

Fall 2012

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam



Dear Friends,

This summer we at the American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam had the pleasure of welcoming **Nava Sonnenschein, co-founder of the School for Peace, in California**. This was a great opportunity for us to work together with some of our dedicated supporters to spread the word about recent developments and major achievements in the "Oasis of Peace." For those of you who couldn't meet her you will enjoy reading about her work and the village latest updates from the village in this newsletter.

Thanks to the help of friends like you, the Primary school continues to expand Jewish and Palestinian children's horizons to include peaceful living with the other. The School for Peace is working tirelessly to reach as many influential people as possible to improve relations between the two communities for the long run. The Pluralistic Spiritual Center just hired a new director, Dafna Karta Schwartz, to replace Abdessalam Najjar and relaunch its programs. And, last but not least, the World Peace College is set to new beginnings, as you will read in this newsletter.

We are also delighted to share with you that **the June attack against the village left the residents and staff more determined than ever to stand for peaceful coexistence**. The support we at the American Friends received from you in response to the vandalism has gone beyond our hopes and thanks to your generosity we will be able to support programs at the Primary School to help children and teachers cope with the conflict and how it impacts their personal lives.

On a much sadder note, we just learned of **a tragic loss in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam: Ahmad Hijazi and his son, Adam, died in a car accident**. Ahmad came to the village as a teenager and later moved there with his family. Ahmad was the head of the School for Peace since 2008 and since last year had been working with us to launch the World Peace College. The shock of these deaths leaves us speechless but we continue to look forward and will work with the village to honor Ahmad's legacy. We remember Ahmad and Adam in this newsletter.

Your support today to the essential work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is more important than ever: when all we hear reminds us of tense relations between Jews and Palestinians or the threat of a new war in the region, **Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam represents our main source of hope for the future**. Yes, Palestinians and Jews can live together as equals and in peace: they do everyday in the "Oasis of Peace."

You know how important it is to sustain the work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, because you believe in peace. **We trust that you will join our efforts today with the largest gift you can make. Thank you!**

In gratitude,

Perrine Vaillant
Executive Director

Deanna Armbruster
US Director NSWAS Peace College
& Other Special Initiatives

Because you believe in Peace.

An insight into the life of the “Oasis of Peace” and the work of the School for Peace

Nava Sonnenschein, Director of Adult Programs at the School for Peace, was among the first families to move to Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam in the 1970s and co-founded the School for Peace in 1979.



How was your visit to Los Angeles?

I enjoyed my visit very much; I spoke to a lot of people, in public events and private meetings. The response was very positive. I hope more people learned about the village and its programs and will want to support us. Overall it was good to see all these friends of the village. Now I wish we could make new contacts in the entertainment industry and find younger supporters.

What is the village's current situation in terms of expansion?

Ninety more families will be moving to the village in the next 10 years; 30 plan to move in the next couple years and have started building their houses. Among the newcomers are young people who grew up in the village and now have their own families.

There is a waiting list of more than 100 families. We just had a workshop at the School for Peace for 12 candidate families; a special committee is in charge of recruiting and selecting the new families.

What has happened in the village after the June attack?

Two brothers who participate in our Change Agent programs from the West Bank offered to come support the village. They are famous caricaturists and organized a day of painting for the children, the parents and members of the village. There are now beautiful paintings on the school's buildings. A lot of people came from around the country to show their support and we received very supportive media coverage after the attack. Unfortunately, we don't have much confidence in the police's efforts to find the people responsible for the attack.

We have to learn how to protect ourselves from such attacks. We are stronger and more determined than ever to continue our work, as a community and in our programs at the Primary School and the School for Peace. We need support more than ever because we were under this attack, plus the government has been working to limit all peace groups' financial ability to run programs. Thankfully, a bill forbidding NGOs to raise more than \$20,000 a year from abroad was recently blocked. However, another bill was passed stating that an institution that gets funding from the government and mentions the Nakba (the Palestinian catastrophe in 1948) will see its funding cut – this will directly impact the Primary School if it is implemented.

Could you describe how the School for Peace and its work are evolving?

In the first years, we developed our method and organized a lot of youth encounters for 5 and then 3 days with young Jews and Palestinians from all over Israel. Later on, we started working with four universities. People who participated in our training 20 years ago, sometimes more, are still active in peacebuilding today.

In the past decade, we saw how effective the method is and how deep is the change we create in people. But we realized we needed to upgrade our programs to get even more impact: creating inner change is not enough, we need to help people to translate it into action, activism. Now we help lawyers, environmentalists, journalists, up-and-coming politicians, and other influential professionals to have an impact in their field.

Journalists, for example, choose their words differently after participating in our programs, they include the other side when telling a story. We educate future leaders in Israel and Palestine, so they share values of equality and peace.

In the next decade we will continue to be action-oriented. With the World Peace College, at the Fred Segal Friendship Library, we will do more to bring academics to discuss the issues of conflict. We will offer long and short programs for a wide range of students and professionals.

We are becoming a center for peace organizations in the region. We are also thinking of developing centers in different mixed cities in Israel and in Palestine where our values will take place. This will allow us to activate our network of graduates.

The Library will become home for cultural and healthy living activities for the surrounding area, where the community can meet and learn.

How is the School for Peace impacting the situation in the region?

In more than 30 years of work, 60,000 people participated in the School for Peace's programs; we have so many success stories. Just recently, a Jewish journalist who works for Maariv newspaper, and participates in our current Change Agent program, hired two Arabs who will now be able to give another perspective to Maariv's readers – they are the first ever to work for this publication. A joint team of Jewish and Palestinian environmentalists are working on a project to treat water in wetlands. A settler fought against relocating Bedouins next to a dumping area, he probably wouldn't have done this before coming to the School for Peace. Graduates are replicating our programs at their universities. Some of them were among the initiating forces for the demonstrations last year.

We can't influence the whole society but from the thousands of graduates we do manage to have a very strong impact. We are only limited by the lack of funding; most of our programs don't receive much support. But our method is now used internationally, the village itself has become a model; four schools were created based on the model of our Primary School. People are looking very closely to see if we succeed. Many see Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam as their hope for the future. It's not about how many people live in the village, it's about how many we influence outside through our educational programs.

Children of Hebron enjoy a summer of fun in the Oasis of Peace

In July, thanks to international donors like you, the Primary School of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (NSWAS) hosted a new Summer Camp for some 45 Palestinian children between the age of 9 and 13. All the children came from the Hebron area. The summer camp was based in the village, with excursions to Jaffa – Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and surrounding areas. Reem Nashef, teacher at the school and coordinator of the camp, reports.



Once again, the Palestinian camp was a great success. In the beginning I was worried and even hesitant when asked to lead the Camp: Anwar [the school's principal] had made arrangements with a group from Hebron. The political situation there is tense, due to persistent clashes between Jews and Arabs in the old city. The children have terrible experiences due to bad relations with Jewish settlers. I thought that the children would be unwilling to accept the idea of Neve Shalom - Wahat al Salam, or to meet Jewish people here.

I actually found that the children were really eager to learn and accept. I felt that they were thirsty for every bit of fun we had prepared for them. The children were well behaved, well educated, very well organized and tidy. They were very humble and sensitive children who showed great respect and care with regard to everything we talked about or taught them.

We patiently and respectfully listened to the children whenever they wanted to tell us about their own experiences. In talking about their hopes and expectations, many of the children expressed their wish to see different cities and villages in Israel. They said that this was the first time they had been outside the Hebron area.

They asked if we could take them to see a train station and the airport - they wanted to see how big a plane is! They asked questions such as "how fast can a train travel?"

It was a joy to follow their reactions to all their new encounters and experiences. One boy, on visiting the swimming pool, stressed how lucky we were to have so much water to play with! They were so excited to see the tall buildings of Tel-Aviv (even trying to count how many stories the buildings had!!), and the sea: they were eager to feel the water and the waves on them. On the journey there, they constantly asked when would we reach the sea shore and asked all sorts of questions about the waves.

In the evening they would speak more of their experience in Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom, asking questions about how we live and how life is in the village. They enjoyed working with Michal (a Jewish teacher who volunteered her time). She gave them a bubbles workshop outside. They were able to talk to her in English, and asked many questions about her and about her children. They also enjoyed working with Diana Shaloufi Rizik (A Christian Arab member of the village), who had volunteered to work with them on their drawings.

They were happy to have this opportunity to see and experience Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam. But it was a greater fulfillment of a wish for them to see Jerusalem and the holy sites. We were not able to take them into the Haram as-Sharif (Temple Mount area) or into the Dome of the Rock, since we did not receive police permission, but they were still happy to see it from afar!

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam will serve as a laboratory for studying conflict and peace education around the world.

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is hard at work developing the **World Peace College**. In the coming years the goal is to offer a Master of Art's degree, approved by the Council of Higher Education in Israel, in Peace & Conflict Studies. Students will be trained as activists in the field of conflict resolution, prepared to work in civil society either with groups in conflict or on the political and policy level. This will be achieved by linking theory and practice with critical perspective, examining the interaction between the micro and macro levels of inter-group conflict, building habits of reflective practice within individuals, and highlighting the interactions between individual, group and community levels. A multi-disciplinary curriculum is being developed to draw from conflict resolution, political science, history, social psychology, anthropology, religious studies, gender & cultural studies, economics, philosophy and sociology.

As a way forward, we are partnering with universities in the United States, building a teacher enrichment program, establishing a research institute and equipping the Fred Segal Friendship Library.

Partnership

The University of Massachusetts-Boston (UMB) is helping to prepare the World Peace College through a partnership with its graduate program in Conflict Resolution. UMB will offer a Master of Arts degree for local and international students at the "Oasis of Peace" with its own faculty and others from the region. UMB was among the first universities in the United States to offer graduate programs in the critical areas of international conflict, conflict management and dispute resolution. The program is designed to provide students with the ability to understand and intervene effectively in conflict situations. Students learn about the causes, dynamics, and consequences of conflict in different settings. The partnership will also offer opportunities to explore peace-building techniques using the lens of the local Jewish-Arab Israeli-Palestinian reality and the 35 years knowledge and experience of the "Oasis of Peace" as a model for study.

Teacher Enrichment Model

A teacher enrichment program for Israeli, Palestinian and international teachers is in development. Courses, along with time spent in the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam Primary School with teachers experienced in working in binational, bilingual, multicultural classrooms, will train teachers and students in the field of education to integrate peace education practices, bilingual pedagogy, and strategies for using conflict as a source of learning into their professional skill set.



Fred Segal Friendship Library

The village, with the support of the American and Swiss Friends, are equipping the state-of-the-art Fred Segal Friendship Library (photo). The facility now hosts "smart classrooms" for residential and online students to connect seamlessly with faculty in a virtual environment via sophisticated technology. Through the partnership with the UMB students will have unobstructed access to the university library system.

Research Institute

Efforts are underway to open a Research Institute as a worldwide center for study and experimentation. The institute will promote research on how to bridge the gap between dialogue and peace activism, gather important archival materials, and initiate conferences, workshops and lectures to further the study and practice of dialogue and peace activism.

Remembering Ahmad Hijazi, Director of the School for Peace, and his son Adam

"The Oasis of Peace is based on the principle of full equality - we promote equality, not only in theory. Achieving peace for us, lies in how well we influence and change the people involved in the activities of the School for Peace, towards strengthening the principle of equality. We know political change might not directly happen through these activities, even if it is the ultimate goal, but we do find that the proportion of people who become active after graduating from our programs, is far greater than we expected." - Ahmad Hijazi

On August 20, Ahmad Hijazi and his 9-year old son Adam were killed in a car accident in Zanzibar. Ahmad's wife Maram was injured in the same accident. Their 18-year old son Esam was not with them. The family were long-term members of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, having come to live here permanently in 1992. Ahmad was a very central and active person in the community and until the time of his death was directing the School for Peace. He was born in 1967 to a working class family in the village of Tamra in the Western Galilee.



Ahmad's first formal encounter with "the other people" was when at the age of 13 he took part in a school exchange. Children from a nearby town came to visit Tamra and each family took two Jewish children home for the day. The meeting was not facilitated and communication was difficult, but Ahmad's mother made them feel at home. A month later there was supposed to be a reciprocal visit to the Jewish children. However this didn't materialize. The Jewish children were embarrassed to not be able to offer the Arab children the same hospitality, and didn't show up to take them to their homes. The flawed encounter caused many hard feelings among the Arab children, and so had an opposite effect from the one that the organizers had intended.

But Ahmad did not give up on the idea of encounter with Jewish people. When he was in high school, he chose to take part in an encounter offered by the School for Peace between his school and a Jewish school. He expected the encounter to be mainly fun, but was surprised by its serious nature. He was especially shocked that the two sides were treated equally, which was reflected in everything, from the facilitation to the seating arrangement in the room. This helped Ahmad to become aware of the existing inequalities between the two peoples which, though unconsciously absorbed and internalized, were seldom spoken about.

The encounter made such a strong impression on Ahmad that in 1985 he came to live, study and volunteer in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam for a whole year and took part in a long-term Jewish-Arab group facilitation training organized by the School for Peace. Ahmad kept strong connections with NSWAS while attending Hebrew University, where he majored in sociology. After graduation in 1991, he continued for MA studies in the same subject. In the meantime, he married Maram, whom he had met during a School for Peace encounter. The couple came to live in the village in 1992.

During all his years in WAS-NS, Ahmad served as an active and devoted member of the community. He worked not only for the School for Peace, where he became part of the management team, but also, between 1995-1997, as secretary of the village. Later, from 2003 to 2008, he served as director of Communications and Development. In a voluntary capacity, he took charge of the village's humanitarian aid program. From 2008, until his death, he directed the School for Peace. In recent years he developed the concept and programs for the World Peace College.

Ahmad lectured at a number of institutions of higher education in Israel and was a board member of several NGOs. He authored several publications, most recently co-editing an anthology of the Palestinian and Jewish poetry, *Two People Write from Right to Left*, published by the School for Peace. Throughout his active career he continued to study, gaining an MA in organizational behavior in 2007.

Ahmad's son Adam was known to be a precocious, popular and self-confident child at the Primary School. Even while in first grade he was able to speak articulately about subjects like democracy and politics, and whenever a visitor wanted to speak to children at the school, Adam was always eager to comply. This September, he would have entered his fourth year at the school. It is hard to estimate the loss to the world of both Ahmad and Adam. But for the village of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam they will be missed as beloved members of our small community.

Pursuing Ahmad Hijazi's Dream

In this issue, we honor Ahmad and Adam Hijazi's lives, and work with the "Oasis of Peace" to fulfill Ahmad's dream of a peaceful future for Jews and Palestinians.

The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has set up a fundraising campaign to fund the World Peace College, Ahmad's latest project.

You can contribute at www.indiegogo.com/worldpeacecollegeahmadhijazi or use the enclosed giving card.



Adopt a class this fall!



This fall, you can **adopt the second grade class at the Primary School and support the 27 children** and their two teachers - one Jewish, one Palestinian - this school year.

The school needs \$42,600 to cover the class' expenses, after government funding and tuition fees paid by the parents. We are committed to raise this **new generation of young people who understand the meaning of peace and equality** and to maintain the school's unique environment, where mutual respect and understanding are fostered. **We cannot accomplish this without your help.**

Learn more at www.oasisofpeace.org/adopt-a-class
and mention "Second grade" when making your donation today.



The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is a not-for-profit organization with 501(c)(3) status under the Internal Revenue Code.

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