

Annual Report

2021



Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom

Educational Institutions and Community



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A note from Rita Boulos Chairwoman of the Municipal Society



Dear Friends,

In my thirty years at Wahat al Salam/Neve Shalom, I have had the privilege of meeting many of our friends and supporters around the world. Even after all this time, I do not take this wonderful connection for granted, and I am, as always, grateful.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone, new and old friends, a new year of health and peace.

I took office in March, and, despite the difficulties of this past year, I can say we have already seen some very positive developments. Quite a few of them will affect the future of both the village and its educational institutions. One of those is the rebuilding of the School for Peace. We have hired a team of architects – one Jewish, one Arab – and when the building is finished, we expect it to be a jewel in our beautiful community.

“We have hired a team of architects – one Jewish, one Arab – and when the building is finished, we expect it to be a jewel in our beautiful community”

Since we managed the formidable process of obtaining building permits for the houses that will bring new young families, half of them second generation WASNS, into our community, I have begun working on further plans for the village. These include a “village house” for a small store and a proper visitors’ center where large groups can meet, as well as revamping the amphitheatre at the heart of the village. In my vision, the amphitheatre will be a place where people can come to see history – Latrun, Ramle and the 1948 border before their eyes – as well as a place for outdoor rallies, lectures and performances. I am also advancing housing for young singles and the elderly; and a green solar energy project that will include the educational buildings and hotel. We have already created a recycling corner and made it accessible.

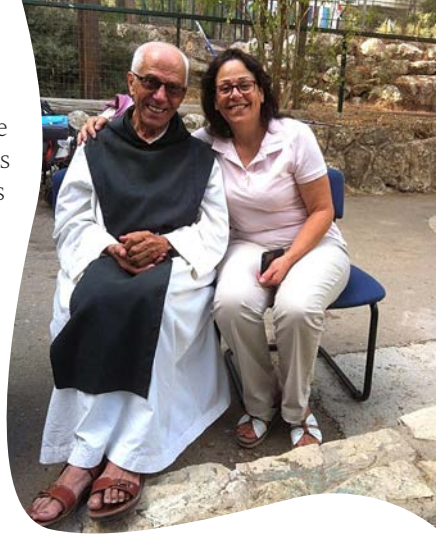
I am working closely with the new Association board, and we are creating a new atmosphere of cooperation and transparency. I am also participating in the Change Agents: Mixed Cities course in the School for Peace in hopes of sharing my experience of our village and of making us part of a mixed-cities network. Likewise, I am working closely with the regional council to advance our projects and interests, including the educational ones.

On a sad note, in 2021 we said goodbye to Father Paul, the former abbot of the Latrun Abbey. In 1999, Father Paul signed the papers that transferred ownership of the land to Wahat al Salam/Neve Shalom, and he remained close to us and a wise guide until the end. The village children and teachers attended his funeral, and they will keep his blessed memory alive.

We have learned, over the past two years, that hope does not spring, unannounced, from the skies. It is something we work on building every single day. As we move into the new year, we hope and believe that the next year will be better than the last, that our children will build a better world, that everyone who comes to our village – for school, for courses, for visits or for a walk in nature – will go return home with a renewed will to embrace peace and equality.



Rita Boulos



A note from Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay Chairperson of the Association of Educational Institutions



Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to write you, our dear partners, friends, supporters and acquaintances of Wahat al Salam/Neve Shalom. I send greetings to all near and far, to all of you around the world who give us hope in our endeavors. The Association Board and I took office at the beginning of November, and we have been meeting every Monday night. That means we have only a few accomplishments to report; but we have many plans and aspirations for the coming years. Each board member is responsible for a different aspect of the work, and as we work together, we are getting to know each other, and finding that we can advance in full cooperation.

We have devoted those meetings to becoming acquainted with the institution and its staff, and to learning about the challenges. We see our purpose as supporting their work and doing what we can to help improve it, so as to contribute to the effective and professional functioning of our institutions.

The Primary School: We are impressed with the new primary school principal, Neama, who is enthusiastic, filled with ideas and dedicated to returning the school to a leadership position in the field of bilingual and binational education. We are working on developing new pedagogy and forging connections with shared society

“We are getting to know each other, and finding that we can advance in full cooperation”

educational institutions. As was the wish of our late founding member, Anne La Mignen, most of her inheritance is to be dedicated to establishing an innovative, state-of-the-art language center, and a new committee is working to design the advanced facility.

The Pluralistic Spiritual Center: After a thorough interview process led by the board, Einat Betzalel, a four-year resident of WASNS, was selected for the position of Director of the Center. She is an experienced community organizer, dancer and event planner, among her many talents. She is now putting together a steering committee to assist her in organizing activities for the local and regional community. We wish her success in her new position.


The Nadi Youth Center: After two intensive years of Nadi activities, Lihi and Reem have moved on, and a new staff is to be recruited. It is clearly necessary to set new goals, rethink strategy and activities. Parents are organizing under the leadership of Nir Sharon, Neriya Mark and Nibal Hasnin, from the Board.

On a personal note, I would like to say that ultimately, it is individual people who create change and forge the realities we aspire to live. I truly value the individuals who, despite life's pressures, workloads and conflicts, continue to devote time, love and energy to making the dream of cooperation and justice between people – Palestinians and Jews, but not only – a reality.

Our board of talented, motivated, hardworking and fascinating individuals includes a healthy mix representing several generations living in our community. They are Omer Schwartz, a film producer; Neriya Mark, an acupuncturist; Nibal Hasnin is a lawyer and mediator; Saed Talli, a group-analyst and clinical social worker; Omri Sendrey, a high-tech professional; and Mor Shippin, a TV producer. All of us are giving our time on a volunteer basis, as all you friends do, out of commitment to our vision and goals.

As for me, I came to Wahat al Salaam/Neve Shalom in 1980, at age 22, and I was a founding member of the School for Peace. After completing graduate studies in the US, I returned in 1993 with my husband, Morris, and our then baby daughter, completing my doctorate in education in 1998. I have since been teaching in college, raised two children (Kerem, 28 and Tzuf, 27), and have volunteered on various WASNS committees and projects, including co-founding our Nadi Youth Center together with others. For me it is indeed a milestone to come full circle as Chairperson of the Association Board.

Best wishes,



Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay





Primary School

Active learning and play



The HOTAM Education, Culture, Tradition curriculum completed at Wahat al Salam/ Neve Shalom in the 2020–2021 school year is being taught this year in every grade. What is Active HOTAM? Ask every teacher and you will get a different answer. That is because the primary school teachers take it upon themselves to lead activities that use fun to encourage language and social skills in the binational setting. For example, second graders do science experiments, sport, recycling and play games that the children bring from home and teach the other children how to play. Fourth graders sing together. For fifth and sixth graders, Active HOTAM includes getting to know the village, its history and that of the surrounding area.



The children also receive elective lessons, including soccer, tricking (a combination of martial arts and indoor parkour), nature, gardening, music, photography and hip hop.

The past year has been one of rising to challenges. As the COVID restrictions eased and children returned, at least part-time, to their classrooms, the spring holidays began. To prevent large gatherings, each class held its own, individual Ramadan *iftar* meal to break the day's fast. End of the year parties were held separately, as well, and the sixth graders had their chance to perform the play they had written and musical pieces for parents and teachers.

When rioting in the neighboring mixed cities in May rocked our part of the world, parents' groups in some of the classes rose to the challenge by holding dinners together with the teachers and children to talk about what was happening and to remind everyone that peaceful, shared society is a living alternative.

Play is an integral part of the school day and the school year. This year we began, with the help of friends and supporters, to carry out the plan to install play equipment all around the school grounds. Each piece of equipment is large enough for several children to climb, walk on and swing from at once. The children also enjoyed an outdoor games day near the end of the year and, in June, the parents and teachers organized an outdoor festival that had something for everyone – theater, rap music, stalls, food and creative art and play stations.

The 2021–22 school year welcomed a new principal – Neama Abo Dalu – and two new classes of first graders. Continuing with caution, the first graders were welcomed only by their parents and teachers and the sixth-grade classes. Abo Dalu comes to the school after 17 years as a teacher and guidance counselor in binational schools. She is already a familiar figure in the playground and classroom, and, with the help of Nir Sharon, the educational director, she is rising to the challenge of running a school that serves children from 19 different communities and three religions, and who speak two different languages at home.



“We have something special every day, because our school is really special”

school that serves children from 19 different communities and three religions, and who speak two different languages at home.

The beginning of the school year is olive-picking time, a deeply symbolic event for Jews and Arabs alike. All of the school children walked from the village to the Latrun abbey to see the olive press there, learn about olive oil and engage in olive-related activities.

By the end of the year, it was time for the winter holidays. Neama was there to help the younger classes decorate and light the Christmas tree, and the children prepared sufganiot – jelly donuts – to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Hannukah.

“Together with the amazing teachers, the parents, the Association and the village, we can build a multi-year vision for this wonderful school that I have the privilege to lead,” adds Abo Dalu.

We also opened a new nursery this year in a renovated space that enabled us to double the number of children, aged 6 months to three years, to 13 youngsters.



School for Peace

Aiming for impact

The dialogue method developed in the School for Peace is more than just a teaching device; it is a tool for increasing understanding and promoting peace. This year, more than ever before, it has entered the mainstream, gaining much recognition among those interested in shared society and equality.

This emphasis on practice and continued involvement is becoming a model for extending the SFP's influence



The “events of May” – war with Gaza and violence in the mixed cities – brought a stream of organizations and institutes to the SFP for consulting services, advice, meetings and conferences. Facilitators from the SFP worked with universities, firms and NGOs that include Palestinians and Jews on their staffs, to establish fair practices and an equal power balance within the organization; or give advice and assistance to organizations that deal with mixed populations. The village called on SFP facilitators, as well, to deal with the events, and special sessions were offered to parents of the primary school children and to WASNS's second generation.

Another point in case is the alumni hub, which now includes graduates from a variety of courses, from mental health professionals to engineers. The graduates of the Change Agents Mixed Cities courses have been especially active. With guidance from School for Peace professionals, they have taken on active roles in the city of Lod/al-Lidd, where rioting erupted in May. Some activists took part in organizing peaceful protests; others are engaged in developing dialogue between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis or working with groups inside the mixed cities. This emphasis on practice and continued involvement is becoming a model for extending the SFP's influence, building active networks and helping others practice what we, and they, believe.

The SFP course facilitators also reached more university students than ever this year, teaching courses within eight academic institutions – nearly double the number from previous years. This year a special course for Arab and Jewish nursing students was opened in Tel Aviv University.

Yet another sign of progress is the number of new partnerships in the courses offered through the SFP, including one with Zochrot, an organization that promotes acknowledgement and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba, who are working with SFP on the Change Agents Tour Guides course.

One more event that is crucial to our work this year was a staff retreat in Acre. Our new and old staff members are taking on new responsibilities and leading the sections, renewing our material and creating interesting and fruitful dynamics in the courses.

Finally, the new School for Peace building is off to a great start with the hiring of an architectural firm. We expect physical work to begin on the building within the year, and to make 2022 one in which our dreams of a new home will take shape on the ground.





Meet the Architects



Hiring a firm of architects to design the new School for Peace building was not an easy task. Among the candidates, several were promising and the hiring team took their mission seriously.

The winning firm is owned by a Palestinian Israeli and a Jewish Israeli – Jacob Tannous and Sharon Sitton. (The firm is called Sitton Plus Tannous.)

This Jerusalem firm was chosen not only because their collaboration gives them unique insight into the philosophy behind the SFP, but because their approach fits with the village's vision of rebuilding and because they are already familiar with Wahat al Salam/Neve Shalom, having designed homes for WASNS members. Since founding the firm in 2003, Tannous and Sitton have designed prestigious residences, bars, restaurants and public buildings, including Jerusalem's Train Theater. They have completed projects in Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Russia and Cyprus.

The two architects are graduates of Bezalel Architecture School in Jerusalem.

Sitton Plus Tannous offers both external and interior design – an advantage in planning spaces for the dialogues, discussions, meetings and lectures that will take place within the SFP walls. Their approach is one of “storytelling”: understanding the history, culture and people who will use the space, as well as its physical environment, and melding these with a functional design so that spaces can properly “flow.” In that spirit, we expect

We expect them to listen to the story of the many dialogues that have taken place within the old structure and turn the outlines of the old into something befitting today's SFP

them to listen to the story of the many dialogues that have taken place within the old structure and turn the outlines of the old into something befitting today's SFP.

The new year will bring us to the next two stages – creating the design (the team has already submitted a proposal to the SFP building committee) – and beginning the process of obtaining the building permits. That second process will hopefully be abridged, since the rebuilding will technically be a renovation, but it will still need approval from the regional planning authorities. Once that process is complete, we will immediately begin construction.

By the numbers

Primary and childhood education
\$724,772

Total income:
\$2,048,584

School for Peace
\$707,623

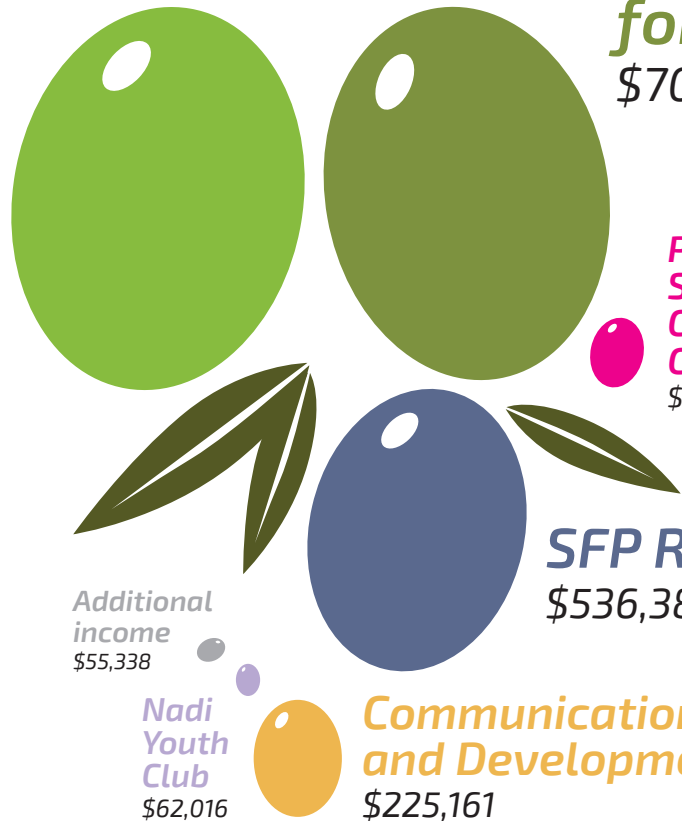
Pluralistic Spiritual Community Centre
\$133,059

SFP Rebuilding
\$536,385

Additional income
\$55,338

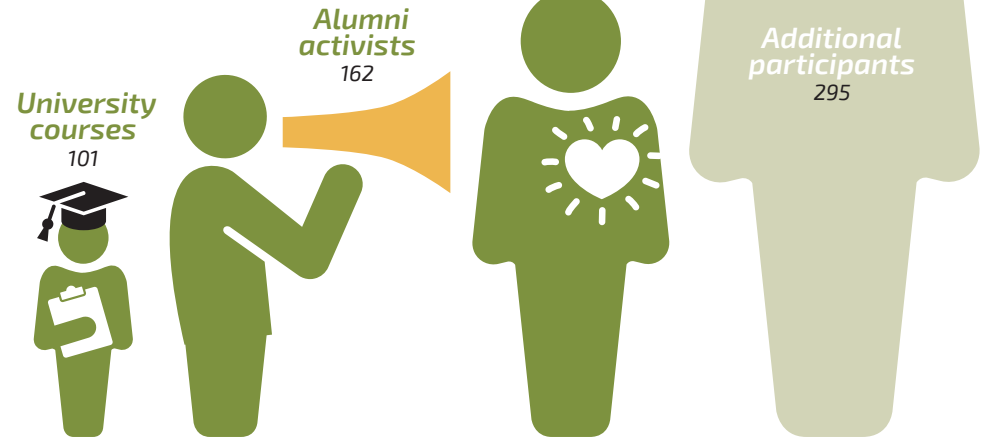
Nadi Youth Club
\$62,016

Communications and Development
\$225,161

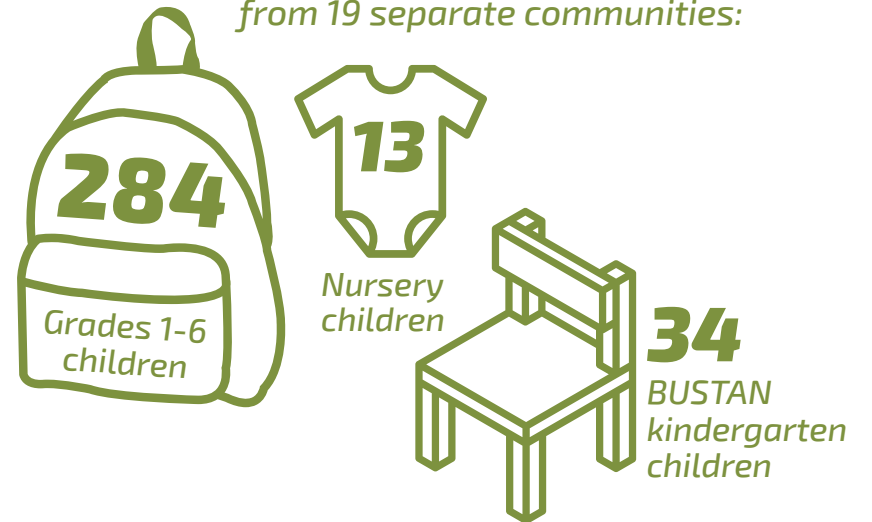


School for Peace participants

Total 758



331 children from 19 separate communities:





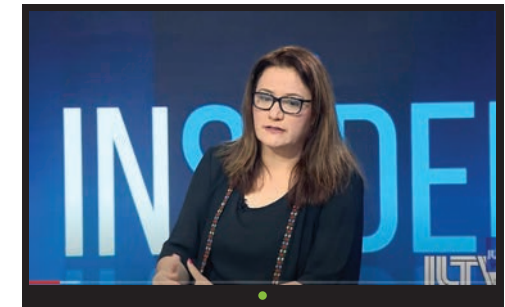
Communications and Development



If anything could be said to symbolize the work of the past year, it would be the thermometer we inserted into our newsletter last May. To us it was a reminder that the pressure was on to obtain pledges totaling over a million dollars so we could begin the process of rebuilding the School for Peace, which burned down in September, 2020. Our team came through with flying colors, raising the funds on time from 17 different sources, including large foundations, private donors and Friends Associations.

At the top of our priority list will be the primary school's professional development and the School for Peace's alumni community

We had an unusual year as far as communication went. When the May rioting in our mixed cities highlighted the tensions between Jews and Arabs in the country, the village and its educational institutions were beacons of shared society. Samah Salaime, head of the department, and Dr. Roi Silberberg, director of the School for Peace appeared in the media together and separately, in the country and abroad, in dozens of appearances following the events of May. Rita Boulos also spoke to the local media.



Under the leadership of Samah Salaime, we are continuing to nurture our relationships with our Friends Associations, foundations and funds, as well as stepping up our search for new means of developing and funding the many courses, projects, events, proposals and ideas of our educational institutions. Scholarships for primary school children and SFP participants, as well as transportation aid, funding to enable SFP courses and events like the interfaith meetings, gallery openings, a summer camp for children from the PA and humanitarian aid to Gaza are just a few of the projects we worked to fund. At the top of our priority list for 2022 will be the primary school's professional development and the School for Peace's alumni community.

A smaller project that deserves special mention is the playground construction that has been taking place in the past year all around the primary school. Friends Associations, and most recently the German Postcode Lottery, with an additional donation from our steadfast supporters in the Kindermissionwerk, have all contributed to this effort.

Also this year, we began the project of putting out our publications, especially our newsletter, in a digital format and we will continue to improve them.

We are also looking forward to the upcoming Annual General Meeting and seeing our friends in person after the past two years.

Pluralistic Spiritual Community Centre

Interfaith Meetings:

Some 17 Muslim, Druze, Christian and Jewish leaders participated in an extraordinary series of meetings over the course of the year, hosted by the Spiritual Center. The team assembled to plan these meetings included Saber Rabi, Hezzi Shouster, Samah Salaime and Rabbi Navah Hefetz. In planning the meetings, they came to the conclusion that the participants needed to be part of the schedule-planning process. Their initial discussions with the participants led to a program of monthly meetings, with a two day-event for the final meeting.

COVID and the resulting restrictions created unique difficulties for the group, as many felt they need the face-to-face presence of the others. Ultimately, some of the meetings were cancelled, others were held online, and a few took place in person.

The political situation affected the meetings as well: In the meeting that took place following the events of May, the group went to the mixed Arab-Jewish cities of Ramle and Lod/Lydda to meet with religious leaders there.

In the beginning, the group discussed common values to all the religions: the sanctity of life, human rights, justice and freedom of religion. From these, the religious

leaders proceeded to the second part of the series' program, planning projects to instill respect for all religions and initiate new meetings.

These projects include: a two-day seminar for youth from the four religions, a teacher training program that will include meetings with various religious leaders, further interfaith events and meetings, training for scout and youth leaders, an interfaith group to organize hospital visits, and work with women's groups. Other projects focused on single events, including lectures, and a teachers' conference on human rights and religious equality. These projects have advanced to various stages of investigation and planning, and will continue into the next year.

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Despite the difficulties, the Spiritual Center continued to provide rich and varied cultural events, including a documentary series, holiday celebrations, Ramadan meals, lectures and a discussion on the citizenship law and its effects on Palestinians. We also had a moving ceremony on International Rescuers' Day, in the Rescuer's Garden, with the support of the Gariwo Foundation, to honor the organizations Medecins sans Frontieres and Physicians for Human Rights.

Hezzi Shouster ended his term as head of the Center at the end of the year, and he will continue to bless the village with the fruits of his expertise, experience and creative insight.



Oasis Art Gallery



Reopenings

The Oasis Art Gallery closed its indoor space at the beginning of 2021 due to COVID restrictions, but activity in the courtyard never ceased. The courtyard became a beautiful, welcoming space for children and adults alike. The Gallery managed to organize trips to exhibits and meetings with artists, to offer studio space to artists in the village, and to invite Palestinian and Jewish artists for a day of dialogue, brainstorming and planning.

Two large exhibits were mounted Gallery, one at the end of July for a group exhibit featuring the work of six Palestinian and Jewish artists, *Confusion*; the other at the end of November, *Me is We, I am SHE*, to mark the Global 16 Days Campaign spanning the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and International Human Rights day. Both exhibits were curated by Dyana Shaloufi-Rizek.

Shaloufi-Rizek explained: “We live in an age of confusion, between what is experienced and what is imagined; between truth and facts.” The eclectic mix of artwork, created by Palestinian and Jewish artists from Tel Aviv to Tira, included miniature bronze sculptures of Dan Reisner, political art of David Reeb, spiritual abstracts of Elias Akleh, three-dimensional woman-themed works of Nrmine Shaban, dynamic paintings of Ohad Shaltiel and the colorful surrealist paintings of Shadi Zuhad.

The four artists exhibiting in *Me is We, I am SHE*, which will be on display until January 2022, each explored different aspects of human rights and the reality of violence against women. Many of these works were created in protest, and the entire effect was to take visitors out of their comfort zones. The opening event included talks by Women’s Rights activist and WASNS member Samah Salaime and political educator Michal Zak. Shaloufi-Rizek said: “The themes of our exhibits are interconnected. They provide inspiration and urge us to take responsibility for our world.”

“They provide inspiration and urge us to take responsibility for our world”

Lital Shironi uses photography, drawing and paint to draw the viewer deep into an exploration of her own femininity; Taghreed Habab is a poet who etches into black on wood, telling stories with his works; Assaf Rahat uses a wide range of media to portray mental survival; Elias Akleh is a philosophical painter who raises the downtrodden refugee and woman to sacred status.

Coming up in 2022: Global Climate Scream





Community

Humanitarian Aid

The humanitarian aid program continued this year, with generous support from our friends associations in the US, France and Italy.

To Gaza: We sent three shipments in 2021 of medical equipment to hospitals in Gaza, worth around \$60,000.

Twinning: WASNS has begun a project to “adopt” two towns in the PA, in order to strengthen them and create a support network for their women and children. The two towns are Palestinian Susya, a village of 40 families that have remained despite repeated expulsions for Jewish settlement; and Umm al-Khair, a small Bedouin village with no running water or electricity.



The Village

The community is committed to environmental action and preserving the natural beauty of the village and its environs.

This year we restarted the community garden where children, youth and adults have been working together. Even the weeds are edible! Improvements in the landscaping include caring for the many olive trees and removing fire hazards from the surrounding pine forest.

Go green: In the first stage of this multi-year plan, the community has moved and upgraded its recycling corner. In the next stage, we are planning to take advantage of our sunny Mediterranean climate by harnessing solar energy from the rooftops of the community buildings, with the hotel being one of the first to adapt.



Visitors Center

Educating the educators

The only foreign groups that managed to get to Wahat al Salam/Neve Shalom this year were several that were already in the country before the lockdowns – from France and Sweden. But groups from within Israel took up some of that slack. More significantly, many of those groups were made up of educators.

“They came from universities, colleges and high schools,” says Rita Boulos, who, in addition to her position as Chair of the Municipal Society, heads the Visitors Center. This is a change, of course, from previous years in which groups arrived from all over the world. But it fits with her personal mission and that of the village to educate people in the country about the possibility of peaceful, egalitarian shared society.

While most of those groups were Jewish, for the first time there was a significant showing among Palestinian groups from Israel, including women from the Negev and pensioners from the North. One of the more interesting groups she talked to, says Boulos, was one of young Arab firefighters, part of an effort to recruit more Arabs to life-saving professions. Other groups to visit the village and get an explanation of its history and philosophy came from community centers and from the Jewish National Fund. “The last was difficult, as I was presenting something they had been educated against their entire lives,” says Boulos, “but they thanked me in the end.”

In addition to these visits, Rita, through the Visitors Center, has given talks to participants in School for Peace courses, introducing them to the village that hosts them. The village hotel, as well, invited groups to participate in talks with village members who volunteer to give them a basic explanation of life in the village.

Although 2022 is beginning with international travel restrictions, we are making plans to receive groups from around the world, while building on our programs for domestic groups and on the organizational contacts we have begun to forge locally.

It fits with her personal mission and that of the village to educate people in the country about the possibility of peaceful, egalitarian shared society



Contacts and Support

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Web: wasns.org

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 Instagram: [was_ns](https://www.instagram.com/was_ns)

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