

# *Annual Report*

# **2024**



# **40**

**years**  
*of peace*  
**education**

*Friends of*  
*the Neve Shalom*  
*Wahat al-Salam*  
*Educational*  
*Institutions*  
*and Community*



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# *Forty years of peace education, moving forward*

In 1984, a handful of children in the village were passing out of the binational kindergarten, and the question was: Should they be split up and sent to different schools; or should they all be sent to a Hebrew-speaking or Arabic-speaking school? The answer to all three options was: No! That left one more option: to start a primary school in the village that would not only be binational and bilingual, but would reflect the values of Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom. The bold decision to found a new school was unanimous, and the project got underway.

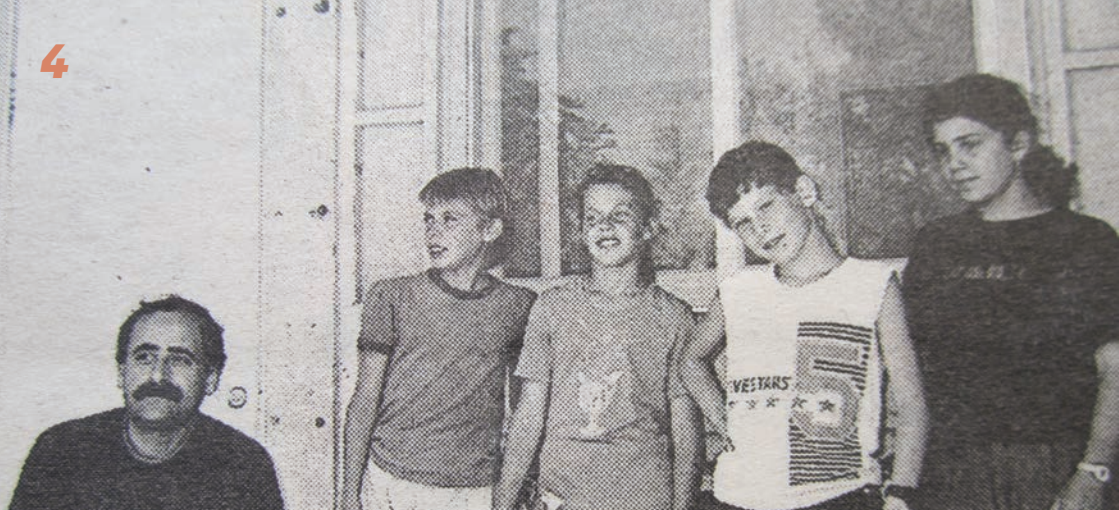
The first task was to create a physical school, and the entire village, including volunteers, chipped in, bringing temporary buildings, furnishing them, hooking up electricity and water and smoothing out a playground where the kids could play soccer.

Ety Edlund had recently moved to the village with her family from Sweden. She and Abdsalem Najjar, both high-school teachers, took up the challenge, taking classes one day a week in primary education even as they began teaching young children.

There were 11 children in the school the first year. Right from the start the teachers insisted on teaching in Arabic and Hebrew equally. In reality, the three Edlund children spoke Swedish at first, and English lessons were also added right from the start.

Celebrating the holidays of three religions was like something “out of a fairy tale,” wrote Ety. But celebrations came with their own issues. Should they sing songs of Jewish heroism on Hannukah, and how to deal with the “national days” of the Nakba and Israel's Independence Day? The political tensions between Arabs and Jews were another issue for the teachers — one that had no clear resolution. The bottom line, wrote Ety, was “the ability to accept the other as they identify themselves.”

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**Anwar Daoud**, who joined the primary school in 1987, and soon took over as principal, wrote that each kid got private lessons. In that year, there were 14 children, and the part-time staff included Dorit, who taught yoga, Tony for sport, Bob for English and Michaela for nature.

The kids, he added, came to school barefoot and half naked. But the school was also an attraction that brought new families to the village. The kids were always happy to come to school, and learning, then as now, was a joyous experience.

At the same time, the decision was made to create an NGO for the educational institutions, which would enable them to obtain support from outside the village and to operate independently. The NGO included the School for Peace, established in 1979, as well as the Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center and later the Oasis Art Gallery. Thus, the educational institutions of WASNS began to make a name for themselves in the country and region, as well as the world.

Today, with hundreds of thousands of children, course participants and visitors who have passed through our institutions over the years, we can say we have accomplished much more than the original goals we set, and yet, there is much more to do. Forty years on, we are still learning, still adapting, still focused on peace, still moving forward.

## *A note from Eldad Joffe* Chairman of the Municipal Society



Dear Friends,

Once again, it is that time of year to gather materials, refine and shape texts and images, until everything takes form in this modest booklet — a publication that encapsulates the dedication of many and summarizes yet another year of activity of the Association of the Educational Institutions of Neve Shalom — Wahat al-Salam. Remaining committed to this long-standing tradition — the publication of the annual report — despite these unsettling times, is a testament to resilience and to our unwavering trust in the justness of our path.

These are times that, beyond the pain and sorrow, the horror and shock following the pogrom of October 7 and the unrestrained response of the Israeli government and military — now extending for over a year — add to our sense of uncertainty and insecurity regarding the future of our region and the world. The unchecked violence of the past 17 months is now coupled with the realization that we stand at the threshold of a new global order — one that is unfamiliar, alienating, and driven by distorted logic, governed by aggressive rhetoric and unrestrained power.

This is a challenge we were neither prepared for, nor could have ever imagined. Yet, as you can see in the stories, reports, and data presented in this report, the community of Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom and its educational institutions stand firm and determined to continue our shared pursuit of justice, equality, and peace.

Alongside the central role played by the educational institutions in keeping the flame alive, the Cooperative Society and Municipal council, for which I have the honor to serve as chair, continue to manage the village's daily operations while advancing development plans for the future.

Beyond the routine management of daily affairs, I would like to highlight a few milestones we have advanced and achieved:

- **Redefining the role of the village operations manager** — We have entrusted this role to the capable hands of Dudu Amar.
- **February 2024 Regional Council elections** — With a newly-elected regional council our relationship with the council has strengthened, fostering cooperation that is already bearing fruit and holds promise for future growth.

- **December 2024 — Inauguration of the new village road** — This is a road that now connects the older part of the village with the new neighborhoods.
- **Progress in the village expansion project** — The construction of new homes in the new areas has been slow due to challenges in the construction industry, another consequence of the ongoing war. Nonetheless, in 2024, seven new homes were built, two of which are already occupied, as of this writing, by new members. We hope this year that at least five additional families will move into their permanent homes and that new construction will begin.
- **Renovation of the village hotel** — Guest rooms, conference halls, and outdoor spaces have been refurbished. Despite the complete halt in international tourism to Israel, our hotel's hospitality operations reached record levels, thanks to determined marketing efforts targeting new audiences within the country. The hotel is a source of pride for the village and a gateway for outreach — people who, through their stay, are exposed to the unique essence of Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom. For example, during Passover, the hotel was fully booked for seven days by a group of 30 ultra-Orthodox families. Over the past year, the hotel has also hosted peace organizations, yoga practitioners, academic conferences, and more, all under the management of the talented Rabiah Barhum.

On a sad note, we pay tribute to the memory of Anwar Daoud, who served for many years as Chair of the Society and was a pillar of the community, an educator, a role model and leader, who passed away on Aug. 20.

Ariela and I continue to work closely, sharing, coordinating and supporting one another.

Our connection with you, our friends from around the world, strengthens us now more than ever. The importance of your support and the trust you place in us cannot be overstated. Knowing that we are walking this path together is a source of hope and encouragement, and for this, I extend my deepest gratitude.

**On a personal note, I have been in this role for almost a year and a half, yet I have not had the opportunity** to meet most of you. I hope that in the coming months, we will be able to correct this and that we will soon resume the tradition of meetings here in the village, as well as welcoming visitors from outside the country to Neve Shalom — Wahat al-Salam.



Eldad Joffe

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



Dear Friends,

Last year I wrote that this war was the most earth-shattering experience any of us has undergone both individually and collectively. And, unbelievably, a year later, we are still at war, with no end in sight. For us here in Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom, we are conscious of the importance of staying aware of the daily destruction and suffering that are ongoing and doing what we can to end and diminish them. When the entire world seems to be going off the rails as each side is totally immersed in their own pain, we seek a path of sanity, trying to contain the pain of both, to help one another through the heartbreak and trauma, to understanding and care about the other's experienced reality, to continue to foster our intentional and humane model of shared society.

Our steadfast commitment to working together towards a peaceful and just reality is validated by the new members who continue to join and choose to build their futures here with us, by the fact that Arab and Jewish parents continue to send their children to our binational school system, by the numerous and diverse media who have visited the village and its educational institutions this year and reported extensively, and by your continued support, dear friends around the world. We feel your support and appreciate it profoundly.

During these terrible times, we still take joy in our achievements. Our committee was reelected in November, as three additional young and enthusiastic members joined us, which I see as a vote of confidence and trust that we are on a good path. Our task is more crucial than ever, and we are all giving our all to achieve our goals, working together as a team and in cooperation with Eldad and the community institutions and especially with Nir Sharon and Samah Salaime, our co-directors who are overseeing and leading our educational institutions with dedication and professional expertise.

In the primary school, we decided to invest in training for our precious and devoted teachers and in workshops for the parents. I am glad to say that our investment has paid off in numerous ways. Between these and lessons aimed at helping the kids with their emotions and communication skills, we have seen calm return to the school and the connection and understanding between the children deepen. The work of the School for Peace facilitators with the teachers and parents has been especially important in restoring the focus and sharpen the vision of a school in which the essence of peaceful coping and sharing permeate everything they do.

In the School for Peace, the university course and Change Agents course participants have found they have to dig deep and use new/old concepts to talk about joint partnership and new possibilities. This is presently not a trivial issue for dialogue courses, and the need to develop new ways in which to promote our aims without losing sight of our original mission in the School for Peace: to foster deep and mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity. The dialogue course of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis living abroad, which concluded in 2024, was a highly successful experiment and one that adds new dimensions to the potential of ongoing relationship and dialogue. We hope to see more such innovative endeavors in the future.

We were delighted to welcome Hezzi Shuster back to the position of Director of the Spiritual Center. For Hezzi, the Spiritual Center is a renewal of the films, holidays and lectures, but also a place where our war-shaken community can come together and share, whether it is a meal, a musical evening or a conversation that allows us to rekindle beauty and significance despite our tears and sadness.





Finally, as Samah has stepped up to the directorship position, the Communications and Development department has taken on new projects: the Peace Press, a project we hope to see fulfilled in the coming year, and a new website that includes the stories of rescuers and will, in the near future, connect with the Garden of Rescuers. In the coming year, we will see the site appear in Hebrew and Arabic, as well.

Our work is not only for us or for our children. We work for our two peoples, who share this region. Learning to live with one another in respect despite our differences is not simply an idea or a symbol, it is a day-to-day imperative, way beyond just hoping: we are about actively working to make it a reality.



**Ariela Bairey-Ben Ishay**



# *School for Peace*

Teaching conflict and peace

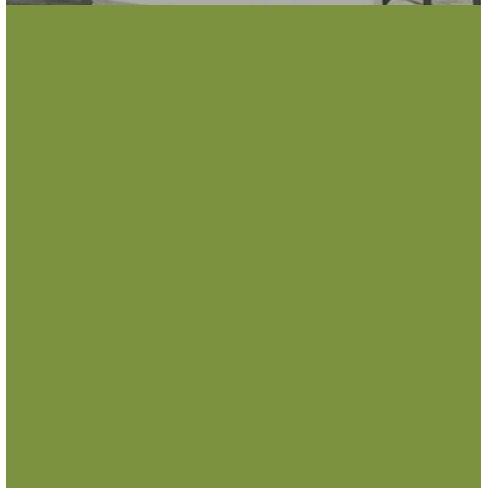


The 2024 year was one of reflection for the School for Peace, not just for calling for an end to the conflict, but working on ways to talk about peace during conflict and training new alumni to resist the current narratives and hatred, to identify issues that are holding back peaceful shared society within the country and the region, and work toward real peace.

For the courses offered during the year, this meant changing curricula. Dialogue sessions were more intense than usual, and the facilitators ensured that everyone's issues could be heard and that as the courses progressed, the participants moved from airing their grievances to learning to cooperate with others to overcome those issues.

***New this year:*** a hackathon for project development, meant for alumni wanting to get their projects off the ground. By openly discussing their projects strengths and weaknesses and obstacles to success, the participants were able to get feedback and take an objective look at their projects and understand how best to proceed.

***Alumni:*** The third annual alumni conference was held in May. Some 70 alumni from all the years attended, and around 100 attended the panel discussion led by Dr. Areen Hawari of the Arab Center for Applied Social Research and Israel Frey, an ultra-orthodox, left-wing journalist who had been set upon by right-wing mobs for daring to pray for Palestinian victims of the war. On the second day of the conference, alumni from recent courses presented their projects.



## **Courses:**

New in 2023-24 — A dialogue course for Jews and Palestinians living abroad. Two members of the group (a Palestinian and a Jewish Israeli) initiated the “Clean Shelters Initiative,” in Germany, assisted by other members of the course. This initiative raised funding to establish the Zomi Shelter Center and sanitary facilities in Gaza.

In addition:

- Facilitators' course for teaching conflict courses
- University courses — two new intensive courses opened in the 2024-25 school year in Tel Aviv and Ben-Gurion University for psychology students on Arab-Jewish Conflict, Theory and Practice
- Change agents — urban planners, civil engineers and architects, in collaboration with the Arab Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP) began in 2024
- Change agents mixed cities, offered in collaboration with Sikkuy-Aufoq, ended in March. Some participants found they lived in the same mixed cities and began meeting with one another.
- Simultaneous translation: 10 people finished the intensive course.

**Facilitators:** Among other things, the SFP facilitators worked intensively with the teachers and with the primary school parents' community, as well as with the village. The sessions are proof that even in a place like Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom, open, directed dialogue is needed for people to overcome their issues and fears and remember how to work together.



# Primary School

Nurturing parents, teachers, children



The primary school remains a place where children are nurtured. We don't ignore the war, but we do ensure that we keep partisanship out of any talk of the situation. At the same time, we want to make sure that every one of the children in our school enjoys the childhood to which he or she has a right.

Play is an important part of the school week, as is learning to cooperate and work with others. Language lessons combine the best of these, and children look forward all week to their sessions in the Language Center.

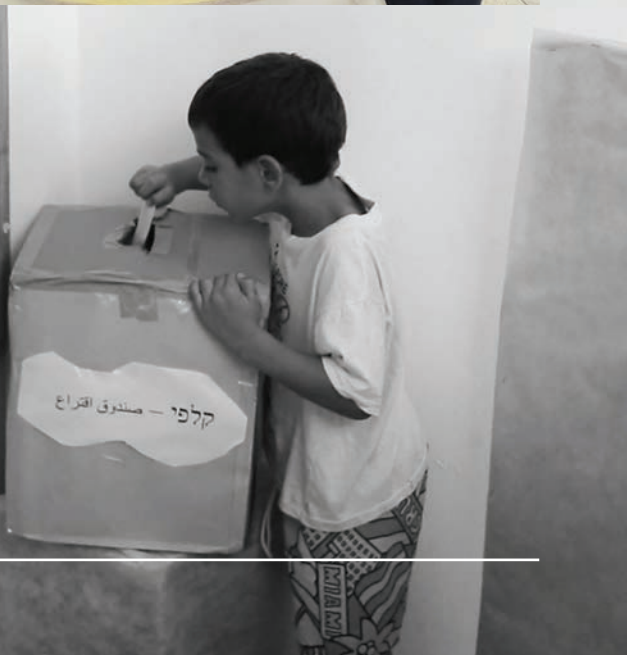
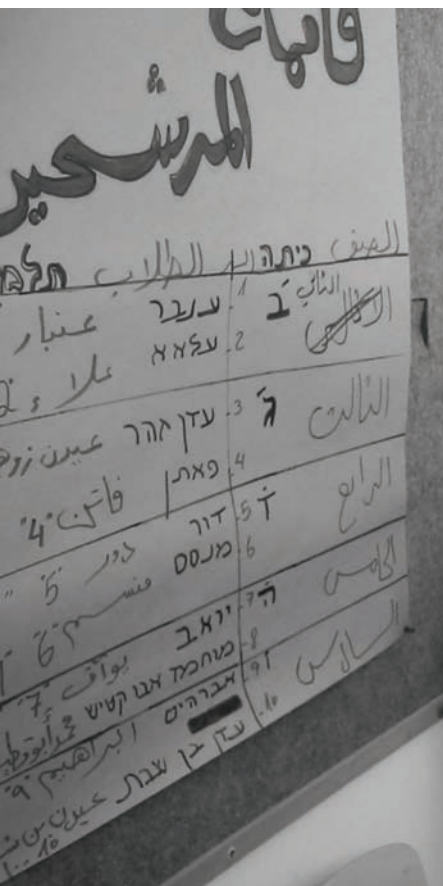
- The HOTAM, Education, Culture, Tradition curriculum developed several years ago together with the Ministry of Education has become a mainstay of the primary school year. Each time a new section is begun, one of the classes takes on a presentation to the school, so that there is a real ritual to the lessons.
- Holiday celebrations and preparations are part of the HOTAM structure. Parents often take part in the preparations, coming to school to lead the children in creating holiday crafts or providing traditional treats for class parties.
- Forest classes for the younger children: Having children walk out into a green space for class games or lessons is a way to help the children improve their self-confidence and their connection to their classmates. Back in the classroom, they are more likely to be calm, less likely to disrupt the class.
- From a young age, the children are encouraged to research subjects that interest them and present them to the class. Work in small groups is encouraged.
- Optional extracurricular classes: Woodworking, gardening and cooking are very popular classes. Yohai — who's class is just called Yohai — works with kids on recycling and upcycling the school grounds. Young engineers use their ingenuity to create new things. Music lessons are important and well-attended, as well.
- Play: In addition to regular recess time and sports, the student council organizes "active breaks," which include games and play around a subject like road safety.

**Parents:** The Parents' Community has become well-established and invigorated over this period. Parents engage in dialogue sessions, and they attend lectures on subjects related to raising children during a war. The parents, in turn are very active in their children's education, coming into the classroom to help out, organizing holiday festivities and more.

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**Teachers:** Teacher training is a crucial aspect of the primary school. Through dialogue sessions and a yearly weekend retreat, the teachers learn to apply the lessons of respect to their colleagues, work as a team, improve the curriculum and address problems. Arabic lessons for the Hebrew-speaking teachers help improve the bilingual nature of the school.

**Nursery:** The nursery building opened at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year enabled the nursery to split into two groups and nearly double the number of children.





**2024**

**Income and Expenses**



**From Friends Associations**  
\$1,437,280



**From philanthropic donations**  
\$179,980



**Earnings**  
\$432,000



**Building, infrastructure and maintenance**  
\$199,792



**Staff**  
\$1,038,186



**Projects**  
\$344,495



**Other**  
\$296,573

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**Total income**  
\$2,049,260

**Total expenses**  
\$1,879,046



## **Other numbers**

# 234

*Children in  
the primary  
educational  
system*

# 115

*Participants in  
day sessions/  
Alumni  
conference*

# 202

*participants in School  
for Peace dialogue  
courses*

# 49

*Youth in NADI*

# 233

*Participants in Parents'  
Community events*

# 17

*Parents'  
Community  
events*

**Over**

# 850

*people using the  
Spiritual Center  
for activities*

# 12,785

*Most views on a single  
social media post*

# *Communications and Development*



Annual Friends  
Associations Meeting  
in London, Nov. 2024



The Communications and Development department has undergone a few changes over the year. The former head of the department, Samah Salaime, is now co-director of the educational institutions together with Nir Sharon, and the department members are still working under her, as well as with other directors and heads of institutions, and organizational change led to new projects and developments over the year.

The main business of C&D is still raising funds for all of our educational institutions, and we are working on all fronts to bring in the funding we require. That includes, first and foremost, our dear Friends Associations around the world, as well as foundation and organizations, old and new. The latter becomes more difficult as funding is cut, requirements are added and competition, unfortunately is increased. Fortunately, we have friends and supporters in many places, and we are grateful for their support.

- **AGM:** Due to the war, the British Friends Association generously offered to host the WASNS Friend Annual General Meeting in London. While this meant forgoing the walks around the village, meetings with school children and village members, and meals in the village hotel dining room; we found there were ample compensations. For one, more of our friends were able to attend, and we were able to hear from every one of them about the wide variety of activities among them. For another, the meeting boardroom and, on the last evening, dinner in the famous Liberal Club were luxurious. All agreed that the face-to-face meetings are crucial to the Friends' efforts.
- **Special projects:** These are projects that meet the vision and ideas of WASNS, but do not fall under the aegis of the existing institutions. For the first large project, we are developing a **Peace Press**, which aims to get a peace-based narrative into the media, including the mainstream media, and to create a database and newsletter for journalists and media people.





- **Website:** After the old website was hacked, the decision was taken to develop a new site, together with a web developer. The new site is aesthetic and easy to use. In conjunction with the English site, we created a separate “mini-site” to tell the stories of the rescuers honored in the Garden of Rescuers and a site for the Peace Press. In 2025, we will open the site in Hebrew and Arabic as well.
- **Successes:** The Parent’s Community and Teacher Training Program have been highly successful fundraising efforts; funds were raised for the Peace Press (EED) and a mental health professionals’ program (Healing Across the Divide). As usual, our Friends Associations, including the newest one, in Spain, are hard at work supporting the amazing activities in our educational institutions.
- **The Visitors’ Center** was operated, over the course of 2025, by the C&D team. Visiting groups came from Israel, including retirees, students and even soldiers.
- **Peace Hub:** The Fred Segal Peace Library, in addition to housing the Educational Institution management and C&D team, is home to Women Wage Peace and to visiting youth groups. In the future, we will renovate the building to make room for more peace organizations.

To access the Peace Press sites:





# Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center



Hezzi Schuster, the new/old director of the Spiritual Center, returned to the post in November.

The reopening of the Spiritual Center kicked off with a special musical performance of Arabic music given by maestro pianist Nizar Alkatar and soprano Noor Darwish, who is a trained opera singer. The moving performance was at the same time a way to mark the spiritual, emotional renewal of the Center and a way to connect with others in this time of crisis.

At the end of December, the PSCC hosted a talk by Dr. Looay Wattad, a researcher on international children's literature, on the problems inherent in translating classic Hebrew children's stories into Arabic.

Although the International Rescuers award ceremony was cancelled due to the war, the Rescuers project got underway with meetings to discuss the project and the rescuers website, which will soon connect visitors to the Garden of Rescuers to the stories of those heroes honored in the Garden.

Hezzi spent the end of the year planning events for 2025. These plans include events to help people deal with the fallout of the war as well as holidays, films and more.

In addition, together with the Association board, he is planning a major renovation, as the building leaks and the facilities require an upgrade.



# Nadi Youth Club







Nur, NADI coordinator, at seminar for youth counselors in Abu Dhabi

Nur Najjar-Elhuda, the NADI coordinator, improved not only the NADI clubhouse with games and activities, she has been honing her leadership skills with advanced courses for youth directors. In addition, Yohai, who the kids know from the primary school extra-curricular activities, joined the NADI, and he has brought fun and new activities into the clubroom.

The NADI continued to be open twice a week, giving all the kids in the village afternoon activities, a place to hang out together and to leave their screens behind. From games of pool, to pool parties during the summer, the first role of the NADI is to give the kids a chance to relax and have fun, and to interact with one another in an informal atmosphere.

● **Latrun Abbey:** The NADI kids have become a part of the village tradition of keeping up ties with the monks in the abbey next door. The older group went to help them with the grapevines, getting a tour of the abbey and its winery, and going again, before Christmas, to bring their wishes for a peaceful new year.

- **Food:** Olive picking is an important part of the year, and the kids preserved their own olives this year. But sushi took place of pride, as the kids had a sushi-rolling lesson.
- **Leadership:** Leadership sessions with an outside organization began at the end of the year. But leaderships and volunteerism are built into the NADI way, whether it is older kids helping younger ones, high-school kids volunteering with younger groups, cooking soup for a woman who had given birth or getting the kids involved in planning and executing holiday celebrations. This year, the kids also worked with their parents to make signs for the weekly anti-war protests, involving them in a positive way in dealing with a situation that affects children as well as adults. A clean-up day was also a lesson in taking responsibility for their surroundings.
- **Continuing activities:** Summer trips revolved around fun: amusement parks and movie outings. Later, the kids had a special day in the forest near the village, complete with a campfire. Art projects include creations from nature and found objects with Yohai, and special art sessions with Dyana. The kids were especially happy to have their artwork included in the Seattle exhibit, halfway around the world. Sports, especially soccer, are important activities, and the kids have a volunteer soccer coach to train them.

With a team of two and support from the local council and others, the coming year will focus on leadership and responsibility, while not relinquishing any of the fun.

# Oasis Art Gallery

Finding direction



Creating art in the midst of a war, and then displaying that art in a binational exhibit presented a dilemma for Dyana Shaloufi-Rizek, the gallery curator. Getting the gallery back on track required some heartfelt searching for a way to express the impact of the war on art and on cooperation between Palestinians and Jews.

Over the summer, Dyana organized a special exhibit of children's work that was displayed in Seattle. This exhibit was special to the children, who each chose the work they wanted to exhibit, and it was special because the artwork expressed optimism and hope for a better future. In addition, she participated in curating an exhibit in Nazareth, her home town, on **“Nazareth through the Eyes of its Photographers.”** In May, the gallery hosted an exhibit, together with the School for Peace, **“Mish Awadi – Abnormal”** consisting of photos taken by women in Lod highlighting the environmental injustice they suffer in the city.

In October, the exhibit/running commentary **“Where To?”** opened in the gallery. It was “full of challenges, doubts and questions,” wrote Dyana about the exhibit, in which clipped news items about the war framed the paintings and sculptures of six artists. At the closing of the exhibit, in November, several of the artists discussed their work, which arose out of a sense of longing displacement and conflict, as well as hope for the future.

In December, a new exhibit in memory of an artist and dear friend of the gallery, **Nihad Dabeet**, opened with his work and the work of 24 students and colleagues who were influenced by him. Alongside Nihad's signature copper and wire olive tree were quirky wire sculptures and paintings that represented a lovely tribute to a man who gave so much of himself to others.



# Community

Finding direction



**Dialogue** is still the best way to heal rifts, build cooperation and remember how to listen to one another. As the war continues and the propaganda becomes more slanted, we need to practice our empathy, compassion and respect for others. Facilitators from the School for Peace have continued to lead dialogue circles for members of the community throughout this year, and members have indeed found them helpful both in enabling them to share their anxieties and emotions and to come away knowing they are not alone.

**Visits to the Latrun Abbey** during the winter holidays are a WASNS tradition, and this year members gladly joined in the opportunity to bring greetings for the new year and spend an hour or so in a place of spiritual peace.

**Bereavement** is a difficult issue when so many have been lost, including many dear ones — family members and friends. As we process the horrors of the Oct. massacre and the unrelenting destruction and death in this war, we also need to allow space and support for personal grieving. In March, the community set up a bereavement tent. People sat in the tent and told their stories — stories of innocents killed, of whole families gone. In listening to these stories, WASNS members renewed their conviction that the war and bloodshed must end.

**A new road**, curving down the hillside just below the Hotel, is enabling the construction of the newest neighborhood in the village, and thus we celebrated its completion as a milestone in the expansion of the community.



The **Hotel rooms** and **White Dove Hall** have undergone a massive renovation and update. This is a continuation of the Hotel renewal plan begun several years ago and led by Rabiah Barhum, the Hotel manager.

**New members** were welcomed into the community, and despite the situation, the village is on track to bring in young families and renew the community.

**Protests** have become a regular part of our lives. There are anti-war, pro-hostage deal demonstrations all over the country every week and every weekend. Some WASNS members are involved in various protest movements, but WASNS members decided to add their voice locally. Every week, WASNS members and families gather at the nearby Latrun junction to wave signs at the passing motorists and busses, and this has evolved into a real community activity.

## Contacts and Support

### Contact us:



Email: [info@wasns.info](mailto:info@wasns.info)

### Online donations:

<https://wasns.org/direct-donations/>

### Web and Social Media:

Web: [wasns.org](https://wasns.org)

### Bank Information:

Association of Friends  
of Educational Institutions  
Acct No. 12-690-454444  
IBAN:  
IL 92-0126-9000-0000-0454-444  
Swift code: POALILIT



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/oasisofpeace>



X: [oasis\\_of\\_peace](https://twitter.com/oasis_of_peace)



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



YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@OasisofPeace>

### Friends of Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom

in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands,  
Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and the US:

<https://wasns.org/category/friends-worldwide/>



Dedicated to our dear friend,  
member, principal, peace activist,  
**Anwar Daoud**

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***Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom***  
Educational Institutions and Community