

Spring 2020

A M E R I C A N F R I E N D S O F
Neve Shalom  *Wahat al-Salam*
נ ו ו א ש ל ו ם واحة السلام
O A S I S O F P E A C E



Hope in a Time of Crisis

Dear Friends,

You've likely experienced, personally, the impact that COVID-19 can have on a community. It's the same at **NSWAS**. The **Primary School, School for Peace, Spiritual Center** and **Oasis Art** Gallery together, annually, bring thousands of students and visitors from far beyond the community's boundaries. They suddenly must reach out, across boundaries and without physical contact, to learners around the globe. We don't yet have any visuals of these programs and projects BUT they are indeed busy, holding classes, dialogues, readying plans and preparing the next generation of bilingual bridge-builders- virtually, and in real-time, once it is safe.

You can help ensure, during this time of COVID-19 distance learning, that **Primary School** students without computer access can borrow needed laptops (sidebar on pg.5). It reminds us that when it appears something can't be done, together we are able to provide the most academically vulnerable with what they need. In five years, we won't remember where those "extra" dollars went but we **WILL** remember that children received what they needed because you decided they were important.

Primary School children always need the arts, music, technology, environmental education and language teaching. Parents and part-time teachers are developing a summer program for the children, because bilingualism, bridge-building and a shared future can't be "on leave" during the school closures.

Once the virus dies out, plan a visit to the community and its inspiring **classrooms, galleries and spiritual center**. See the power held by an idea... an idea that holds the heart of those who work in the branches, or whose families are planted in the soil of the community. The idea of **Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam** is one that has transformed the lives and actions of tens of thousands.

We are grateful for your past and current support, sustaining NSWAS teachers, children, facilitators and, as a result, the families and wider community. We celebrate the village, the **Primary School, School for Peace and Spiritual Center and you**. We can be confident that there will be an "after" time.

We stand with the members of **NSWAS** through this very challenging time and into their future. Invest in their future. It is an act of courage, giving birth to ideas that sustain and transform life.

From the **Board of Directors of American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam**.

Two Mothers - One School

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam's Primary School is the heart of the community, where the youngest citizens make connections and build bridges that span differences of language, religion, tradition and narrative. It is a reality that parents want for their children. It is their commitment to their children's future. At an open house held just before COVID-19 arrived, 75 children registered for first grade, and 100 enrolled in the early education (N-pre-K) program.

Amana, a hopeful mother, was at the school with her husband and children to ensure that her daughter got a place in the coming year's class. There weren't enough spaces last year. "This time I won't let you refuse me. I want to be the first one to sign up from the Arabs and the Jews, because my daughter deserves the best. Even though I am not yet a parent of the school, I visited this amazing village a number of times with my children, just so I could sit and absorb and wonder at the miracle of this place. I see there's no difference here between a Jewish child and an Arab child. I don't want my daughter to grow up in a place where people will say to her, 'Arab, go away from here'."

Another mother, Maya, invited her friends from the neighboring community of Tel Shachar to come to the Open Day with a post on Facebook. She wrote:

Parents' Group

COVID-19 presents so many challenges, and so many examples of solidarity that arise in the Primary School community. Two mothers, one Jewish and one Arab, created a bilingual Facebook group for parents of Primary School students to keep everyone informed and connected. Parents and children are sharing film clips and their experiences, encouraging everyone (unwillingly) at home. Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam's community is providing modest funding for the mothers running the group, the only currently available means of thanking them for providing a channel for encouragement and connection.

"Do you want to know why you should come to this school? Come to the open day and you will understand why my children are here. My six-year-old son was sick and had to stay home, but each day he refused to stay at home and tried to go to school... On Monday he didn't want to miss Music with his favorite teacher. On Tuesday he didn't want to miss the Nature Lesson and walk through the forest with (Uncle) Voltaire. On Wednesday there is a special technology program "Scratch" and he really wanted to get out of bed so he could join in. On Thursday he was still sick and he still wanted to get up out of his bed and go to school. I told him there was nothing he could do, sickness is sickness and he has to stay home. And so he answered me. 'Mom, I'm not sick anymore. I want to go to Neve Shalom.' There is no greater pleasure than a child that loves his school and wakes up with a smile before he gets onto the bus to go there. That's a sign there is something good happening there and I don't need more than that."

Two Israeli mothers, from two separate worlds, brought together by the **Primary School's** mission. School will start, they will be class parents together, a small bridge will be built and two communities will begin to weave connections in Hebrew and Arabic to strengthen their futures as Israeli Muslims, Christians, Jews. Two worlds, one future; two languages, one society. Even COVID-19 can't stop this work.

Your support increases the **Primary School's** capacity, providing space for the parents and children who are creating their shared future, bilingually and multiculturally, grounded in equality and peace-building.



New parents meeting at the school.

If you are over age 70 1/2, you can make tax-deductible donations to qualified charitable organizations like American Friends of Neve Shalom / What al Salam directly from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA). This donation will count towards your Required Minimum Distribution. You can do this by contacting your IRA representative and requesting that a distribution be sent to: American Friends NSWAS.

School for Peace Change Agents Course



Change Agents Zoom Meeting

Environmental Change Agents

Despite mandated closures and the impossibility of meeting in person, 18 Jewish and Arab professional environmentalists, part of the 2019-2020 **School for Peace Change Agents Course**, used technology to learn from Dr. Danny Rabinowitz, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel-Aviv University about “A Century of Energy: The Generation of Electricity between Two National Movements” and the impact of age, nationality, gender and social status in the current crisis.

The issue of language was raised. When you have lectures or dialogues intended for all participants, which language should be spoken? Should a translator be present? Where Jews and Arabs are planning or working together, it is an essential question for creating the future.

Recent SFP Change Agents projects have included connecting a Palestinian town to the national electric grid, planning ‘wetlands’ waste treatment projects in towns that lack sewage systems in the Palestinian Territories, developing organic seed exchanges for Palestinian and Israeli farmers.

Change Agent’s Program for Lawyers

The second cohort of Jewish and Arab Lawyers, focused on Human Rights, held its 2nd meeting at the end of February. Coming up next: a meeting with Ayman Odeh, head of the Arab Joint Political List, exploring a proposal to establish a new Jewish-Arab political party. Political journalist Meron Rapoport spoke about the developing cooperation between Jewish and Arab national politicians and what he sees as the fading Israeli identity, and the role of society and government.

Ongoing

The Change Agent program for leaders in mixed cities begins April 17, 2020. April 10th saw the second meeting of the graduate Change Agents mental health professionals program. Change Agents graduate planners, architects and engineers’ graduates are meeting with the Arab Center for Alternative Planning. All are focused on real-time changes on the ground.

International Rescuers Day

This spring, the **Garden of Rescuers** celebrated International Rescuers Day by honoring several Jews and Palestinians who acted according to their conscience rather than to the expected behavior at the time. **The Garden of Rescuers**, an outgrowth of the village’s Pluralistic Spiritual Center, was founded by community member Dr. Yair Auron, a specialist in Holocaust and Genocide studies, and conceived as a memorial to those of every nation and faith who act, without hesitation and without reward, to save those who others would see as their enemy.

Recognized at this year’s ceremony were the late Issa Kurdia, a landlord who sheltered his Jewish tenants during the riots of 1929; monks from the Latrun Monastery, who sheltered Palestinian refugees during the 1967 war; and Bella Freund, a bystander who prevented the lynching of a Palestinian youth.

In 1992, hostilities were again ramping up between Israelis and Palestinians. One day in May, a Palestinian youth living in a refugee camp outside Jerusalem stabbed two Jewish teenagers and fled, pursued by an angry crowd. Bella Freund, a daughter of Holocaust survivors, was passing by when she saw the youth fleeing unarmed and decided to intervene, feeling compelled to prevent more bloodshed.



Bella Freund honored at NSWAS

Her actions saved the youth's life, and she was praised by many including Israel's chief rabbi for her courage. Bella was able to attend the ceremony at the **Garden of Rescuers** and accept her award, a great privilege for Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam.

All three of the honorees serve as examples, encouraging others to be courageous, to protect human life and prevent more violence.

Pluralistic Spiritual Center

Since its founding, the **Pluralistic Spiritual Center, (PSC)** at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has promoted interfaith connections between the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities through the arts, study, research and dialogue. The Center has led groups of young adults through walking tours of religious and cultural history, held interfaith community celebrations, hosted Ramadan Iftar, Passover seders and Christmas activities and held Palestinian/Jewish book and film launches and discussions with attendees from as far away as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and as close as Abu Ghosh and Carmel Josef.



Doumia Sakina at the Spiritual Center

The newest **PSC** program, Truth and Reconciliation in the Context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, focuses on the Abrahamic traditions, giving religious leaders practical tools to take a mutual stand against intolerance and injustice, key to reducing religious conflict in the region and advancing peace. The **PSC** equips young religious leaders to guide their communities towards mutual acceptance, respect and cooperation. Seventeen young religious leaders will be recruited from diverse communities in the area. Over the course of a year, they will meet at the **PSC**, build personal connections and create shared initiatives to engage their congregations. Rabbis for Human Rights is partnering with the **PSC** to support participants through the program and beyond. These leaders will be the future of inter-religious peace in the region, forming strong networks among Muslim, Christian and Jewish congregations, an essential condition for building confidence and trust.

After the Corona Virus - The Primary School Playground



Children in the playground area.

In challenging times like these, a playground is more important than ever. With the **Primary School** now operating virtually, playing with friends is a treasured memory for the children of NSWAS. It will be the first activity they will return to when schools reopen.

Currently, the playground is empty. Swings, slides, and climbers were removed due to new Ministry of Education safety regulations. Fundraising committees have been created in the village with the purpose of renewing the "Purple Playground of Friendship".

Vital to the mission of the school, the **Primary School's** playground is where Hebrew and Arabic are used interchangeably, where Jewish and Arab children play as equals, where empathy builds bilingual friendships across cultural divides.

The playground will be recreated, area by area, driven by the vision of the students, the new design and a one-section-at-a-time-fundraising plan. Your generosity has already made the expectation of that first section possible.

When the COVID-19 crisis is history, the playground will once again strengthen friendships, support bilingualism and build immunity to fears and stereotypes. We are all stronger together.



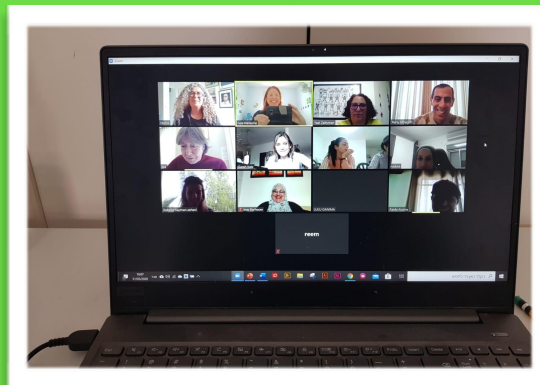
School computers can't go home.
Laptop tablets can

COVID-19 and the need for laptops to lend

The **Primary School's** evolving distance learning program, thanks to COVID-19, is essential. Students need and want to continue their education while schools are closed. Teachers have developed interactive lessons and hold individual conferences. WhatsApp, email and FaceBook provide support around the edges.

Distance learning requires access to a computer, a serious challenge for families with one laptop shared among several children and adults, or with limited internet access or with no computers at all! The **Primary School** is committed to full student and family participation. Since children must stay at home, the school is purchasing additional low-cost laptops to be loaned out to every child in need.

And when schools are once again allowed to open, the laptops will be returned to the school Library, ready for use as soon as the next need arises.



First Arabic Lesson

Jewish Teachers Learning Arabic

All of the teachers at the NSWAS Primary School are committed to its bicultural/ multicultural and bilingual mission. Some of the teachers have an additional challenge to meet. While all Israeli Arabic-dominant speakers grow up bilingual in Arabic and Hebrew (because Hebrew is the national language) most Hebrew-dominant speakers have lives that don't require any Arabic language at all. With fewer formal school hours of instruction, Hebrew-dominant teachers are using this as an opportunity to extend their knowledge of, and fluency in, Arabic. Currently, they are, as a group, taking video-conferencing classes twice a week, at varying levels depending on their skills. These courses are being done as a response to an unexpected opportunity and as a pilot, with process and results assessed after a month to determine how to proceed.

Teacher Salary Fundraiser

In addition to core subjects, the Primary School student's learning is enriched by music, art, environmental studies, culture, second and third language, civic engagement and technology. The Ministry of Education, during this period of school closures, does not cover salaries for teachers responsible for these subjects and, since all non-core teachers must take a leave, community parents have come together to ensure that all twelve of these teachers will not have to go on leave without pay. The parent group and the school have committed to continuing their salaries which will need our support as well, so that these enrichment faculty do not carry additional hardship during this period. The children will benefit since these teachers will engage them in the enrichment program during the coming summer.



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Planned Giving

Will your legacy continue your commitment to the work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam?
A bequest or a planned gift to AFNSWAS keeps your commitment.

The new CARES act allows for cash contributions to qualified charities such as AFNSWAS to be deducted up to 100% of your adjusted gross income for the 2020 calendar year. The new CARES act allows all taxpayers to take a charitable deduction of up to \$300, even if you do not itemize.

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