim is to really bring them all into the primary school/WASNS ideology, so that they are teaching not just math and geography, but also teaching the kids the idea of peace. The highlight of the teachers' calendar is the retreat, in February, in which the teachers work together to brainstorm and plan. This year, the focus will be on the national holidays in May that tend to be emotional days and to divide, rather than join, the two peoples.

New Soccer Field



The children came back to school to find that the court that had been paved with crumbling, uneven paving stones had been turned into a soccer field, complete with special synthetic grass that is meant for games.

This court is the fourth part of the playground renovation, and the field was made possible by a gift, through the American Friends of NSWAS, by the Fred Segal Family Foundation and the Little Lady Lori's Playground.

Soccer is a favorite game for many of the kids, and they had played it on any flat, grassy surface available during recess. As expected, both boys and girls were thrilled with the new field, and they could not wait to start playing.

The kids who choose soccer lessons for their extracurricular classes now have proper field to play on, and we expect even more enthusiasm for these lessons with this new field. We especially hope to get girls interested in the sport. This field will also be great for other kinds of physical activity, including the games days and more.

School For Peace

Alumni Gather at the School for Peace

At the end of March, more than 100 alumni from the School for Peace gathered to reflect on the school's impact and legacy and what more is needed to grow and sustain dialogues necessary for peace in Israel and the region. This was the second-ever alumni convening organized by the school, which hopes to make it an annual event. Over three days of discussions, uni-national and bi-national alumni working groups came together to tackle questions about power relations in peace work and activism, what it means for Arabs and Jews to struggle in solidarity with each other, and what role young people can play in moving the peace process forward.

There were also presentations by alumni who had previously received project grants from the School for Peace. Yasmin Shbeta, a 2019 alumna of the School for Peace's Architect and Planners Course, presented her plan for greening Tira, a city in the Central District of Israel, by converting waste areas and an abandoned parking lot to parks. She is working with a group of volunteers to advance the project. Other noteworthy presentations included a film that imagines a future in which national identities don't matter, a gardening initiative that uses recycled building materials to create planting beds and hydroponics systems for elementary schools, and a theater project that asks actors to interrogate common cultural narratives by receiving files from the national archives live on stage and discussing them with the audience.

Keeping Faith with Each Other

Since October, the Village has hosted six dialogues for residents, facilitated by instructors from SFP. Participants are invited to share openly about their most painful feelings, including anger about the October 7 massacre and death and destruction in Gaza. Small-group breakout sessions give everyone a chance to contribute. Many have also reflected on current tensions between groups in the Village and how best to keep empathy, understanding, and trust alive in times of crisis. Sessions dedicate time to identifying concrete actions residents can take to promote peace and unity in the Village and beyond. These dialogues will continue as events unfold. NSWAS has also been offering free group meditation and yoga sessions to support mental health and wellness.

Holding Space for Dialogue



Even as the violence rages around them, the School for Peace (SFP) is redoubling efforts to resource communities throughout the region and the globe. This spring, SFP will lead courses at Ben-Gurion University, Hadassah Academic College, Tel Aviv University, and Ruppin Academic College for students seeking to bring conflict resolution skills into their academic training. For many years, SFP has taught doctors, nurses, psychologists, human rights lawyers, and other professional cohorts to practice empathetic dialogue with each other and with clients.

The SFP is also providing special training for the staffs of health organizations in the region, including facilities in Beersheva, Haifa, and Rehovot. And, the school continues to lead dialogues on Zoom for Israelis and Palestinians living abroad and grappling with the grief, sadness, and anger of this moment. These virtual sessions have taken place in Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Turkey, Spain, and Switzerland. The school's director, Dr. Roi Silberberg, says that he has never felt the need for the SFP more than now: "We will not succumb to the darkness of quietude, and the chilling distance of alienation. We will maintain the hard-won trust between the Palestinian and Jewish graduates of our many SFP programs, harness their collective power, and disseminate it outwardly into the world."

Practicing Peace

Since January, the School for Peace (SFP) has conducted almost 50 workshops, trainings, and dialogues to help hundreds of people integrate peace practices into their professional and personal lives. The school's Advanced Human Rights Training Program for Lawyers focused on moral and strategic dilemmas facing human rights attorneys, drawing on recent court cases as well as participants' own experiences. A training session for staff at Carmel Medical Center in Haifa provided an opportunity to talk about the conflict and its effect on mental and physical health and wellbeing. And now in its seventh year, SFP's Change Agents Course for Mixed Cities brought tools and support to activists working toward binational cooperation in cities with significant numbers of Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs.

Spiritual Center and Oasis Art Gallery

The Pluralistic Spiritual Center is a center for community, and broader community activities. Over the spring and summer, these included mindfulness, meditation and movement workshops, as well as a host of other meetings, lessons and activities.

Art That Knows No Bounds

In June, the Oasis Art Gallery opened “Us and Them,” an exhibition showcasing works by eight artists—four Palestinian, four Jewish. “Us and Them” offered perspectives on racism, nationalism, prejudice, and the things that divide us as well as what ultimately brings us together. The gallery also teamed up with the School for Peace to organize an excursion to the Mishkan Museum of Art, Ein Harod, to view “Spirit of the Man, Spirit of the Place.” This group exhibition, featuring works by five members (and multiple generations) of the Abu Shakra-Al- Fahmawiya family, marks one of the first times an Israeli museum has devoted the major part of its space to Palestinian art.

Women Moving Together

In May, the Pluralistic Spiritual Center launched a new, daylong workshop for women that is now planned as an annual offering. “Naot: Moving Together” encourages healthy and holistic self-expression through dance. Skilled instructors lead a series of warm-up exercises before introducing movements and techniques from diverse traditions, including belly dance, Dabke, and other cultural and folk styles. Between movement sessions, participants pause to reflect on what they’ve learned, share insights and discoveries and honor their connectedness.

Humanitarian Aid Program



Dr Raid, a pediatrician and village member, is active in the Humanitarian Aid Committee of Wahat al-Salam – Neve Shalom (WASNS) and a member of Doctors for Human Rights. On July 15th 2023 Raid joined a delegation of Doctors for Human Rights to Gaza. The delegation consisted of Dr Raid and three other doctors, an orthopedic doctor, pediatric surgeon, and neurologist. This time, the delegation went to Rafiah hospital and brought with them medicine for children (pictured left), which Raid had requested from the Humanitarian Aid Committee. Dr Raid, along with Dr Yasin, the pediatric surgeon, reached the hospital in Rafiah and undertook follow-up surgery for children that were injured in the recent war; in addition Dr Raid treated 38 sick children and gave them the medicine they needed.

The delegation also visited the center for children with cancer in Gaza and heard a report by the management about the children and the work that the center does. We are looking into ways of providing aid and support to the center.

Another Successful Visit

Another successful and still ongoing visit to the beloved Gaza Strip to check on the conditions of our people and our people and to carry out patriotic, humanitarian, and medical duty.

Surgical operations were performed and are still continuing in the field of eyes, spine, joint surgery, blood vessels, mental health workshops, implementation of a medical day in Deir Al-Balah and another in Gaza City, the detection of hundreds of patients, the dispensing of medicine, mental health workshops, and the provision of medical and humanitarian aid, is undoubtedly a great, hard and mighty work day and night.

The Nadi Youth Center

Summer Fun at the NADI Youth Center



The NADI Youth Center is the place to be! All summer long, kids from the Village and surrounding areas have been exploring the center's many fun offerings. Some of the highlights: a hip-hop breakdancing workshop, a dough-making class for baking fresh pizza and Manakeesh (Arabic flatbread), a trip to an amusement park, soccer tournaments, and an end-of-summer pool party for the youth and their families. A new biweekly program, Creative Fridays, also launched; geared toward elementary-school-aged kids, it focuses on the fundamentals of drawing, collage, and painting while giving budding artists the freedom to make their own masterpieces. During these quiet summer months, the NADI continues to make a huge difference in the lives of local youth who benefit from the social connection and learning opportunities they would otherwise go without.

Village Youth in Santa Cruz

In July, nine teens sponsored by the NADI Youth Center traveled to the U.S. to take part in the Science Internship Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The 10-week program allows high-school students interested in science, technology, engineering, and math to participate in real-world research projects based at the university. Participating students also receive close mentorship from UCSC faculty and graduate students. Next summer's cohort has already been announced, and a record 12 NADI teens were selected by the university for the Science Internship Program.