



Oasis of Peace

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

Winter 2022 Newsletter

One Community, One Voice

Dear American Friends,

Because we have been friends with those in the Village for decades now, we know how integral this example of peace and brotherhood truly is—now more than ever. And because we have been in the work of building peace for so long, we know how desperately some will try to knock that work off course. But this does not stop us. This cannot stop us.

We are writing to you with good news of the excellent work still happening every day at the Oasis of Peace. The Primary School is making new strides in building bilingual community from childhood; the School for Peace continues to expand programming to activate the talents of peace workers from every walk of life; and the wider Neve Shalom-Wahat al Salam community live every day with this mission of peace in mind.

Imagine then, their gratitude that you live with this mission in mind as well. The American Friends have support the Village as they build deeply-rooted partnerships and programs throughout the region. Your support makes everything they do possible. No matter that there are those who wish to harm these communities and partnerships, we all stand together. And because we are all together, we make progress toward building a just and durable peace.

Wishing you happy holidays and a joyous New Year,

Joan C. Waller, Co-President and the Board of AFNSWAS

IN MEMORIAM

With renewed commitment to the cause of peace through NSWAS, we honor the memory of our beloved Gordie Fellman who recently passed away unexpectedly at the age of 88. Gordie was an influential and key board member of the American Friends of NSWAS and was a dear friend and a mentor to so many. He was a member of the Brandeis faculty for almost sixty years, and retired from teaching just in fall 2020. Over the years, he inspired generations of students to think critically, be self-reflective, and engage in social action. As a former student commented at his June 2022 retirement gathering, Gordie conveyed warmth, passion, and concern for students as people. He invited students to join him in an inquiring approach to education. Countless students have spoken of the profound personal growth they experienced in his classes, and the ways Gordie inspired them to make the world a better place.

Gordie was chair of the Sociology Department from 1974-1976, and again from 1984-1987. As well as being a faculty member of the Sociology Department, he was a co-founder and, from 1990 on, served as chair of the interdisciplinary Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies Program (originally called Peace Studies Program, and later, Peace and Conflict Studies Program). Most recently he was awarded the '2021 Peace Educator-Scholar Award' for excellence in scholarship and dedication to peace education by The Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA). His work on the board of the American Friends was an integral part of bringing his scholarship into action, building and maintaining the Oasis of Peace we all know and love. This holiday season, please consider a gift in his honor to further his life's work.



Get to Know the Students of the Primary School

Primary and Secondary education in Israel is, when public, a segregated space with schools for Jewish children and schools for Arab children. The exceptions are schools like the NSWAS Primary School and the small but vital number of schools that have adopted the NSWAS bilingual, bi-and-multicultural approach and curriculum. The region in which NSWAS is located decided, suddenly, to open a regional school for Jewish children. The imbalance this caused in this year's enrollment and Jewish/Arab Primary School balance was significant although not likely to be long-lasting. Stay tuned as we share the Primary School's planning and forecast for 2023-24.

Welcoming New Students

The opening ceremony included a heart-warming opportunity to greet new students from NSWAS and 21 local communities, and welcome back those returning - the first time the school has been able to gather together at the start of the school year since the beginning of the pandemic. The occasion was celebrated with rainbow streamers and songs performed by the children.

Welcome back, students!



Learning Leadership on the Student Council

While some student council elections may add up to little more than a popularity contest, the students at NSWAS Primary School (PS) take their elections very seriously, whether as candidates or voters. Their words are a lesson for us all.



Student candidates gave speeches before the entire student body.

Itai Arbel, also in sixth grade, has attended PS with Muhammed since the 1st grade and will join him on the student council as the Jewish head of the student governance body. "I ran for a couple of reasons. I don't think my job is to just make the changes I think up. I represent all the students. I need to find out what the other students want and then try to change things according to that."

A student supports a friend's campaign.



Communication Station: Welcome to the PS Language Center



Teachers Lutfiah and Ilanit heading the language center.

The Language Center brings together many of the core values of the Primary School into one multi-modal learning center dedicated to the development of a bilingual, multi-national school community practicing powerful cross-cultural communication. The physical structure is complete on the outside, including a grassy outside area and colorful walls, and the inside is progressing right on schedule. Bookcases and room dividers for different sections of the center, beanbag chairs and regular chairs and tables, props for role-playing, books, tablets, and more are ready to be placed over the winter break.

But even more exciting than the building is the program that is taking shape. Two primary school instructors, Lutfiah and Ilanit, have taken charge of the project, and they are working with the organization Madrasa, which develops Arabic-language programming for schools, to create an entirely new kind of language-learning program – the first of its kind in Israel. This multi-modal language learning center will allow for the latest pedagogic research to be put into practice, allowing students to role-play real-world activities and build genuine conversational mastery of their second (and third!) languages.

Nir Sharon, PS Educational Director: “The theory of peer learning is that children learn language best when they learn from one another. They learn to speak to one another, to explain to one another, and to help one another understand. It can be in a group or one-on-one. That way, we are working on strengthening the social network of the school and building friendships and at the same time we are teaching language skills.”

But Sharon, Lutfiah, and Ilanit are not working alone - they have been meeting with the entire primary school teaching staff to ensure the Language Center activities tie into the PS’s overall HOTAM (Education, Culture and Tradition) curriculum. And, of course, parents are an integral part of the learning process. In addition to assisting with preparations, parents will soon be able to participate even more fully, as in the next several years there are plans to open the Language Center to the wider school community as well.

Meet the Parents of the Primary School

Nearly a quarter of the PS parents are an active part of the Parents’ Community, and these numbers are growing. This official school organization is not unlike a group of “room parents” or the “P.T.A.” groups with which we might be familiar in the U.S. Parents help out with day-to-day and special activities, help plan celebrations for holidays, birthdays, and field trips.

Students and parents took part in several exciting field trips this semester, including participating in World Walking Day in October with a group hike.

A favorite field trip activity is always olive picking in neighboring villages. While this semester finding a safe location for our olive picking proved more challenging than in other years, the PS was grateful to be welcomed by the village of Deir Istiya. Students and parents got to pick olives, learn about the cultivation tradition, spend time with neighbors, and enjoy the beautiful view.



Playing in the trees on the olive-picking trip.



World Walking Day participants enjoy the great outdoors.

Muhammed and Itai: Newly Elected Heads of the Student Council

Muhammed and Itai, sixth-graders at the school, were elected to head the student council. Muhammed Hasnin, 11 years old and in sixth-grade, was recently elected the Arab head of the student council for the Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom primary school. He said: “My friends and my parents all supported the idea. So I ran for head of the student council – which I’ll lead together with a Jewish head – and I won!”

Muhammed is active in the Nadi youth club and participates in soccer and drama classes after school. He lives in Wahat al-Salam, and has attended the primary school since first grade. He loves the village and his school friends.

His mother, Nibal, is a member of the governing board of the educational association. She is a lawyer by profession and Muhammed’s father, Walid, is a dentist. Walid says: “Muhammed is very popular in school. He really cares, and it is important to him to be involved in everything. We were a bit worried about the stress and competitiveness of the elections – a process in which there are winners and losers – but that is part of life. He learned that the election process demanded a lot of work and responsibility. Of course, we are happy for him that he won, and we wish him a lot of success in what is his last year in the school.”

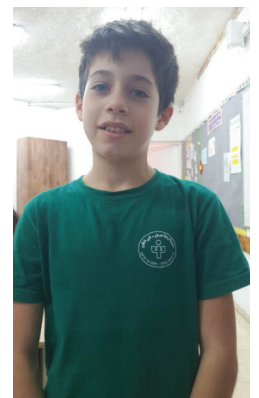
Nibal: “I am so proud of the school, the principal, and his teacher for giving these kids a real hands-on lesson in democracy. With the political situation in the country right now and the rise of the far right, I think it is important to give these kids hope. **Maybe they’ll even become leaders in the future – ones who work through democracy and promote peace. Where are the schools that teach this? It’s a lesson that, in my eyes, is even more important than math or science, and I’m hoping they succeed.**”

Muhammed has many plans for how he wants to advance the school community. He wants to improve the playground and to make some all-star sports teams, as well as organize activities that are challenging and fun for the students. In his mind, these would be group-building activities that bring Jewish and Arab students together.

Itai Arbel, the newly-elected Jewish head of the student council, lives in the nearby moshav Mishmar Ayalon, and he has been traveling to the Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom primary school since first grade. The day before the elections, just before each of the candidates presented their platforms in front of the school community, Itai and about five of his best friends ran around the schoolyard hanging hand-lettered signs that said “Vote for Itai” in Hebrew, Arabic and English. Itai speaks politely, with intelligence beyond his years.

“Other kids put more of an effort into getting elected than I did,” he says. “Some even had T-shirts. I think they voted for me because I had something new to offer them. Some students have already asked to have the library and gym open during breaks. Activities during breaks are a big issue with the students, but things are already much better than when I started at the school. There is more playground equipment, for example. Still, recess needs to be fun.”

Itai likes sports – he has soccer and basketball practice several days a week, as well as Scouts’ meetings. He likes to read, to be outside and to go hang out with his friends. The oldest of three, Itai’s younger brothers are in second grade and kindergarten at the primary school. His mother is a teaching assistant at Tel Aviv University and the Reichman Institute and his father is the founder and head of a tech firm.



Giving Today Builds a Brighter Tomorrow

For more than three decades, the support of the American Friends of the Oasis of Peace has been integral to building peace in this fraught region. Now more than ever, this support is not only valued and appreciated, but deeply needed. Please join us and make a tax-deductible donation in support of the Oasis of Peace’s many programs and overall mission of creating a lasting peace.

The School for Peace: In Brief



SFP staff on their retreat in Nazareth.

In November, the School for Peace (SFP) staff took a weekend retreat to plan for their next year of activating programs for a diverse assemblage of students, professionals, and peace-workers.

The expansion of graduate programming and support, a top priority for 2022, will continue to grow into the next year. SFP graduates are being encouraged to run for seats on their professional committees, and four Palestinian SFP graduates were submitted for candidacy for key positions in the Israel Planners Association elections in November. Follow-up discussion groups have also been taking place

for graduates of University courses as the SFP prepares to embark on courses at five campuses in 2023. Facilitation work continued this winter in Jaffa and Beer Sheba, and a new simultaneous translation course began this winter in order to deepen understanding during bilingual discussion groups across the SFP's programming.



Meet and greets during the first meeting of the facilitators course in Ajeec's tent in Beer Sheba.

The School for Peace Grads Appear Before the Supreme Court

Two graduates of the School for Peace (SFP) Change Agents courses, Michael Sfard and Shaked Morag, appeared before the Israeli Supreme Court in support of Palestinians cut off from their agricultural land and from nearby Beit Lehem (Bethlehem) by an expansion of the Efrat \ settlement. Michael Sfard is a prominent Human Rights lawyer and Shaked Morag is leader of Peace Now.

Nava Sonnenschein, Director of the SFP, expressed understandable frustration with the outcomes that day, although she remained hopeful about the SFP graduates and the ongoing support they are receiving for their work: "What we taught our graduates is: Never give up."



Michael Sfard argues the case.



L to R: Nava Schonenschein, Shaked Morag, Michael Sfard, and the plaintiffs.

Please Join Us For the AFNSWAS Israel/Palestine Tour April 27 - May 7, 2023

Presented jointly by AFNSWAS and MEJDI Tours, the Israel/Palestine Spring Tour, 2023 will be centered at the Oasis of Peace, the only intentional community of Israeli Jews and Palestinians living together. Remember, you'll need to register by **February 12th.**

Spend in-depth time at the Village, absorb its mission, history and educational programs while also taking part in excursions and encounters with complementary organizations and historically-significant sites around the country. **You** are an integral part of our mission to build a durable peace - now you can join in person!

Learn More & Book Your Space at <https://www.oasisofpeace.org/>

BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE IN PEACE



Oasis of Peace

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Leave a Legacy of Peace

Consider supporting Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam through planned giving. Even the smallest gifts have a big impact over time. Choose to support the areas that mean the most to you—Israeli Jewish/Palestinian conflict transformation, youth leadership, arts initiatives, spiritual encounters, humanitarian aid, and more. Your generosity will sustain the Village's inspiring work for decades to come.

**THE OPTIONS
INCLUDE:**

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Planned giving is a powerful way to express your enduring commitment to peace while at the same time achieving both personal and financial security. Planned gifts offer substantial tax savings to donors, especially on appreciated properties and securities, and can reduce income tax and avoid capital gains tax.

Make peace a lasting part of your legacy. For more information, contact The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam by emailing afnswas@oasisofpeace.org or calling (818) 662-8883.

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