Dear Friends,

Did you know that just in the past few months, thanks to your generosity, the American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam was able to provide support for the Primary School’s first grade class, its Language Laboratory program, and its Zoo, and students' tuitions? We also provided seed money for the organization of one youth encounter at the School for Peace, for the launch of the Peace College and its programs for students and scholars in the U.S. and Israel, and for the Massa-Massar program for Jewish, Muslim and Christian youth at the Pluralistic Spiritual Center. You make it possible for us to carry our mission to make peace a reality.

We want to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude for your gifts; they transform the dream of a better future into the reality of a life-changing present.

Of course, we are still going through a rough time financially, and the American Friends has had to make some difficult choices this past year to sustain its capacity to support the educational programs of the “Oasis of Peace.” But we are happy to report that, because of these choices, more than 82% of your gifts went directly to programs in the last fiscal year and we hope that this will encourage you to renew your support.

Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is like no other place in the world. Its residents and the staff working for its educational programs have created a unique community where Israeli Jews and Palestinians together can build a peaceful future for the generations to come. But it is philanthropists like you who make it a reality by enabling these programs to exist and impact hundreds of children, youth and adults every year.

We trust that you will feel as inspired as we are by the stories we share in this newsletter and we sincerely hope you will consider making the largest gift you can today. Thank you!

The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’s Executive Committee
Gordon Webster, Jeanine Shama, Judith Tuller, David Matz and Deborah First

You shared your passion for peace with us

“Your village is my ideal and wish for all of Israel/Palestine. Why can’t the whole country follow your example?” - Rosemarie

“I was in Jerusalem in 1993 and visited the Oasis of Peace. I was so thrilled and overjoyed seeing how the Jews and Palestinians lived and got along so well together! I keep praying it will happen soon in all Palestine and Israel!” - Lois

“I love the fact that you encourage and facilitate understanding and caring among people of different and sometimes hostile cultures.” - Nessa

“We are grateful there is such a stellar example demonstrating that yes, peaceful and collaborative coexistence is real and possible.” - Genevieve & Will

“You are turning swords into plowshares.” - Carmel

“We are heartened by the courage, hope and resilience of village residents and supporters.” - Patricia & Aaron

Because you believe in Peace.
Hanan Nafar: a student returns as a teacher

This year, for the first time, a former student at the Primary School has returned to the school as a teacher trainee, having just completed her studies at a teacher's college in Tel Aviv.

Hanan Nafar came to the Primary School in the fourth grade, in the 1990s. She was the second child in the family to attend the school. Her older brother and later a younger brother attended too. The family lived in the nearby mixed Jewish-Arab town of Lod (Lydda). Neither of Hanan's parents were originally from Lod. Her father's family came originally from Jaffa, while her mother's family is from Majdal (the Palestinian town that later became Ashkelon).

The Primary School was not Hanan's first experience with Jewish children, since she had previously attended a Jewish kindergarten. However, she came to the school after three years in an Arab primary school. On arriving at the Primary School at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, she settled in well and still has happy memories from her time there. Boaz Kitain and Dyana Shaloufi were the co-principals at the time.

“It is nice to return to the school and work alongside teachers who originally taught me like Anwar, Raida, Hezzi, Yasmin and Aisheh,” says Hanan. The school that she attended was much smaller and has matured considerably in the intervening years. But asked if she has noticed a change in the teaching methods, she confesses that she does not remember so well.

After graduating from the Oasis of Peace school Hanan went to a normal Arab public school in Lod, and then to the Kibbutz Seminary where she was trained as a primary school teacher. Now she is teaching the 1st to the 4th grade children Arabic together with Lutfiya and Nadwa, and Hebrew together with Yael. She hopes to remain on staff after her practicum. “I enjoy the friendly and respectful atmosphere at the school and among the teachers,” concludes Hanan.

A School for Peace workshop for young Americans this summer

For 4 days in August 2012, the American Friends is creating an opportunity for 40 young Americans to participate in a series of dialogues on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in Vermont. This workshop is for young American Arabs and Jews (18-26) and others interested in developing an awareness of the ethnic/social relations and conflicts that exist in our society.

Two facilitators from the School for Peace (one Palestinian, one Jewish) will facilitate this 4-day program.

This program will take place at OscarsFarm, a 40-acre retreat center located in West Burke, Vermont. Oscarsfarm features an organic vegetable garden, winding trails and pure spring water. Guests to this event will enjoy opportunities to hike, swim, and share Iftar dinners with the Muslim participants observing the Ramadan fast.

We are now accepting applications for this event. All those interested in participating should visit our website at www.oasisofpeace.org/oscarsfarm-workshops/ or email us at 2012workshops@oasisofpeace.org.

Registration fee is $150, which includes all food and lodging. Partial or total scholarships may be available upon request.

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Peace College Programs Open in Partnership with US Universities

The Peace College conducted its first course in January at the University of Massachusetts-Boston (UMB). Professionals, graduate students and undergrads explored “Experiential Dialogue and Inter-Group Conflict,” engaging in intensive dialogue addressing political, economic, social and cultural differences between groups in conflict. The Founding Director of the Peace College, Ahmad Hijazi, guided discussions breaking down what divides people and teaching how to build respect for each other. The students also learned how to facilitate small group dialogues and practiced peer facilitation.

In June, UMB Professor Darren Kew will conduct a course for international, as well as Israeli and Palestinian students. The course "Scaling Up: From Grassroots Conflict Resolution Efforts to National and Policy Impacts" will introduce students to the work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam while exploring alternatives for scaling up grassroots efforts and their impacts on the national and regional level. Professor Kew is an expert in conflict and transnational civil society development. He studies the relationship between conflict resolution methods and democratic development. He is a consultant on democracy and peace initiatives to the United Nations, USAID, the U.S. State Department and to a number of NGOs. Professor Kew’s work on how conflict resolution methods promote democratization of national political cultures is among the first of its kind linking these important fields. The 12 day course (June 10-22) is open to all. The cost is $1,200 (plus $350 if transfer credits from UMB desired) including double room, breakfast and two day tour of Israel-Palestine. The application is posted at www.oasisofpeace.org/peace-college/

The Peace College is also establishing partnerships with other top universities and colleges in the fields of conflict resolution and peace studies throughout the United States, Europe and in Jordan. The M.A. program in Peace & Conflict Studies, enrolling students in fall 2013, is designed to deepen knowledge, shift attitudes and build skills for a new generation of peacemakers. Faculty exchanges, student exchanges and joint research projects will offer professionals and students the opportunity to learn from the practical experience and theoretical knowledge of the School for Peace, Primary School, Pluralistic Spiritual Center and the lived experience of the “Oasis of Peace” community.

For more information about Peace College programs contact deanna@oasisofpeace.org.

Jewish-Palestinian cooperation one seed at a time - a “Change Agents” project

For a year and half, 120 Jewish and Palestinian environmentalists from Israel and the West Bank have been meeting as part of the “Change Agents” program run by the School for Peace. With support from the United States Agency for International Development, the program promotes dialogue and cooperation among three groups of professionals - women journalists, up-and-coming politicians and environmentalists. Participants acquire skills to implement change in their professional fields and communities and are encouraged to develop projects together that will advance peaceful cooperation between the two national groups.

This spring, Dorian, a Jewish environmentalist, is organizing a seed exchange between Jews and Palestinians. Because seeds are now genetically modified and cannot be fertilized from one year to the next, the meeting aims at exchanging traditional, local seeds that are viable for fertilization. The event is open to everyone and every person will be able to give and/or get home grown seeds. The project also includes time for ecological workshops and dialogue.

“Change Agents: Israelis and Palestinians in Dialogue and Action” is made possible with the generous support of USAID and the American People in cooperation with the School for Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and Tawasul.
In Memoriam: Abdessalam Najjar

On March 22, 2012, the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam lost one of its earliest and most influential members, Abdessalam Najjar. Over the years, Abdessalam had traveled many times to the United States and helped spread Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’s message of peace in the country.

Abdessalam Najjar was born in 1952 in Nazareth, North Israel, and came from a family of devout Muslims. Abdessalam became involved in peace education while he was studying at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, where his first meaningful encounter with Jewish students took place. There, he began to initiate encounters based on dialogue between other Arab and Jewish students. Each time a violent episode would occur in the region, Abdessalam would respond by organizing discussions between Arab and Jewish students. Later in Rechovot, dialogue groups between Jewish and Arab students organized by Abdessalam became more established and people from outside of the university would also join to meet the ‘other.’ For many Jewish children and young adults, meeting Abdessalam and learning about his story was their first experience of meeting and listening to an Arab. Abdessalam through his work was opening the door of communication for hundreds of Jews and Arabs.

Abdessalam first met Father Bruno Hussar, who envisioned the creation of a Jewish-Arab village, in 1976. Two years later Abdessalam became the first Arab to join the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the “Oasis of Peace.” He and his wife Aisheh raised their four children in the “Oasis of Peace,” where Shirin, Leila, Nur and Mohammed could learn the art of peacemaking from birth. Once the village was founded, Abdessalam, worked with other village members to develop educational institutions which would exert influence beyond the village itself. Since then the village has become home to fifty-five families, half Jewish and half Arab. Homes are now being built for the second generation and the village has plans to expand to accommodate ninety-one more families.

Abdessalam began teaching at an Arab High School in Jerusalem in 1977. Abdessalam used his position at the school to bring Arab students to WASNS to meet with Jewish students from other schools. From these encounters the School for Peace, an educational institution for Jewish Arab youth and adult encounters, was founded. To date over fifty thousand Jews and Arabs have participated in programs there.

In the 1980s as the first children of the village were born, the need to provide an education which enabled Jews and Arabs to learn together became apparent. In 1983 Abdessalam was asked by the village management to re-train to teach young children so that he could teach in the Primary School. In 1984 the first class of the first binational, bilingual school in Israel was opened, taught by Abdessalam and Ety Edlund, a Jewish colleague. Nine Jewish and Arab children from three different grades were taught together.

In 1983 a close friend of Abdessalam, Emil Grunzweig was killed while demonstrating at a peace rally in Jerusalem. In honor of Emil, Abdessalam and others established the Adam Institute, which develops and implements programs that promote education for democracy and peace, civic education and methods of conflict resolution in Israel.

In 1986 Abdessalam suffered from a heart attack and left the teaching profession; he then worked as the general secretary of the village. His new position enabled him to dedicate more time to peace education outside of the village. He began working to establish the Arab Department of the International Cultural Centre for Youth in Jerusalem. For the first time the Centre included Arabic and Islamic art and culture in their programs, for many Jews this would be their first exposure to ‘the other.’

In the recent period, Abdessalam headed the Pluralistic Spiritual Center in NSWAS. He focused his efforts on providing peace education to Jews and Arabs in the mixed Jewish Arab town of Acre in northern Israel. Acre has become the site of tensions and violent clashes between the two peoples. With great success, Abdessalam facilitated dialogue and mediation workshops for Jewish and Arab community leaders of the town, to meet each other and find ways to cooperate together.

Abdessalam dedicated his whole life to peace education through his commitment to improving Jewish-Arab relations in Israel and the region. Gifts in his honor will support the work of the Pluralistic Spiritual Center.

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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