

Wi'am Newsletter May 2011

The "good life" has something to do with making life good for other people."

Joan Chittister

Citizen Diplomacy

Since the beginning of 2011, Wi'am Centre, Usama Nicola – the Citizen Diplomacy coordinator – and all the staff have welcomed 35 international delegations numbering 688 visitors, with additional 78 individuals coming through our doors. These people have come to participate in our tours, hear about Wi'am's work, and experience the political socio-economic situation, the Palestinian culture and the realities facing the Palestinian community. While here, they see the facts on the ground, see historical sites and areas affected by the settlements, and visit areas around the Wall. They meet people from both sides of the divide, enjoy cultural nights, have home-stays and traditional Palestinian food, and are enabled to better understand what it means to live under occupation. We also hope to show them how there can be hope for a future of freedom, justice, peace and reconciliation. Interfaith groups, students, travellers, researchers and journalists are among the many types of people who visit us. Why not to join us for a cup of coffee or hot meal with Attallah and the staff.



Photograph courtesy of Rt. Revd. Dr. Brian Castle



Networking

Since the last newsletter, Zoughbi has been to many different countries. He has given trainings and participated in various conferences and workshops as a speaker, a trainer and as a participant. Recently, Zoughbi has visited Winnipeg, Manitoba and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in Canada as well as Indonesia and the USA. This summer, Imad and Zoughbi went to Denmark to engage with partners. Topics have been about methods of conflict resolution, transformation and youth education.

Peer Mediation Project

Usama Rock is running the peer mediation project. Taking place in schools, the goal is to teach and encourage mediation between youth through workshops and trainings. The project aims to equip the students with various tools and skills which allow them to choose a process of mediation when disagreement or conflict arises amongst themselves. Parents and school teachers have also been included, with Zoughbi providing their training. Saliba is also involved, who with Usama, have trained students how to have a comprehensive approach to understanding peer mediation and conflict transformation.



Wi'am's Role in Empowering Women

Currently, the women's coordinator Lucy is in the USA completing a course and participating at an internship but Roula, who is also our accountant, is helping in the Women's Department.

Wi'am's work with women is a significant part of its operations. Wi'am's goal is to achieve the development of Palestinian women by working against all forms of discrimination that they face. We are in close cooperation with a network of 17 Palestinian women's organizations and institutions.

In close networking and cooperation with women's networks and the women's section in the Governorate, Wi'am social workers are addressing the issue of domestic violence by providing counselling for a number of cases. Wi'am is also providing on-the-job training to help these women train for a profession and find a decent job. Earlier this month, Wi'am was involved in three cases; all three involved physical abuse from one family member to another. Wi'am was able to provide them with a specialist to help them to address their situation and find their inner strength.

This type of process achieves two goals. First, women and girls have a safe space to express their psychological wounds freely and to work through their feelings. Second, during this process these women gain an ability to build and improve on their existing life and educational skills (languages, computer skills, and secretarial work).

Equipped by the vocational training and follow up that they have received, these women have been granted possibilities for potential jobs which they are passionate about. This will help them to become more self-sufficient and stand for themselves.

Two other aspects of Wi'am's focus with women are the job creation project and the weekly women's group. Both are further developments to support women.

One aspect of the job creation project is the hand-made gifts and clothes that can be purchased at Wi'am. We hope that the next time you are here that you will support this enterprise. The money goes to the women for everything from paying for university tuition to providing bread for their families.

The women's group recently took a visit to the Bethlehem Peace Centre where they heard a presentation by the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation about the Nomination Document to inscribe Bethlehem on the World Heritage List. Bethlehem is the historic birthplace of Jesus, as well as containing the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route.

The women's group also participates in a number of trainings. These include nutrition, health, democracy, human rights, women empowerment, and gender issues...to name a few.

Currently, Wi'am is planning a workshop for gender awareness. Highlighting both women and men, our philosophy of gender equality is based on the idea that men play an integral role in the development of woman as a result of cultural issues and traditions, and that men can be intentional or unintentional obstacles to the development of women. When both sexes are involved, we believe that workshops and the community are at their best.



More than just workshops, Wi'am puts the theoretical part of gender equality into practice. We plan to integrate a number of implementation projects as the result of the gender awareness workshop. Through our mediation, projects and practices, we seek to empower women and let them realize their own potential. While we are striving for this vision, it has not been fully realized yet. There is still much to be done so that women and men can be equal. Let's work together to achieve this vision.



Mediation: Cases of Conflict

Wi'am continues to work in resolving conflicts and restoring healthy relationships among community groups and individuals. In the past four months, our mediators have worked on 85 cases. The range of these cases has been significant: traffic accidents, domestic violence, debts, property feuds, inheritance, family problems and youth problems. One of the newest and largest developments we are facing is Facebook and the abuse of this social networking site by young adults. As semi-anonymous online identities can be stolen or abused, this situation creates unique challenges for the future of families and young people of both sexes. As we live in a conservative society, family honour is one of the intricate cases that we take extra care in dealing with.

It is worth noting that the conflicts we address have no borders or time. Adnan, Saliba, Usama, Zoughbi and volunteers at Wi'am Centre are sometimes required to work until late into the night. This need is due to the fact that a more timely response generally produces better results. So far, our mediations have yielded positive results with the majority of our situations. We have an almost 80 percent success rate, but we are still looking to improve our ability to help people through their conflicts.

Training in Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation

Wi'am continues its efforts to train local leaders in youth groups, universities and schools around the West Bank (Bethlehem University and Jerusalem University in Abu-Dies). Imad, the two Usamas and Zoughbi have been performing training around Palestine, equipping the participants with skills and theories that deal with the conflict that they face in their immediate environment and in their own family context. The training provides teachers and students with concrete tools to transform their conflicts. It also gives them a platform to discuss ways to constructively deal with local conflicts and provide solutions to chronic problems that the community and students are facing in their life.

Wi'am has also been involved in nonviolent actions on the street. We initiate, or join forces, in villages around Bethlehem – Al Masara and Al Walja – or in 'different pockets of non-violence' – Budrus, Bilin, and Nilin.





For four days in mid May, Wi'am hosted a planning workshop with KURVE Wustrow, Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action, from Germany. The days were marked by fruitful exchange, deep discussions, sharing of thoughts, laughter and food. The new project is called 'Publicity for Nonviolence,' and it is planned to run through to December 2013.

Reacting to the growing culture of violence in the West Bank, the project aims to enhance a culture of nonviolence through educating local leaders in the strategies and realities of nonviolent action. Its goals include empowering people to consider the alternative of nonviolence while also improving the visibility and awareness of nonviolent direct action. To help run the project, KURVE Wustrow has sent Wi'am one of its civil peace workers, Thimna Bunte. From Wi'am's staff, Usama Rock and Lucy Talgieh will be working on the project to coordinate a variety of activities such as trainings, conferences, and media work.

Children's Program

Wi'am's Children's Summer Program will be starting soon. We expect to have between 90 and 100 children. The summer program will focus on providing a safe place for children to play and learn. Our activities include drama workshops, drawing, painting, swimming, theatre, dancing, art and music therapy, stress relief through sports, constructive games and running around in our garden and playground. Part of our summer program involves teaching the children peer mediation and nonviolence skills, as well as taking the time to engage in trauma healing. We are also planning a number of trips, with a focus on places of environmental importance such as the Solomon Pools and Golden Park, Jericho.

Most of these activities will take place on site at Wi'am, in the garden and playground. These facilities are continued to be improved as we move through some final stages of cleaning the area and planting some more trees and flowers. We also encourage the children to plant flowers and trees so that they can continue to have a connection to Wi'am as they watch these plants grow. The founder and the staff would like to thank all of the supporters and volunteers for helping to make Wi'am a greener and more environmentally friendly place, as well as a beautiful community centre which accommodates children, youth, women and families.

This summer we have a number of international volunteers with us: Cecily, a volunteer from England; Ida, a volunteer from Finland; Ann, a Master's student from America and Josh, a student from Canada. Recently, we have welcomed Dr. Muriel Schmid, the director of religious studies at the University of Utah. We also have Annereika, from Holland as well as a group of eight students from Goshen College, USA to help us with the Children's Summer Program.

While Wi'am is already a beautiful place, we need to continue to develop the garden and the playground. Specifically, we need to finish developing a quarter of an acre. We are counting on you to support us in this goal. We hope that you will continue to share the dream of Wi'am with us. We welcome your impute through creative ideas, support and voluntary work.



**“Let go of the past and go for the future.
Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you imagined.”
Henry David Thoreau**