

Annual Report 2020

A word from Zoughbi Zoughbi, "The Founder and Executive Director of Wiam":

"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it, even if I may not have it at the beginning. " Mahatma Ghandi

I have the belief that I can do it as Mahatma Ghandi says; we have acquired the capacity to do it even if the beginning tells us we may not have it. The first two and a half months of 2020 were great; we had been happy with the number of groups visiting, which gave more hope, more meaning, and more depth to our work. They were our ambassadors of our struggle, hopes and dreams to the world. Tens of them came from different corners of the world. They were not only meeting the Living Stones (Human Beings) but they were also visiting the Holy Stones (Churches), and they were introduced to the Rolling Stones of the current socioeconomic and political conditions. We were vivacious at Wi'am, working with kids, youth, women, and men. We were creating jobs, offering mediation and counseling, and walking hand in hand with other members of our society in the less travelled road of non-violence, restorative justice, and enhancing the common living among our people. Then the coronavirus in addition to the known virus of Occupation attacked our society!!!

As the second Corinthians 4:8 says, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed."

This defines our situation pretty well, especially in the months following March 15. We have the belief that we can do it and we have the capacity to do it despite the fact that many members of our community lost their jobs, and due to this COVID pandemic people have become hopeless and helpless. Paranoia has become our way of life without a clear direction to follow. Some people are scared, saying these are the sign of the end of the world. Wi'am relies on the holistic approach and has chosen to be with the people. Yes, we are from the people and we do all the things we can to be with the people; extending our hand to our brothers and sisters whether by providing help to the needy, providing counselling, calming the fear of the children and their parents, and continuing to be a voice for the voiceless, disseminating

by our walk and talk the culture of peace and common living and the united spirit of the community.

We haven't been idle; many of our staff are risking being infected by corona or succumbing to fear of the current state of affairs. Taking risks has become our daily vitamin to continue with the work we do, despite challenges, difficulties, fears and hardships. As you will see in our report, we have more activities this year than in previous years because of the challenges caused by COVID. We carried on our activities as much as we could, taking into consideration all the hygienic practices required to keep our staff and community members as safe as possible. Some changes though, still happened in our program due to COVID, such as our participation in outside conferences and speaking engagements. Our homes and our office have become our platform for exposing what we face in the occupied territories and sharing with others about our problems, hopes, and ambitions. Our advocacy has been shared through zoom calls, online teaching, virtual tours, and virtual speaking engagements.

We cannot say thank you enough to all volunteers, partners and friends, churches, and secular and religious groups around the globe who have been showing their solidarity, empathy and compassion.

To all of you, we hope our love will flourish in your hearts. Your love has been sprouting in our hearts, fields and communities.

Background:

For the past years, Wi'am has been providing support to programs at the grassroots, community level that bring youth, women and children together across difference, to learn, grow, and thrive, paving the way for a more peaceful future. Through our work, we seek to undo the hatred, fear, and violence that have been passed from one generation to the next. We adopt an approach that replaces the current short-term thinking with a long-term outlook that promotes a dialogue of words, promoting contact and familiarity to help young people, children, women and families unite, not divide, around their perceived differences.

Since the onset of 2019, we have been facing one of the most challenging times since the establishment of Wi'am, represented in the Pandemic and the continuing occupation. It has gravely impacted the

lives of people across the entire spectrum of the community and posed unprecedented challenges to our work in the community. But with challenge comes opportunities in which the staff/volunteers at Wi'am rose up to the challenges with prompt responses to these needs. Through the work of our grantees, we seek to undo the hatred, fear, and violence that have been passed from one generation to the next.

The crisis demonstrates the vital need for Wi'am, as a civil society's organization, to work at different levels in a holistic manner to satisfy the needs of the people. At Wi'am, we have been working hard to shift our activism and coordination online when we are under lockdown. The challenge is pushing forward to a new normal: a world that is fairer and more equal. Much of our civil society's regular work became a great deal harder, as crucial activities were done under abnormal situation, leaving us trying to mobilize social solidarity while practicing physical distancing. We are continuing to hold decision-makers to account, reducing the level of conflicts among families, helping in easing economic hardship for families via job-creation projects, empowering youth/children through engaging them in constructive learning, education and civic activism, advocating for just peace that respects human rights, and demanding that injustices be reversed.

We are also committed to building a world that is fit for the people – without occupation- putting into action civil society values of empathy and compassion and placing our lives on the line to cope with the day-to-day hardships.

The work of Wi'am continues to the best of its ability with mediations, trainings, women's groups, and summer camp. We are working with young people and scouts in areas of peacebuilding and human rights issues. We are continuing on building the capacities of children and young people as leaders of change in their community. We are working with women's groups to empower them in areas of gender equality and as advocates of justice and human rights. We consider women as a motor of change-the mothers of the future.

This report provides a snapshot of a world that might just have changed irrevocably. In this report, you'll find a wealth of ideas and inspiring cases of individual and community successes that can help us make

the world better, and a great diversity of actions that are already in action trying to build it. We hope you find the many stories of civic action told in our report inspiring and will join with us in the struggle to build a socially just and rights-based society.

We are proud to share with you the milestones we celebrated this year as an organization, made possible by our dedicated staff, volunteers, communities, and donors around the world, and thanks to your continued support.

1. SULHA-MEDIATION

The Pandemic and the general political and economic situation carry a devastating impact, exacerbating underlying root causes of conflict, particularly domestic violence, family and school conflict. The intense strain on individuals and increasing poverty means that there is more likely to be arguments, rage, school violence and frustration between families. When stress is high it is likely to cause more anger and frustration even in families without an abusive history. The complexity or intractability of these conflicts can vary considerably depending on the issue itself, the time period over which it has existed without resolution, and the frustration levels of those involved. Unaddressed or unresolved conflicts over issues may transform or escalate to conflicts over relationships.

Mediation takes the parties out of the courtroom and gives them the space they need to resolve their disagreements with the help of a mediator. Every mediation starts with screening. This gives the mediator the opportunity to understand the nature of the conflict, the parties involved, the relationships between the parties involved, and the history of the conflict.

Mediation, therefore, shows that satisfying the interests of the victim, the offender and society at large are not incompatible. Socially constructive solutions are of benefit to all parties concerned. A relationship of dependency by one party on another or implicit or explicit threats of violence could prevent free participation and true consent to agreement. It should be recognized, however, that many discrepancies in power and skills can be corrected by mediators who will seek to redress the balance in favor of disadvantaged parties.



Case Study:

Stigma against survivors of Covid-19 (and their families) has emerged as a major issue in our communities, as there remains a common belief and fear that those who have recovered remain infectious. Survivors of Covid-19 are widely avoided and stigmatized. Stigma and discrimination against survivors of Covid-19 and their families (including children), has been widespread. Unfortunately, these factors are also fueling harmful stereotypes. Covid-19 witnessed an increasing number of bullying cases directed to those who were infected with the virus.

One of the cases of stereotypes is that of Samaher's family from Bethlehem whose parents tested positive with COVID-19. After following the health protocol of complete isolation in their homes, they did the test again and tested negative. Nevertheless, their neighbors were looking at them in a very demeaning way as if they were guilty for getting the Virus, and they utter negative comments about them.

In the morning when S. was about to take the elevator, she was obstructed by the head of the family next door telling her in an angry

manner not to take the elevator and take the stairs instead. Samaher felt very betrayed and humiliated from this behavior although the neighbor knows that her family were negative. This caused S. to fight back and raise her voice in objection. During this encounter, Samaher's parents came out of the flat and started to shout abuse against the neighbor. The intervention of other neighbors saved the situation from escalating into a physical encounter between the two families.

As the case reached Wi'am, young trainees aided by a senior mediator were quick to intervene. After a couple of individual meetings with each side, young people tried to provide S. with emotional and personal support to ease her situation and make her at ease that they understand her situation and the humiliation that she and her family are encountering. On the other hand, after meeting the others, young trainees (people under the close supervision/guidance of the mediator) told the family that their action is causing hurt to Samaher's family and it is considered as a deliberate attempt to humiliate them for a normal situation that can happen to anyone in this world.

The head of the family finally realized their grave behavior and the fact that their bullying behavior caused hurt to Samaher and her family, which was visible emotional. The family apologized to Samaher's family saying that their ignorance of the Virus made them so scared and jumpy.

It is worth noting that we chose this story to make an outcry to the reader to know that it is right to talk about bullying and encourage people to talk about it to a mediator or teacher or contact the school if the person is a student. The story is a reminder that seeking support is a positive thing

Supporting Networks of Change Agents: strengthen capacity and coalition-building of change agents to leverage change

In order to facilitate systemic change, Conducive Space for Peace must work with people in positions inside the international institutions that support peacebuilding and development. This means working alongside and accompanying 'insiders', whether decision makers, peacebuilding experts or reform agents. CSP will engage with them in

different ways depending on their role as change makers, and their position, power, interest and willingness to share knowledge and invest political capital.

Change agents are at the center of our thinking, whether we pursue changes in structures, attitudes, or practices, or a combination of these, within the international system of support for peacebuilding. We know that there are many people working to support peacebuilding who see a potential for doing better. CSP aims to support and serve these change agents and accompany their change efforts at the international level as well as at the national and local.

We acknowledge that there currently is little space for change agents from conflict-affected countries to have a 'voice' in the agenda for systemic transformation. CSP will seek to support a community of local peacebuilders and development practitioners that pursue this change agenda. We will support different spaces for dialogue among different types of change agents, and will facilitate linkages, complementarities, and joint action when possible.

Stronger platforms and coalitions within and beyond the peacebuilding system are necessary to jointly pursue this change agenda. CSP aims to play a convening role creating conducive spaces for reflection, innovation, and action as part of the change process. We will work to create a spiderweb network of change agents.

II. Youth Program:

Young people are important drivers and agents of change in the development of their societies. This may be because they demonstrate openness to change, learning and fervency for change. They tend to be more future-oriented, more innovative, and more willing to unleash their positive potential to contribute to their societies.

2.1 Training of Trainers in Mediation:

Objectives of the training

- To enhance youth competences in conflict management particularly through the development of mediation skills, and to empower them to engage in constructive conflict resolution
- To learn about the origins of different types of conflicts and possible methods of solving them

This training in peacebuilding and conflict mediation targeted 60 young people during the year (20 youth in each group) from wide areas of the West Bank. It has been designed to benefit youth peace actors interested in deepening their understanding of peacebuilding and wishing to work in mediation and conflict transformation in their communities. This group of “potential trainers” usually looks for both content-based and educational skills-training. Pre-workshop planning helped ensure the training ran smoothly and gave trainers an opportunity to research participant expectations and then tailor the training to meet the specific needs and concerns of participants.

A co-learning environment was ensured during the whole training. The training was innovative due to the fact that it included a strong inner peace dimension, as we consider this to be an integrative part of the holistic approach towards peacebuilding. The participants explored real-life meditation cases, exploring and analyzing diverse case studies of conflicts which were collected through Wi'am's work, applying conflict analysis tools such as a the conflict tree, force field analysis, and actors mapping. These case studies were analyzed by the participants in which they identified various phases of conflict and how SULHA mediation can be applied to transform conflicts in a win-win mechanism.

During the training, key skills and competences of a facilitator and trainer were presented and put into practice. It included an overview of communication and conflict theories, constructive responses to conflict, and principles related to comfort zones and conflict sensitivity.

The Training covered the following topics:

1. SLLHA Mediation as Arab Indigenous Tradition and Culture
2. Conflict Analysis: Understanding Conflict
3. The Nature of Conflict, types of conflict, tools for Conflict Analysis

4. Cultural aspects influencing conflict resolution
5. Communication skills: Active Listening
6. Facilitation/ Key Steps in Training Design
7. Fundamental skills, tools, theories and processes required for conflict transformation and peacebuilding practice.
8. Facilitation skills

Results:

The training helped young trainees improve their facilitation and training skills through a series of participant-led sessions, where participants got hands-on experience in developing and implementing their own non-formal education activities. Young people gained increased understanding of different conflict analysis tools, the inter-relations between a conflict context, and intervention strategies with improved knowledge and skills of different conflict transformation and *Sulha* mediation.

2.2. Intergenerational-meetings between young people and community leaders on the role of youth in combating violence and peacebuilding.

Part of Wi'am's efforts to engage young people in promoting civic peace and non-violence, we organized monthly series of meetings (one each month) between young people and community leaders from wide areas of the West Bank. When older adults contribute to the well-being of youth, it cultivates a sense of purpose and extends benefits both ways.

These organized gatherings enabled youth, community leaders, older adults to come together and share time and experiences. It gives older adults the opportunity to fill a mentoring role for the youth. These relationships also offer older adults' opportunities to learn about and experience the excitement of seeing the world through a younger perspective.

"Intergenerational meetings" involved the sharing of skills, knowledge or experience between old and young on several issues related to

peacebuilding, youth problems, civic peace, and ways of combating rising violence in the community. The participants discussed the root causes of violence, took an analytical look at its potential roots, its causes, and the ways to combat it effectively. These meetings gave young people and the elder the chance to state their opinion about ways of combatting violence and eventually reached recommendations on ways of reducing violence in the community.

These recommendations centered around prevention and intervention strategies that are holistic in their nature. Prevention cannot be accomplished by one sector alone. Justice, education, health care (mental, behavioral), government, social services, media, and organizations that comprise the civil society sector, such as non-governmental organizations like Wi'am Center, faith-based organizations, youth-serving organizations, and others all need to play a key role in reducing violence. In addition, the voices of children, youth, and families who are most affected by violence must be taken into consideration.

The intervention via SULHA that Wi'am does, on the other hand, can collectively contribute to the prevention, elimination of violence, mending of broken relationships between families, and improving the well-being between families.



2.3 Series of Workshops on “the Art of Managing Emotions”

Wi'am Center organized a series of workshops on the theme of "The Art of Managing Emotions" for 20 social workers and youth workers. The workshops included many activities aimed at educating the participants on the mechanisms and tools for managing/controlling their emotions in the various situations they are exposed to, in addition to equipping them with techniques for replacing negative feelings with positive ones and using discourses aimed at reducing emotions such as anger.

We believe that providing young people with tools to manage their energies and their daily emotions can make them more self-confident, more able to realize their potential, and more able to give a contribution to the society in which they live. The meetings also provided young people with effective tools. Through the practice of dramatizing everyday events, young people can have a critical vision of their current situation and that of others, and of their own way of reacting to the challenges of everyday life. This will allow them to increase the psychophysical awareness of themselves and others, and as a result this will enable them to grasp the opportunities that life offers them and to plan their own future based on their own desires, abilities and needs.

One of the participants indicated that the workshops helped her find a way to express the things that are hard to put into words. To use the energy of an emotion to create a statement, and to work out frustration, sadness and anger.



Internal Dialogue with young people:

Part of Wi'am's efforts to take the opinion of young people and build on it for community building and social change, Wi'am organized periodic meetings for young people. The objective is to share them in our initiatives and build on their ideas for better intervention.

These meetings provided a platform for young people to talk about different issues of concern under the supervision and facilitation of Wi'am's director and staff. There were a number of issues discussed:

1-Tribal law and national law: Colliding or complementing approaches

2- Youth and the customary law

3- Gender and Violence

Despite the difficulties of life under occupation and COVID, these discussions and the willingness of individuals from all lifestyles to engage with each other sends a resounding message that dialogue is the ultimate way to help young people state their ideas and eventually respond to these needs via our programs and activities.





Young Volunteers:

Our young volunteer, Rafiq Al-zoughbi, has participated in “Youth for Global Health& Social Justice commemorating the International Youth Day.





Wi'am is also keen to promote the values of volunteering and community work in Palestine, and from this standpoint the center has opened its doors and continues to remain here for youth over the years.

Among the young pioneers in the field of volunteering at the Wi'am Center were Nicole Zogby, Jalil Zoughbi, Rozan Barghouth, Razan Al-Khatib and Aya Atti. This group volunteered for several months during the Coronavirus period and presented many initiatives, the most prominent of which is the Wi'am Library tab online.

3. Children Activities:

3.1 Children Summer Camp:

Background:

As the coronavirus hit communities across Palestine over the summer, schools were closed and children were desperate to go out of the lockdown and find an outdoor space to play, air out their frustration, and compensate their loss of schools and learning.

Children in Palestine are limited by their social, economic, or physical environments during the summer months which expose them to higher risk for worse academic, health, social and emotional, and safety outcomes. During this unprecedented moment in history, we're asked to respond to the diverse needs, particularly meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, the children.

In fact, structured summertime activities and programs support basic developmental needs and healthier life of children who join our programs.

The summer camp poses "a unique challenge" for preventing the spread of infectious diseases; temperature testing, rigorous cleaning and sanitizing, social distancing, and frequent handwashing strategies were used effectively.

Beneficiaries:

We targeted 70 marginalized children of mixed genders (6-15 years old) from most underprivileged Bethlehem areas who are in bad need of a healthy and safe-space to escape the repercussion of the prolonged lockdown in their homes and absence from their schools.

Objectives of the Camp:

- To help children overcome negative thoughts, identify and overcome behavioral and psychological difficulties.
- Raising the awareness of children about protection from the Pandemic and ways of preserving hygiene
- Empower school children via knowledge, skills and coping practices, giving them basic tools to have power over mind and body to control stress, to feel better and to have more positive thoughts.
- Providing a safe, healthy environment that encourages children to acquire necessary knowledge and life skills to think out-of-the-box and be creative in their thinking and actions
- To help children develop problem solving and abilities to manage problems they face in their daily life

The activities are divided into:

1. Raising the awareness of children about protection from the Pandemic

The (COVID-19) pandemic has a major impact on the lives of children and families. At the very start of the summer camp, children received accurate information and practical strategies that can help reduce their risk of exposure to COVID-19, while increasing their resilience and sense of control. Children's understanding of COVID-19, how it spreads, and how they can protect ourselves and others is an important first step. We managed to minimize or avoid children's concerns about the Virus and acknowledge their feelings and assure them that it's natural to feel afraid about health issues.

The social workers informed the children about good hygiene practices and a healthy diet. We also used everyday moments in the Summer Camp to reinforce the importance of things like regular and thorough handwashing and touching surfaces.

2. Turtle Time

The goal: To help kids practice observing what's going on around them. Picking up on social cues helped children reach their needs and understand the perspective of others. Children become more aware that social cues are the signals people send through body language and expressions. When children miss social cues, they can misunderstand people and situations.

One of the learning skills they acquired about social cues is facial expressions. They learned how we use our faces to express how we're feeling whether or not we intend to. They are also aware that we raise our eyebrows when questioning something, smile wide when happy and tempered when we feel angry.

3. Learning how to Use Personal Space (physical boundaries):

They learned how we use personal space: If we're interested in someone, we tend to move closer (but not too close). When we take a step away, we signal that we'd rather keep our distance. This space is an important way of communicating. Some kids can totally

misunderstand what's being said. And people can feel annoyed when the signs they're giving off with their body are ignored.

4. Fun days for children:

It was very obvious from the faces and behaviors of children at the camp that they suffer from depression and anxiety as the result of the gloomy situation they and their families are going through. We realized children at the camp need fun activities and games. The fun days for children sought to address the enormous level of stress experienced by children under the prevailing very difficult situation, especially in areas most affected with economic hardship, unemployment and the lockdown. When kids are too stressed, they're more prone to anxiety, irritability, tiredness and violence.

Learning through play is vital for the healthy brain development of young children, and it is an essential part of a child's development. How to help your child through play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of children. Your life wouldn't be the same without the element of doing things that bring you enjoyment.

Children are also given constructive thinking games and puzzles that helped them pick up important social skills (how to share and take turns) and healthy emotional development (expressing themselves) through play and the thinking time they spent in the game.

5. Promoting Heritage Activities-People's memory

The summer camp adopted a policy of immersing children with their traditional background via Folk dancing as way of highlighting their heritage, shaping their artistic talents and creativities. The training focused on integrating males and females as a way to promote gender equality and cooperation.

Through hard and strenuous trainings, we were able to create a smaller dancing troupe of 8 children from different communities, mixed genders and schools that can represent Wi'am in national events and school celebrations.

6. Environmental Awareness

We taught children to reuse plastic bottles, lids, cardboard packaging, old CDs to make arts, crafts and games, and we made them consider whether something might have other uses before it is thrown away. When items are truly finished with, children can separate them into the correct refuse receptacle. Some children even enjoy 'homework' challenges inside the camp to collect certain discarded items to use for an upcoming activity. Children had time in nature in a setting that promoted observations of nature, birds, discovery and fostered creativity and imagination. Popular games and activities based on nature, such as 'guess the animal sounds' were used.

7. Training children on peer-mediation and problem-solving skills:

The Peer mediation learning is a response to the rising cases of conflicts in local schools and the lack of knowledge and skills among students to deal with conflicts that arise in their schools.

The training focused on two tracks: firstly, equipping children with tools to map conflicts (parties involved, their needs and interests), learning active listening, neutrality and brainstorming, and at the end ways of reaching a win-win situation between conflicting parties; secondly, children engaged in interactive simulations and role playing of problems that students themselves are facing in real-life and in their schools.

In the process of training, students get to learn the different stages of Peer- Mediation process:

1. Agree to Mediate
2. Storytelling and Gathering Points of Views and facts (mapping the conflict to reach the parties involved, interests/needs, and the problem at hand)
3. Create Win-Win Solutions
4. Evaluate Options
5. Create and Agreement between the conflicting parties

Quoting one of the participants in the training- Saeed, a 14-year-old student who was very creative in the peer-mediation trainings who was a victim of bullying and discrimination in his class and felt helpless; “I want to help my classmates, solve their problems and assist them to survive any type of conflict and stereotyping, and not to take bullying that can be destructive and so catastrophic”

8. Art, Drama, crafts, drawing activities:

Theatre and drama training helped children explore the theatre world and learn its basics through creating a short play based on their improvisations in the training sessions. In the sessions, the trainers worked with the children on the subject of school dropouts, bullying others in schools and those tested positive during the Pandemic, exploring intention, reason and possible solutions. Through making drama/or theatre, the child enters an imagined context (the drama world), through enacting a fiction about characters or events in certain circumstances at some particular time and in some particular situation, and so can explore in a unique way conflicts, issues, consequences, attitudes, emotions, concerns and preoccupations that are important to the understanding of real life. At the end of the training, we provided students with the opportunity to be on stage, act out a real-life situation and encourage their audience (students) to think about it, trying to help look for alternatives to the issues at hand and solutions, get lessons and think about solutions.

The training program resulted in a short theatre play about bullying that the children performed.

Allow me to quote one of the students: “When I play a role, I feel as if I am entering another world and I begin to better understand how life is going” he said. “I once played the role of a bully. I understood what harm this behavior can cause to others’

Craft activities, on the other hand, enhanced the imagination of children. Crafts such as jar-shaping and painting encouraged children to play and experiment in a fun and relaxed environment and build their self-confidence. They learned to explore outside of their comfort zone, appraise new situations, think outside the box, and express their thoughts and ideas in a safe environment.

These activities contribute towards enhancing mental health and wellbeing of children, as well as fostering a whole range of developmental skills in children, such as:

- ✓ Fine motor skills
- ✓ Identification of shapes, colors and texture
- ✓ Working with materials teaches them about colors, shapes and textures. How things work and how they fit together.
- ✓ Creativity

9. Storytelling for Children:

We believe it's important to tell our kids stories. Every culture has its own stories or narratives, which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values. This shows them how to tell stories using parents' and grandparents' tales as models for their own storytelling and is an important way to transmit cultural values, traditions and a family's culture.

The storytelling in the S. Camp helped children to reflect their emotions, stimulate creativity, devise imaginative solutions, and be more in touch with their feelings, enabling them to recognize and express emotions and engage with interactive activities within the story.

Once children became at ease with storytelling, they began to learn that good stories have a beginning, middle, and end, interesting characters who have a problem to solve, and other elements. Storytelling at this stage may lead naturally to story writing, because children want to keep a record of their tales.

10. Providing counselling to cases of trauma and anxiety in the Camp

As a result of the Pandemic, many children developed stressful life and traumatic experiences as most of them are seeing and hearing frightening news on television.

At the camp, the facilitators noticed that 5 children (3 boys and 2 girls) were depressed with introvert behaviors that were evident. As a result,

these cases were provided with private care and counseling sessions even after the period of the summer camp that helped them overcome their problems and engage in the activities more actively.

By providing counseling, we helped children cope with the stress and trauma that they endured during the lockdown and lack of schools.

11. Distributing food packages and education items to impoverished children

COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented stresses on the entire families with many parents losing their jobs. Once the pandemic began it reduced the ability of people to obtain sufficient amounts of food to meet their daily needs. It is difficult to predict how long the negative effects of the Pandemic and closures will last, so the health, food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable children and their families must be prioritized.

Access to adequate food and diet quality is an essential right. During the camp, we sensed that many children suffer from malnutrition and other family problems. So, we found it essential to distribute emergency food rations to children and their families to help them cope with their impoverished situation. The parcels contain essential supplies including pasta, cereal, fruit, tea bags, rice, oil, cans, lentil seeds, etc.

This gesture was helpful in reassuring children and their families that they are not alone and for encouraging children not to leave the Summer camp because of the problems they are facing.



Let me share with you the following quotations from the participants:

"I came at the Summer Camp with confidence that I can share my story and listen to the story of other children with mutual understanding of feelings. THIS IS THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH!!!" (12-year-old male)

"I feel that I am better at interacting with friends and family. The people skills learned at camp affected me dramatically when I went home." (15-year-old male)

A quotation from one of the parents:

"My daughter always came home so energized with positive feelings and new friends. Life at home and in "the real world" can sometimes be hectic, crazy, and stressful. At camp, she has a place to be herself, free of judgement, is able to try new things, and relax. The Camp has had such a positive effect on my child and we are blessed to have been able to send her to the Camp."



3.2 Training workshops for students on ways of dealing with Violence

Wi'am Center in cooperation with the Department of Social Guidance at Terra Santa College organized a series of training workshops on ways of dealing with Violence for grade 8,7 and 10, reaching 60 students. The training that was conducted by Zoughbi Zoughbi and Imad Nassar focused on exploring different types of violence in schools, mapping conflicts, and ways of dealing with it.

The Students realized that the best way to address violence is to explore its root causes and to develop common solutions. The training focused on encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions and for maintaining safe school environments, including student participation in resolving problems. The trainers urged that students report potential problems to school officials or social workers. They also reminded the students of the importance of resisting peer pressure to act irresponsibly.

In addition to the theoretical side, the students learned ways of analyzing conflicts via a problem tree in which they had a simple case study to analyze and see the roots of the problem, its causes and possible solutions in a small-group work setting.



3.3. Awareness raising sessions for students on ways of dealing with bullying in schools

In a society where technology and the online world are playing an increasingly big role in people's lives, it becomes evident that schools also need to be up to speed with the latest online trends, both in terms of the opportunities they present and the challenges they pose. We believe schools can play a crucial role in building children's resilience to fake news, bullying and providing students with all the necessary tools to face the online world in an empowered and responsible manner.

More than half of children have used an online social network by age 10. It is important that we guide them through their online surfing and to do this we need to understand why they want to use these sites. Just as we teach our children to ride a bike or cross the road – it's also essential they learn how to work their way around the internet in a safe way.

In that field, Wi'am Center organized a series of consecutive meetings for 250 students from grades 4-10 in partnership with Terra Santa College. The meetings focused on bullying behaviors, types, causes and ways to reduce them, in addition to the pros and cons of social media sites and digital safety issues, challenges and solutions.

Apart from providing students with tools to tackle fake news in the classroom and beyond, this training offered students with essential knowledge, tips and tools to handle a wide range of issues such as online abuse, cyberbullying, establishing positive online relationships, and, above all, how to tackle hate speech.

What Students learn:

- how to use the internet and technology
- the risks children may encounter online, harmful content online
- Sharing personal content
- verbal offending against children online
- bullying online

- understand which technologies, games, websites and apps children and young people use and why
- understand the risks and issues associated with children being online
- know how to access advice and support to be able to overcome their problems and keep children safer online.
- Define bullying and describe its various forms: 1. Physical; 2. Verbal; 3. Relational: designed to harm reputation and relationships
- Describe best practices in bullying prevention and response
- Raising awareness of children about what they post and teach them not to share personal information like phone numbers or addresses.
- Stress the importance of critical thinking skills, with which all children and young people should be equipped from the very start. It is only through this means that they will be able to distinguish reliable sources of information from misinformation.

All of these learnings that students received should help minimize the risk of potential hazards including cyberbullying, strangers talking to children, and exposure to inappropriate content. So, children are more aware about what they should share with people and how to report abuse and block people on websites if they want to.



4. Bible Study:

Wi'am center organized weekly Bible studies that hosted Wi'am staff and wide range of community members, led by different speakers, i.e., Mrs. Ann Fortin, Mercy Aiken, Zoughbi Zoughbi, that centered around different themes:

- The theme of Salvation. The meeting made a connection between people and how they should be one spirit and one mind. The Bible study focuses on the unity between people and how they should be one spirit and one mind. Prayers have helped them as it will help everyone from fear, sadness, and hopelessness. At the end of the Bible study, the Wi'am staff had a farewell lunch to Ann Fortin as she is leaving the country after spending one year in Palestine.



2. Devotion on Faith and Deeds:

Zoughbi Z. led a devotion on the topic of Faith and Deeds according to James. Participants talked about faith and action and its intersection. The participants emphasized the importance of the correlation between talk and the walk in our life...“You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone” James 2:24



3. Devotion on making Peace the New Normal!

The participants in the meetings focused on the prospects of peace, they discussed the possible scenarios of the months or years to come. They have an open question: will the coming days be characterized by increased justice and justice building, or will they bring forth more suffering and wide-spread marginalization and further the plight of the Palestinian people through annexation? As Palestinian, we remain open, focusing on the prospects of justice, while preparing to effectively protect the weak. In the times of uncertainties one thing is sure, that this time demands renewed and strengthened grass-roots work on the ground with initiatives to meet the needs of the people.



4. Devotion: The meaning of Resurrection in our life:

Our Bible study based on the resurrection according to the Gospel of John. The staff reflected on the theme and the narration focusing on the rolling stone and the assertive role of the women. Resurrection is a message of hope at the time of hopelessness and helplessness. We prayed for the healing of those who are affected by the COVID.19 as well as the victims of the Occupation, Tsunami and the terrorist attack on Nova Scotia. We prayed for Justice and peace hoping that we will overcome all kinds of viruses.

4. Devotion: The Road to Emmaus:

The Road to Emmaus was the theme of the bible study facilitated by Ann Fortin. In our discussion we reached the following didactic lessons:

1. The Road to Emmaus is a journey of faith.
2. It is a process of transformation.
3. It is the best example of a prophetic (compassionate) listening.
4. It enhances hope and fights hopelessness and helplessness.
5. It is a way to overcome fear and enhances courage.
6. It is a journey of faith throughout history starting from Moses onwards.



5. Advent

It is the first week of Advent in Bethlehem and the time to prepare our hearts for hope made flesh. Wi'am Center organized its first advent event of the year at the Carmelite Monastery in Bethlehem, headed by Sr. Firyal Qara'a and the participation of Wi'am's women and men group. We are so thankful for St. Firyal's explanation about the

meaning of Advent and its spiritual and earthly meanings. Our amazing group recited Advent Carols that touched our hearts and constituted a spiritual prelude to the Christmas night and the birth of the good news. The participants talked about their personal and family experience, meters from the Grotto, and then about their aspirations of peace and the belief that peace will prevail in this sacred land and across the world. Weekly gatherings will follow the first week of advent on the run up to the Christmas night that we yearn for, in the Holy Land, and around the globe. May this season, and all seasons be a blessing for all, near and far.





6. Gender and Women programs:

6.1. 16 days of Activism Against Domestic violence

Wi'am launched its 16 days of activism to eliminate violence against women and girls with a motto: "let us raise our voice against violence against women".

The 16-day action has started with a daring campaign against sexual harassment in Bethany area in cooperation with Al Hamawi Center. Our campaign gave the chance to women and men groups from Bethlehem/Bethany areas to raise the awareness of their communities and reiterate that sexual harassment is a stark violence against women, which is also human rights violations that we need to confront forcefully in our communities.





6.2. Vigils & Activism:

Wiam, The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, alongside with few NGOs and other dignitaries, held many vigils denouncing and rejecting all kinds of violence especially against women in the Center of Ramallah. Other vigils and interviews were held in the center of Bethlehem and Hebron too. It is worth mentioning that crimes and killing increased so far with the beginning of this year by 42% in comparison with 2019. This year witnessed 34 crimes with 22 cases of killing against women.



6.3 Internal staff meetings marking 16 Day campaign:

On the occasion of the 16 days campaign against gender-based violence in November, Wi'am Center embarked on its internal staff dialogue sessions on the theme of gender-based violence. In each session, one employee selects an important topic related to the campaign, discussing the issues, exchanging information, experiences with colleagues.

Topics discussed included the causes of violence and crime in Palestine, articles of the Palestinian Penal Code that deal with violence and early marriage. All the participants agree that we are witnessing a significant increase in the rates of violence, crime and security chaos that we should deal with head on. All the staff agree that there is an urgent need for the amendment of laws that can contribute positively to reducing societal violence and crime in Palestine.

The second week of discussions dealt with “Early Marriage of girls and its implication on girls and the community”. The Central bureau of statistics in 2019 indicated that the number of females who married before the age of 18 is around 20% in the West Bank and 28.6% for Gaza, with no notable decline in rates of early marriage among younger women. An OXFAM survey also found the highest rates of child marriage in encampments (40%) and in the Jordan Valley

(38%)—areas that also experience the most obstacles to education (OXFAM, 2019).

The session sheds light on the increasingly frequent and still unexplained practice of early marriage, which might at first sight appear solely as a strategy for escaping the hardships of life under occupation and poverty. The participants in the session gave some reasons behind early marriage, which emanates from socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. However, the political situation in Palestine has played a major contributor to raise early marriage, in particular, the closures, instability of the economic situation and the uncertain future faced by many families. An important factor that drives families toward early marriage is culture and traditions in which girls are viewed as the main source of family honor. One way to preserve the honor is by marrying off young girls earlier.

What are the procedures to protect young girls facing early marriage? Changing the obsolete and backward cultural norms and enact laws that criminalize early marriage and put parents as the sole responsible persons for this infringement of the girl's human rights.



All the staff reiterated the fact that efforts are needed to limit the occurrence of early marriage. It will take much effort to completely tackle early marriage from the Palestinian society, but gradual efforts from civic society organization like Wi'am center, the law, and individuals will make a significant step in the right direction. This is should be done by first improving the economic situation, creating job opportunities and education for girls as it will raise an awareness about the consequences of early marriage and bring with it hope and respect for human rights.

6.4. Networking with Universities:

During the year, Wi'am center established a fruitful networking with the Department of social Science at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem and Bethlehem University. Through this partnership, 7 students from both universities completed their community services at the center. They delivered 50 hours training to 20 students on different themes: Psycho-social support for cases of domestic violence, Conflict transformation, leadership skills, initiatives, gender mainstreaming, UNR1325, and CEDAW.

These meetings had impacted the student's personalities, the most prominent of which is their involvement in civil society institutions and their desire for progress and achievement and changing the reality in which they live for the better.



One of the outcomes of these meetings is that the group was able to implement an advocacy project in which they provided psycho-social counseling/guidance to 25 families (children, women, youth) that had cases of COVID-19 and domestic violence problems.



6.5. Job creation and Economic Empowerment:

Since Wi'am's inception it has been involved with economic empowerment programs on different levels and through different structures through work-for-cash-programs, by supporting micro, small, and medium initiatives, and by enhancing the channels of communications between employers and those seeking jobs. Since 2000, we have provided temporary employment for 600 bread winners and more than 20 workers have found permanent employment doing maintenance, gardening, carpentry, etc..

In an attempt to meet the dire economic needs of breadwinners and enabling them to have a decent living, Wi'am has embarked on Job Creation program where Wi'am has continued with the economic empowerment for men and in-house food preparation by many women. Pastries and sweets are great supplements to the main dishes in many Palestinian meals. The women of Wi'am are ready to respond to any

demand from the local community with homemade food, vegetable and organic products.

In addition, this project will provide unemployed workers, who have families to support, with needed temporary employment opportunities in various public institutions, such as schools, social centers, clinics, and hospitals. This project will also help build links between the unemployed workers and the public and private institutions which may enhance the possibility of future employment.

The greater Bethlehem area, which has been sectioned off from other Palestinian cities, has been facing a staggering unemployment rate of 30-35% for the past few years. Due to its dependency on tourism and the restrictions placed on travel due to COVID-19, the unemployment rate is now estimated to be at least 80%, with rampant poverty, and as a result, traumas, domestic abuse, and stress-related diseases are on the rise.

The target group for this project is the inhabitants of Bethlehem, Beit-Jala and Beit Sahour who are directly or indirectly affected by economic hardship. We have directly reached tens of unemployed workers. Indirectly we have reached over 200 people as we help the worker's families in the project. Recently , we have directly affected at least 20 public institutions such as Scouts, House of Hope, Asharook School for the Blind ,,,, as well as Wi'am, which serves hundreds of Palestinians.

Priority were given to individuals who meet the following criteria:

1. Fully unemployed workers who do not receive any support from any other social sources
2. Married individuals with large families and with children in school
3. Families with serious medical problems and debt



Our project responds to rampant unemployment and growing poverty and economic insecurity in the Bethlehem area.

Project goals:

- To provide unemployed breadwinners with temporary employment for 7 months
- To provide impoverished families with a daily income as a way to sustain their living
- To contribute to the improvement of services and facilities that serves the public such as hospitals, clinics, and schools.
- To create links between workers and beneficiary institutions with the hope of future, permanent employment for the breadwinners.

Beneficiaries of this program will have received income and enhanced their economic security, while also having expanded their network found sources of regular employment and income.



Networking with Governmental Organizations: The Ministry of Women Affairs

As part of our networking efforts with the Women Ministry, Wi'am Center represented by its director Zoughbi Zoughbi and Staff and the participation of a group of women, women networks, and youth activists in the field of women's rights met with Dr. Amal Hamad, Minister of Women Affairs at the Ministry's on the headquarters in Ramallah, on Tuesday 11/3/2020.





The objective of the meeting was to lobby the Palestinian Authority on implementing UNR1325 and mainstreaming gender equality. In the meetings, the Head of Woman Ministry praised the work of Wi'am and the women networks in their effort to implement the UNR1325 resolution and enhance the protection, accountability and participation of women. The Minister noted the steady increase in the number of women in the security services, due to the increase in women's confidence in their power and more family acceptance of women's participation in community work and security.

During the meeting, the minister pointed out to the importance of the participation of men as a strategic ally of women in change, because advocating women rights should be equally shared between men and women, calling for strengthening the partnership with men based on gender equality. The minister also stressed the importance of the Security Council issuing a resolution complementing UNR 1325 that focuses on the Palestinian context that takes into account our situation under occupation. Besides, the Minister pointed to the importance of adopting the Family Protection Law in which she pointed out that there

is a serious discussion to reach a final draft of the Penal Code that guarantee equal rights between men and women.

She also focused on the importance of reshaping the public and official discourse to reach all segments of the society because of its importance in restoring confidence with the society, and the need to give civil society an opportunity to work in line with the government to reach a civil society that guarantees rights for all segments of society.

At the end of the meeting, Wi'am center and the women's group presented the Head of the Women Ministry with a letter calling for the PA to fulfill its obligations to implement the UNR1325, and prevent and protect women from violence. The letter contained a number of recommendations calling for an amendment/abolition of laws that discriminate against women, the endorsement of Family Protection law and ratification of penal code law, and also calling for the active involvement of women in emergency support committees fighting COVID-19 and rising domestic violence against women and children.

A conference on UN 1325

Wi'am organized a **conference on UN 1325 at St. Maria Hotel** in Bethlehem. More than seventy participants from different camps, cities and villages attended the conference. Most of the women are coming from grassroots women and human rights organizations in the West Bank. It started with Zoughbi's welcoming notes and introductions to the UN 1325 followed by debriefing on the women groups led by Lucy who talked about their situations and their initiatives to implement various aspects of the UN resolution.



Dr. Kifah Manasreh in her turn gave a talk on asserting women's recognition as peacemakers in addition to women's participation in all spheres of UN 1325. Judge Scarlet Bishara gave a talk about the Family protection law and its necessity to be adopted and endorsed.

The conference concluded with recommendations and letters to officials in the PA to implement this resolution in addition to the endorsement of the Family Protection Law, on which we will debrief you soon.

A Meeting with the Director of Gender Department at the National Security on "Women's Role in the Security Force"

As part of Wi'am's effort to empower women's participation at the social and political levels, we organized a meeting with the Director of Gender in National Security in Ramallah (Ranah al-khouly) which hosted a group of women, girls and youth from the Bethlehem,

Hebron and Ramallah areas. The speaker talked about the important role that women occupy within the Security forces indicating the increase in the participation of women in security, which is currently about 6%. She also mentioned the contribution of women to the security establishment, which is represented in maintaining security, providing psychological support to different cases and alleviating psychological pressures within families. She also spoke about the stereotypical image of women in society that hinders their access to decision-making or their joining of the security services. She touched on the formation of the first negotiating team of women in the country working in the security services to solve societal and family problems.

In the end, Rana talked about the achievements of women who work in security in terms of response and assistance in humanitarian aspects during the Corona period, providing psychological and social support for the quarantined and distributing aid to poor families.

The meeting included a general discussion and questions from the audience related to the career path of women in the security service and the difficulties and challenges that female employees face during their service period



Workshops for Women and Girls on Social Media and Digital Safety

We organized a series of awareness meetings on Digital Safety in the village of Bani Na'im, Hebron District for 40 women/girls focusing on "social media and digital safety and use of social networking sites." The participants were provided with the basics of digital security and the most important measures and advice to protect privacy when using the Internet and social networking sites. Some guidelines were shared on ways of protecting the personal account and prevent its penetration, as well as how to browse safely and distinguish between safe and unsafe sites on the Internet. The meeting included a presentation of some cases and realistic stories about fraud, extortion, theft of personal accounts caused by the wrong use of these sites and browsers.



Workshops on the power of the Media in creating peace.

Wi'am organized a series of workshops for a group of 20 Jerusalemite women on the power of the Media in creating peace. The training gave women the chance to learn how the media can be a powerful mechanism in changing people's lives either for the best or the worst. 70% of social media users are women. Therefore, by using social media women can make a difference. The facilitator gave examples of women peacemakers and how they were able to change the lives of others and their own lives as well.

In the meeting, the participants come to a conclusion that they can promote peace and make a difference within their communities. Through social media, we can face lots of people who might agree or disagree with us. Handling differences with a high spirit is a very important skill. They realize that they need to learn from other women's experiences in order to bring peace into our hearts and minds. From social media we can learn a lot. The facilitator shared how they can also use social media in promoting their work, their services and products.

Most of the women expressed that through social media they can spread peace, and how it is important to talk about inner peace, peace in the family, peace in the community and peace in the country we live in.

One woman said that, "I use the medium of Facebook to say that violence is not the solution in arguments".

At the end, all the participants agree that social media companies sometimes have their own agenda; therefore, women can be the scapegoat of the media. It is women's role to create an atmosphere of harmony to change the distorted image of women and prove the opposite.

Before the end of the workshop, the facilitator shared how they can also use social media in promoting their work, their services and products.

Combating Domestic Violence:

We have chosen to work against the problem of domestic violence, as it is a severe hindrance in the lives of women when it comes to decision-making over one's own body, within the household, community and finally the state. It prevents women from accessing and gaining control over security in their own home and greater community. In addition, the cultural stigma surrounding domestic violence hinders justice.

As a Center, we realized that women in the ages of 18-55 in marginalized areas need much attention. They do not have a platform or any women networks in which to voice their concerns or even provide them with decent protection from violence. Wi'am is very attentive to the needs of women in the community.

Through our work, we managed to tackle domestic violence that receives minimal attention/response from civic organizations or governmental bodies, by reducing the relatively high rates of abuse within the homes of Palestinians by making women and men aware of women's rights and active in the support of women's rights. Our work enhanced the capacities of stakeholders to respond to psychological, physical and social needs of women victims of domestic violence and survivors of gender-based violence, actively reduce domestic violence cases in the target areas, and strengthen the support for women's rights by advocacy work aimed at both men and women.

Our activities involved:

A. Providing Psycho-Social Counselling/Mediation via physical encounters and a helpline enabled us to reach 25 women with direct counselling and 150 cases of family violence and GBV violence in the target areas. The mediation helped in breaking the cycle of violence and restoring friendly relationships between family members, particularly between husband wife and between female and male members, by helping them cope with their situation, building their resilience. This enables them to bounce back from the impact of crises by putting their lives back together. Many reaching the Center suffer from anxiety, physical-psychological abuse and depressive disorders.

One of the outputs of the sessions is opening a space for women victims to express their needs and related feelings, normalize stress reactions and strengthen coping strategies. Counselling and support via mediation are great sources of strength and support for women victims of domestic violence. It gives women victims the chance to share their feelings, pain, and their traumatic experiences with the counsellor and the mediator. Sharing the traumatic experience helped woman victims deal with their pain and heal.

In turn, family Mediation produces fundamental changes in family dynamics, providing family members with concrete means that can have a sustained positive effect on family functioning over time. The mediation in families (young people, children, mothers, fathers) not only focused on the on-going disputes but also significantly on the creation of awareness about the importance of peace, harmony and support for one another in the society.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the mediation was the participation of 3 senior mediators in the network of key actors. They actively participated in the discussion meetings, exchanging opinions and best practices on means of combating GV. By the same token, around 15-20 women reached via counselling and mediation and were motivated to join our advocacy campaign(s)/discussion meetings which we organized in Bethlehem and Ramallah protesting against violence against women. They were active in preparations, writing placards and inviting other women from their communities to join these events forcefully.

The evaluation that we conducted via interviews and counsellor reports showed that relieving the distress associated with the difficult situations that women victims were facing helped them to move beyond the trauma to build their lives at the family and community levels. Besides this, we came to a great conclusion that complementing the counselling stage with mediation helps in breaking the cycle of violence and brings normal relationships between the parties involved with much solid family protection.

B. Educational workshops for social workers on issues related to domestic violence:

The training helped strengthen the capacities of 10 social workers (mixed gender) to respond effectively to gender-based violence and develop a realistic attitude towards helping those affected and addressing negative coping mechanisms. The educational workshops promoted the social workers' understanding of domestic violence, as well as of the role of social workers in responding to domestic violence. The training deployed participant-centered learning that includes scenario-based activities, role-plays, group and other activities to develop the skills needed to understand more about violence against women.

Overall, capacity-building training focused on sensitization of participants to gender and GBV issues, how to facilitate survivors' access to services and support models, and legal frameworks and guiding principles in dealing with survivors, such as maintaining confidentiality and ensuring the safety of survivors. The specific trainings included gender-sensitive methods, referral services and other issues. Pre- test evaluation results indicated that before the training the trainees had basic knowledge on gender and GBV, and many participants did not think that dealing with GBV survivors was part of their responsibility. Post-evaluation clearly demonstrated an increase in the capacities of social workers in terms of knowledge and skills. Trained service providers internalized what they have learned and began applying it to their work and context. For instance, it was observed during a monitoring mission that social workers embarked on counselling students with violent behavior and conduct who were referred to Wi'am from three schools in Bethlehem and Hebron. They provided 8 students with counselling, guidance and conduct correction which helped them overcome their violent behavior and improved their positive behavior using role plays, arts, face-to-face encounters, and voluntary work. The issue of client confidentiality was taken very seriously by the social workers and they securely kept all their records in a locked cabinet at Wi'am. They also never disclosed names of their clients when discussing progress of their service with other stakeholders. This is quite remarkable in the country where awareness of privacy is very low.

The evaluation showed that the capacity building has proven instrumental in not only increasing the social worker's ability to respond to GBV, but also in raising awareness and changing perceptions. The participants previously understood GBV as a private issue, but the training has achieved large strides in changing perception on GBV to be understood as a public health and social problem. In turn, the training has reinforced the participant's understanding of their role in responding to GBV, as well their readiness to use the referral system. In addition, the workshops led to records and interventions that are more reliable, a greater inclination amongst victims to seek assistance from our center, and improvement in the referral of victims of domestic violence to appropriate services (legal, mental health, mediation, etc.).

One unexpected outcome was that after the training, the trainees embarked on a social initiative that provided counselling/guidance to families that face Domestic violence against women and children and at the same time provide awareness and guidance on COVID-19 health risks and ways of protection. Through this initiative, the social workers managed to provide 5 families in Bethlehem and Hebron with initial psycho-social support and essential guidance on the COVID-19 Pandemic and sensitize them on prevention methods. The social workers formed a task team that have been meeting regularly and facilitating responses. In the process, the social workers have been referring their clients to the project services (mediation and counselling) for follow-up and direct intervention by the project team. Another unexpected outcome is that the trainees have been actively engaging in our advocacy campaigns that happen in Bethlehem and Ramallah protesting against gender-based violence and violence in general, and actively participating in community discussions and events related to the project. Yet another unexpected outcome is that Bethlehem University is accepting our work and experiences in areas of women empowerment and GBV, by sending 6 social workers to do their 50 hours of community services at our center.

Wi'am participated actively in the activities of the Center and the project activities as active players (i.e., they helped in choosing, writing the themes of the placards that were displayed in the main square in the advocacy campaigns and coordination with other groups in the event).

Lessons learned from this project is that cooperation between universities and civic society organizations is important to give social workers and students a very important field experience that can help change occur and empower students of social services to get the right practical experience and increase their participation in tackling social issues.

“Through the workshop I have learned how to deliver messages on gender-based violence and health to communities, how to apply our knowledge and skills to assist GBV survivors by referring them to appropriate services, and how to elaborate on sensitive topics in a way that is understood, acceptable and useful. I have also learned how to make sustainable plans to reach as many people as possible,” said one of the participants.

C. We organized three-day discussion meetings that hosted 60 men and 35 women key actors in total (Lawyers, mediators, clergy, security personnel, human rights advocates, academics, youth activists, women activist, social workers and lay women and girls) to raise greater awareness of GBV and make people more supportive of women rights and developing work strategies with men.

The discussion meetings with key stakeholders provided participants, particularly women, with a space that challenged their isolation, with individuals who listen to their concerns, and with sources of support in case they witness or hear about a problem that entails abuse of women. Growing awareness and understanding of domestic violence is also evident, particularly amongst the girls where there is a greater openness to discuss their personal experiences. Discussion groups are a non-controversial and effective means of addressing domestic violence. Guest speakers, of men or of girls, share their experiences in a learning framework that helps women share their concerns. In these kinds of forums, participants have the opportunity to listen to one another and to hear stories that they thought would never be told. Within this group, we heard the legal background and laws that deal with domestic violence (i.e., penal code), the flaws that the law has, and the need to tackle these flaws.

In addition, we have one opinion from certain clergy about women rights and how it is respected in religion, while what we see in reality is the abuse of religion to reach social ends that serve Patriarchal

mentalities and tradition (i.e., issues related to early marriage); another opinion came from a legal background, in which a lawyer said that there is a difference between what the law says and what is common among people. He stressed that there is an attack on women rights based on obsolete traditional thinking and some laws that need amendment (for example an honor killing law that is lenient on the perpetrator); another women activist stressed the fact that there is no equality in the family between males and females which leads to domestic violence. She says that women run 10% of households in Palestine. There is a need, she says, for the dissolution of women's isolation and encouragement of women to gain work and express themselves.

An internal evaluation conducted with selected participants and community members revealed that this group of "key actors" from the Bethlehem and Hebron areas are recognized as key actors by the community and women groups as advocates of women's rights. They are recognized as a strong and unifying force that demands respect of women's rights, and they have started to have an impact on local communities and decision-makers on women issues. Within this group, active and supportive counselling, mediations, and consultations (legal, religion, social) are provided to women in need and in cases of violence against women or girls, with the aim of breaking women's isolation and encouraging women to express themselves. These discussion groups and meetings can change how women and girls see themselves and their lives. With knowledge, understanding and support, women and girls gain a stronger awareness of their self-worth and they are better positioned to prevent violence (particularly violence that was once considered normal and not abusive, such as verbal abuse).

The evaluation showed that WI'AM and the key actors in the discussion group are in constant contact with many geographical groups who are seeking their support for help in their effort to empower agents of change and stand up against gender-based violence and other Patriarchal practices/mentalities that curb their freedom of choice, and participation in community life and education. The chances for expected results to be realized are very high. Women, families and girls in rural areas and cities are eager to participate in activities (such as discussion groups) that can help them come out of their isolation,

practice democratic thinking, argue against obsolete norms, and lead a normal life for their daughters.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the discussion groups is the formation of a solid “Stop the Violence” network of key actors, a mixed gender group made of lawyers, human rights advocates, academics, clergy, activists, and teachers. The committee, which meets every two weeks at Wi’am and other places, took on a goal to intervene in cases of domestic violence as a solid unified body providing mediations, counselling and guidance to victims of DV, and to actively participate with Wi’am in organizing advocacy work to combat gender inequalities and violence against women.

After discussing the broad challenges of women’s protection, the participants suggested a comprehensive strategy and approach for the prevention and protection of women from violence:

-There is growing recognition of the need for an orchestrated evidence-based violence prevention message via social media and mainstream media. They agree that gaps exist between what we know (knowledge), what we do (action), and the structures that can influence or even hinder change (Patriarchal norms and policies).

-Improve access to services via home visitation programs involving trained social workers and mediators that can help in reducing VAW.

-Engage in an advocacy campaign to pressure decision-makers for the endorsement of the Family Protection Bill as a critical Preventive milestone in the journey towards ending violence against women and girls in Palestine. The real success, however, will come only with proper implementation and translation of the commitments embedded within the bill through responsive policies, services, and practices.

- Unite for shifting the narrative from blaming the survivors to ensuring the accountability of perpetrators,
- Integrate Community-Based mediation as a pivotal mechanism that complements counselling to transform conflicts, restore healthy relationship in the family, and bring justice to cases of Domestic violence against women.

D. Organizing Advocacy Campaign :

Advocacy is an important activity that can raise the voices of Palestinians in general and Palestinian women in particular and protest against gender-based violence and the silence of the community and decision-makers about the killing of girls. Our campaign aims to raise awareness, stimulate advocacy efforts and share knowledge and innovative ideas for fighting violence against innocent people.

In light of the sharp increase in societal violence, Wi'am Center, in cooperation with development organizations from Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron areas, human rights advocates, Muslim Shiekhs, Church leaders, young groups, activists, social workers, university students, volunteers, lay people, Hirak (Enough in English) movement, and civic society organizations, organized many protests and activities in front of Bethlehem Peace Center -the main Square in Bethlehem as well as in different places in the West Bank towns. All of that was an outcry against killings, violence and the alarming rise in VAW and so-called honor killings. The protestors raised many posters calling for an end to violence which has become part of the reality of Palestinian society, and calling for the abolition of unjust laws and practices that discriminate against women and leave the perpetrator with impunity. They also condemned the absence of legal action and deterrent measures for this phenomenon.

An evaluation (selective interviews) that took the opinion of the participants and the larger community present at the time of the event showed that the participating organizations (with Wi'am as an integral player) act as a unifying voice against societal violence in general and GBV in particular, calling for justice for women victims, and a voice against the silence of the community when it comes to so called "honor killings". Another outcome is that the advocacy work helped in raising community awareness of gender-based violence and its implications in the family. The participating organizations in the advocacy and the young activists started to work as a united force for future work that will have influence on the grassroots in changing obsolete traditional perception on women rights and the decision-makers.

One unexpected outcome was the formation of a network of civic society organizations, civic activists, women groups, and lay people, with Wi'am as an active member, which plans and implements more

advocacy campaigns. The latest of which was organizing another protest in Ramallah against GBV and violence in general.

As part of Wi'am's networking and exchanging of best practices and opinions regarding women rights and problems related to domestic violence and UNR1325, Wi'am participated in three virtual meetings:

The first on-line meeting was between women Coalition groups, women members of women guidance and support committees, women members of local councils, and the Head of the Ministry of Women Affairs on 11/05/2020; the second on-line meeting was with ICAN's "Women Alliance for Security and Leadership" which includes 300 women from different worldwide organizations (WASL) and happens every Thursday; the third virtual meeting was organized by CARE International and "Women Center for Social and Political Guidance" (WCLAC), with the participation of diverse local Women Organizations in Palestine; The fourth was multiple physical meetings (4 meetings-one each Thursday of May-June-July-August) organized between Wi'am and our partner networks of 13 "Development Coalition."

The first online meeting was with the Head of the Women Affairs, Mrs. Amal Hamad, that involved women members of the local councils, women activists, and members of the Guidance and Support committee in different Governorates. The objective of this meeting was to spark discussion about how to engage key actors and women activists in developing and communicating a strategy to combat family and GBV and the integration of women in strategies to combat COVID-19 and prevention of GBV. The meeting was attended by 70 local women activists and local council members.

It reached the following recommendations:

1. First and foremost, the Palestinian Authority, community organizations, health responders, policymakers, and all other humanitarian actors must support the inclusion of women in frontline emergency response teams (health, humanitarian committees) as important partners in the COVID-19 responses at the humanitarian and health levels
2. Forming a social incubator and women committees for creating future women leadership that can provide support and protection of women in distress and their children.

3. Discussing a “draft plan” to upgrade UNR1325 based on four points: a. mechanism of prevention and protection of women and girls from occupation measures; b. Accountability; c. Participation; d. Recovery.
4. Suggesting a comprehensive strategy to combat GBV based on consistent and comprehensive media messaging to reach the larger public and address their mindset in a rational manner
5. Helping women victims of Domestic Violence have confidence in reaching a compassionate service provider and dispel their fear of stigma and reprisals.

Key Messages of the meetings:

Cases of violence against women and girls must be exposed to the public, making it clear that VAW cannot be tolerated. An essential element in VAW prevention is to eliminate misconceptions about violence against women and girls. All elements of society, including public decision-makers and key influential figures, need to understand that VAW is a violation of human rights, regardless of when and where it occurs, and that not only should there be zero tolerance for it, but also that swift and effective action must be taken to end it. With a clear strategy, frequent consultation with stakeholders and careful planning, it is possible to make change happen. Existing evaluations and evidence show that campaigns can be successful – within a reasonable scope. The meeting reached a conclusion that to provoke a shift in social norms over a period; we must follow evaluations of VAW campaigns that suggest that well-designed campaigns can prompt significant change in attitudes and social norms related to VAW.

The second on-line meeting, “The obstacles facing women in the security sector in reaching decision-making positions”, was organized on 8/07/2020 by CARE and WCLAC, with the active participation of Wi'am, civic women organizations and the Head of the Women Ministry. It hosted 60 women activists, the Participation of the Head of Women Affairs, and a diversity of local civic groups. The meeting focused on how women in security are at the forefront of this pandemic and their role in raising awareness about Domestic violence and COVID-19.

It reached the following points:

1. Dr. Hamad reiterated the importance of supporting women in security and civic roles and empowering their participation in political life and decision-making process, which is integrated in the “National Strategic Plan”,
2. Overcoming obstacles that impede women reaching decision-making roles whether at the procedural, cultural, or skills level;
3. Integration of more women in security into the emergency committees established during the emergency of COVID-19
4. Develop the legal skills of women in the security sector, as they constitute 6% of the security sector
5. Working with decision-makers, journalists and social media outlets to raise awareness on the need to increase women representation and participation in social and political life;
6. Enforcing UNR1325 by asking the government to enforce a strong legal mechanism for its efficient implementation.

The third on-line meeting was with ICAN and WASL centered on “how do women peace-builders cope with the rising of GBV and the Humanitarian impact of COVID-19”, and “the impact of recognition on women peacebuilders and their work”. The meeting, which is held on a weekly basis every Thursday, reached the following conclusions: 1. The need to provide protection and safety to women peace-builders and their work; 2. Recognition of women’s rights comes through their participation in mediation and decision-making bodies; 3. the need to empower women to be part of the mediation, reconciliation and negotiation teams at the political levels.

The fourth meeting was part a series of physical periodic meetings (4 meetings) with a women “Coalition” centered around GBV. One of the outcomes of the meeting is inviting the political parties and other civic groups to talk about their role in combatting violence against women; second, inviting community leaders, mediators, and clergy to put forth solutions to the rising violence in the community against women and ways of involving women in community affairs; third, organizing awareness-raising sessions on the role of law in protecting women and preventing GBV apart from the traditional/tribal intervention; fourth, activating the work of the emergency committee of the Coalition in combatting COVID-19 and GBV.

The discussion also covered issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination against women, including honor killings, violence

against women by the Israeli occupation, and the challenge of forming a unified front among women on the issue of women's rights in Palestine.

An oral evaluation conducted at the end of the meetings indicates that this platform is an efficient medium to take the voice of women to decision-makers (the head of the Women Ministry) and a chance for civic society organizations to unite their forces to pressure for change. The evaluation also indicates that there should be consistent advocacy campaigns that can address the deficient response, and sometimes the complete absence of government and civic society organizations in taking the responsibility of responding to women's needs and voice the silent voices of women victims more loudly to reach the larger public and decision-makers.

Personal Stories

A woman's life has changed from a victim to a resilient survivor. Her husband constantly abused a 30-year-old woman with no formal education to the extent that she started having symptoms of depression. She has two small daughters and lives in the Hebron area with her husband and in-laws. She got married four years ago. Initially, the husband was very caring. However, during the COVID-19 Epidemic and the lockdown they started quarrelling over petty issues, which soon turned more violent. Her husband started drinking alcohol excessively and beating her every day. He stopped taking care of her as well as the children. He would sometimes hit the children too. He also started to hang out with bad men and on many occasions stopped coming home.

Due to his behavior, Mrs. X became very irritated, worried and tense, because she had no education and no employment to support herself and her son. Other family members (in-laws) also started bullying her and abusing her. She could not confide her problems to anyone, as she could not contact her father or mother due to geographical hurdles and traditional family norms and mentalities that do not welcome girls to go back to their family homes. She wanted to go and find work, but her husband did not support her. Due to negligence by in-laws and poverty, she did not have enough to eat, and her daughters started suffering from malnutrition.

Because of these constant physical, psychological, economical and social abuses, she developed symptoms of depression and despair. After hearing about Wi'am's counselling services via her female friend who works in a local women's organization in her village, she approached the counsellor for help. At that time, she had problems like nervous breakdown, loss of sleep, crying, apathy towards the children and herself, and headache, and she did not want to talk to others about bodily pain. Every day her problems were getting worse and creating obstacles in her daily activities.

Counsellor's Intervention:

To address these problems, the counsellor held various counselling sessions with her in a safe place. In the sessions, her psychosocial problems were addressed by using various techniques like relaxation exercise and psycho-education. In the first session, when conducting a discussion of her history she did not reveal all her afflictions. However, she came to the next session because after expressing some of her problems she felt better. In another session, she broke down, started crying and talking about her problems as stated above. The counsellor provided her with several techniques such as relaxation and emotional support. Each of her problems was discussed one at a time and brainstorming techniques were used to find out the solutions to reduce her problems.

Finally, the counsellor/mediator met with her husband and had counselling sessions with him. He was hesitant to take her back and was extremely uncooperative. With the help of the mediator, the counsellor managed to bring normality to the case of the woman and convince her husband to take care of his wife and children.

The woman slowly started feeling better and has started cultivating the land. She still lives with her in-laws and is now empowered to face her in-laws and her husband. She went through 7 sessions. She was provided with emotional support, relaxation and positive coping mechanisms. Recently, her husband has started supporting her with household activities and takes care of her and the little girls. She has become extremely confident and is living a normal life without any fear and sadness.

A meeting of Community Leaders

As part of Wi'am's efforts to share the wisdom of community leaders in the community, a group of thinkers got together at Wi'am, discussing socio-political and economic issues, the implications of American elections on the Palestinian society and cause, alternative methods of responding to conflict, the socio-economic implications of COVID-19 on the society, and ways of supporting marginalized communities.



Intergenerational Dialogue: young of the heart meeting young of the age

During the year, Wi'am held a series of sessions between the youth of the heart and youth of the age. These dialogues were facilitated by Zoughbi and attended by dignitaries, religious leaders, journalists, professors, and political leaders, as well as youth from different walks of life.

Zoughbi, the director of Wi'am center, talked about the gap between generations, posing many questions and quoting Jibran Khalil Jibran and Aliyy Ibn Ibyy Taleb. By the end the attendees asked for more sessions, meetings and conferences.

Please find the link for the debate

<https://www.facebook.com/nativitytv/videos/669032907320715>

The session delved into the topic of "Violence and the escalation of conflicts among families in the West Bank". The discussion began with an introduction from Zoughbi about the causes, rates and implications of conflicts on the family and the community in general. All the participants agree that there is a need to join forces between the older and the younger generation to tackle the escalation of conflict in the community, and concluded with the following recommendations:

1. Media should be better utilized as an awareness-raising tool for positive change.
2. To increase awareness of youth and help practice diversity in unity.
3. To Have meetings with local and national authority personnel, to synergize our collective efforts towards the reduction of violence.
4. To treat religion well and respect it as a private and unique relationship between creator and the created.
5. To focus on citizenship as the basis of good governance.
6. To reform the mentalities of the community and its members while preserving its authenticity.



Citizen Diplomacy:

Let's hope you'll be over here sooner rather than later! We look forward to the day after COVID-19. We love travel and we love travelers.

After what was a record-breaking year for tourism in 2019, we anticipated a boom in tourism. But, as we all know, COVID-19 came along and shut down the whole world. Our own plans for expanding our tours and diversifying our groups came to a screeching halt. The Coronavirus will pass and things will normalize again and we will be happy to host you. But let's hope that the world will open again and tourist can visit our part of the world.

Obviously, the big question for many of you is how we can keep tourism alive and reach our audience and potential tourists around the world. For that, we are offering travel experience to the Holy Land via "Virtual Tourism" (via Webinar).

During 2020, we have had the great fortune to make virtual tours in Battir Village, Church of the Nativity, Shepherd Field, and Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. We also took the audience around all the sacred sites with our local guide, Usama N., creating a sense of deep connection with this holy, spiritual place at one of the most auspicious times of the year. The virtual tour on Oct 31/Dec. 19, 2020 hosted Pilgrims of Ibillin:

Topic: Resistance in Battir Then and Now

Topic: Christmas in Bethlehem - Wi'am staff with Pilgrims of Ibillin

The webinar highlights the step-by-step process on creating live virtual tourism experiences.

Visiting groups before the Pandemic :

Many groups blessed us at Wi'am: for an example an international group of Business students from Aalen University in Germany and a local Palestinian group from Ramallah, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Bethlehem. See a marvelous photo of the two groups at Wi'am emphasizing that we all belong to one earth; we live in a global village, and care for each other.



Wi'am hosted many groups from England and another group from Methodist Church USA. During their visits, both groups spoke with the director of Wi'am, Zoughbi Zoughbi, about Wi'am's mission of creating a culture of acceptance and empowering the local community. The groups also spoke with Zoughbi about the Christian presence in Palestine and the challenges Palestinians are facing following President Trump's recent peace deal.



Zoughbi Zoughbi, the director of Wi'am hosted many groups from EOs and visitors from different countries. During their time at Wi'am, the visitors engaged in a conversation with us about Wi'am's role as a peace building organization in the community as well as the importance of spreading a message of hope in the face of the conflict and the separation wall.



In addition, Zoughbi Zoughbi responded to questions relating to Christianity in the West Bank, the ongoing conflict, and the consequences of President Trump's "Deal of the Century." Conversations and meetings such as these reflect Wi'am's mission statement and help spread awareness and educate visitors of Palestine in the spirit of bridging divides within the region.

Wi'am hosted a group of women from England visiting Bethlehem. The women shared a meal prepared at Wi'am. The Palestinian women talked about the challenges they face confronting the Israeli Occupation as well as exposed the atrocities that the Palestinian prisoners face. They emphasized that what they hope for is Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. They also discussed issues pertaining to gender and equality in Palestine.



Some changes, though, still happened in our program due to COVID. That is our participation in outside conferences and speaking engagements: our homes and our offices have become our platform for exposing what we face in the occupied territories and sharing with others about our problems, hopes, and ambitions. Our advocacy has been shared through ten of zoom calls, several online teachings, couple of virtual tours, and tens of virtual speaking engagements.