



Annual Report

2023



Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom

Educational Institutions and Community

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Introduction

We began the year with internal divisions in the country that pointed in the direction of civil war. While those in power tried to pass laws to weaken our democracy, supporters of the democratic ideal took to the streets. Institutionalized racism was strengthened while the Palestinian population was torn between alienation and the recognition that their rights were the first to be trampled under the new legislation.

From there, we progressed, in October, to real war, with a bloody massacre, rocket fire, untold destruction and killing in Gaza and displaced populations on both sides of the border.

In the midst of this terrible time, we, in Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom have reinvigorated our commitment to peace, justice, equality, respect and shared struggle. Only by working together can we make a difference. Cooperation is both harder than ever — and more crucial than ever. The past year has shown there is no alternative to the struggle for peace and equality, and the imperative for peace education.

The year 2023 was one in which we adapted, every day, to new situations and new realities. Through it all, we have remained positive in our belief that peace is both possible and necessary. The following report reflects this year of turmoil and our work to educate for peace, and to preserve our oasis of peace for all the generations to come.

Everything changed for us on October 7. And yet, the accomplishments of the entire year have been crucial to us and to our work, and they will continue to sustain us in the coming years. That is why, in this year's annual report, we have returned to reflect on the beginning of the year, looked closely at the ways we adapted in the last quarter of the year and added some thoughts on the way we'll continue from here.

A note from Eldad Jofte Chairman of the Municipal Society



Dear Friends,

I received the keys to my office on October 8, the day after the event that turned our lives upside down. That is, we immediately skipped over dealing with important issues and on to dealing with the urgent, critical ones. From hoping to sort through the main matters that need addressing, we found ourselves trying to deal with the unimaginable.

Fortunately, the municipal board is an active one who's members share the burden. Each and every one has taken upon him/herself responsibility for a program or project. We immediately identified several issues connected with the functioning of the village in wartime, as well as the issues we need to address, despite the war, so that we can continue to grow and blossom as a community with shared ideals and a vision for the future.

To begin with, we remind ourselves why we choose to live in Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom, and the commitment each one of us makes to working for peace. I have been working closely with Ariela, Chairwoman of the Educational Association, especially on strategic planning and in the dialogue sessions that bring together the village members.

These dialogue sessions help us think and talk our way back to one another, as well as helping us learn and take a stand, as a community, on the events in Israel and Gaza. We are pursuing two additional paths — one of personal wellbeing and one of the security of the village. Members of the board, together with others, set up a resilience team. One group works on ensuring that village members look out for one another, particularly the elderly or those who experience anxiety or other psychological issues. Another has been working with the regional council and local police to increase the village security. My predecessor, Rita, initiated a project with cameras and guards. We also obtained the security and first aid equipment that was much needed.

At the same time that we are grappling with issues of resilience and recommitting to the struggle for peace in the face of the bloodiest war in our memory, we are also in the midst of absorbing new members into our community. This is already having an amazing effect on our village; we see it changing before our eyes. We are pleased to see quite a few of our new members participating in the dialogue sessions, events and projects, and we hope to create more avenues of involvement in the future. Construction of new houses is beginning, and we hope to see this project proceed in an orderly fashion. The war, of course, slows down construction, but we are seeing progress, nonetheless.

My board and I have identified several projects we intend to pursue, including a think tank to address the changes in the village due to our new, young population; the creation of an archive, together with the Association; rejuvenating the library building (which now houses some of the Association staff); and restarting the volunteer program.

I want to thank my predecessor, Rita, and the board that worked with her. Her leadership jumpstarted several projects, especially bringing the new neighborhood to the construction stage, and she helped the village grow and flourish. I took over knowing there would be challenges for the future, but a solid foundation, as well.

The challenge that guides us in our work is the desire to strive together, with an emphasis on the common and the connected, to strengthen the commitment to the values underlying the establishment of Wahat al-Salem Neve Shalom. This is my commitment, as well, to the community I am privileged to serve, and I hope to lead us through these difficult times and into an era of truly advancing peace and equality.

Eldad Joffe

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



Dear Friends,

Looking back on 2023, the war that broke out in October in Gaza stands out as the most dominant and earthshaking, making it difficult to see past, to earlier times before the war. This is the worst war in my memory; and the challenge of coping with the trauma together is huge. Palestinians and Jews in the area, and all over the world, are exposed to different media, and they often have mirror-image perspectives of what occurs, especially concerning this conflict between the two nations. "From the river to the sea" is the Palestinian narrative for self-determination, disregarding the Israeli need to exist and its deep fear of ceasing to do so, while "Am Israel Hai" expresses the Jewish concern for Jewish survival and nationhood, totally disregarding the Palestinian reality and needs.

Our community and educational institutions continue to embrace an unwavering commitment to the needs and aspirations of both peoples, which is a highly unpopular position at the moment. The Amuta (association of educational institutions) and Aguda (municipal society) work together in conducting difficult yet necessary conversations in the community, both uni-nationally and bi-nationally.

In contrast to the deep rift between Palestinians and Jews elsewhere, NSWAS is facing the challenges of trauma together. Holding onto the complexity of our reality together, rather than separately, is a momentous achievement, even as outside NSWAS, both national peoples bleed, blame, and condemn each other in isolation, and they refuse to take the "other" into consideration.

The war has been devastating, from the Hamas massacre on October 7, to the Israeli military retaliation in Gaza. Many in NSWAS have relatives and friends who have been killed, wounded, and displaced. The hope for negotiations is slim, but our determination to strengthen the solidarity and our life together in NSWAS is strong.

Primary school attendance is full, and the SFP projects are expanding. A local professional team was summoned to the school to offer information and workshops to both parents and teachers, strengthening their skills to deal confidently with fears and the extremism that arise from the war.

Last year was characterized by cooperation between the primary school and the School for Peace. Under the leadership of Nir Sharon, the school staff is undergoing massive pedagogical and ideological development, as deeper teacher dialogue led by SFP staff is underway. This dialogue increases cohesion and cooperation; and, in parallel, teachers are undergoing added professional bi-lingual and multi-cultural training. There is a strong sense of cohesion and a clear sense of purpose, especially in coping with the stress of the war. The Language Center is in high demand, and the pupils cannot wait to participate in the fun language games and activities.

Finally, we are proud to say that the SFP facilities that were burned down by arson three years ago have been modestly, yet effectively completed, thanks to Samah's team's fundraising efforts and the hard work of Voltaire and Nir who supervised the building efforts themselves. Similarly, the dilapidated old warehouse building on the school premises, near the library has been turned into a beautiful nursery and pre-school facility, housing 18 toddlers who are happily growing up bi-lingually together. Preparing the next generation is a joyful task and Nur is orchestrating the educational symphony beautifully.

The Amuta committee has been granted permission to stay on, at least until the end of June, to see the school year through and support the joint directorship of Nir and Samah in leading the organization. We wish them the very best and strongly believe that this joint venture will strengthen the institutions' work and broaden their scope, reaching new horizons and impacting and inspiring the commitment of more individuals and organizations to Palestinian and Jewish solidarity and the pursuit of peaceful and egalitarian solutions to our conflict.



Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay

School for Peace

Maintaining a commitment to peace,
growing the influence of peacebuilders





Beginning of the year

The year began with political and social upheavals that tested our faith in shared struggle. The second annual SFP alumni conference, held at the end of March, opened this question to discussion in a number of ways. Some of these discussions were difficult, and the facilitators leading the sessions worked to keep them on a level where people could not just hear one another speak, but actually listen. On the Saturday session, participants imagined a world without conflict. Many found this last session an impetus to keep working to build that society that values peace and equality.

Simultaneous translators who had graduated from the SFP course were on hand to smooth the way toward sessions in which everyone could speak in their own language and be understood by all.

The School for Peace dialogue courses continued during the year; especially crucial were the Climate and Environment Activists, the Change Agents for Mixed Cities and the Lawyers' course. An advanced human rights lawyers' course was offered for the first time.

University courses took place as well, and the School for Peace facilitators brought their expertise to the dialogue courses in the primary school as well as in counseling for organizations that have Palestinian and Jewish staff and uneven power structures.

The beginning of the year also saw crucial work with alumni. Alumni of human rights lawyers' courses were involved in the Israel bar elections, while architect alumni worked to get members elected to the national association of architects.



September

The School for Peace moved back home, after over two years camping out in the library building. The rebuilding of the School for Peace following the arson attack was finally complete and the offices were ready for the staff to move back. The 2023-2024 courses were set to begin in October-November. The new building, with its shade trees and fresh design, is a dream-come-true for the SFP team.



October

While university courses were put off at the outset of the war, the SFP courses began as planned or with a slight delay, some by Zoom and some in person. A new Zoom dialogue course was offered to Palestinian and Jewish Israelis living in Europe, starting in October. There was some hesitation opening the course after the events of October, but the participants insisted on holding the dialogue sessions. We realized, as the course progressed, that the course members, both minorities in a society that did not understand the particular trauma either side was experiencing, needed to speak to one another and hear one another, even through their screens.

Assistance to organizations was imperative, and SFP facilitators and staff led over 100 dialogue and peace-building sessions in hospitals, mental health teams, schools and more.



Looking to 2024

The School for Peace is recommitting to working toward peace. That means, first and foremost, working with facilitators and training new ones to deal with the war and its aftermath. We will be working in several directions: Developing collaborations with other organizations to improve our dialogue courses, increase our impact in our university courses, offer further online courses, following our success with our first one, developing our alumni community, and increasing the assistance we offer to alumni and to external organizations.



Primary School

It's all about language



*Beginning
of the year*

Since it was inaugurated in March, the **Language Center** has been the center of the entire school week. There are two reasons for this: The Center is a place that makes learning fun. There is no end to the educational games, playacting and challenges: The Center is designed to address both the complex task of learning to speak, read, write and comprehend a new language; as well as to teach in ways that every child can enjoy. Over the summer, the Arabic teachers designed a curriculum to improve Arabic comprehension among Hebrew-speaking children, and this curriculum went into effect in the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.



Language and communication are the basis of everything else in the school, and the teachers are working to integrate language into all of the lessons. In addition, Arabic lessons were offered to the Hebrew-speaking staff through the Language Center. The teachers have also been participating in dialogue sessions for the past several years, helping to build a cohesive educational staff.

Play is an important part of the school day, and we try to encourage Arabs and Jews, boys and girls, to play together. **The Fred Segal Play Area**, finished over the summer, is in constant use by all the children.

When regular sports classes or planned games are not taking place on the field, there is almost always a pick-up soccer game on the special synthetic grass field.

Learning about one's emotions and feelings is another part of the school week, and **lessons in the forest** near the school and mindfulness sessions were designed to help kids deal with their emotions, think positively, and concentrate on their lessons



The youngest children finally have a permanent home: Over the summer, a building in the educational campus underwent a colorful renovation for the use of the nursery, enabling the existence of two separate groups and taking on more children.





October

The outbreak of the war is especially challenging for a school where children come together from 19 different communities, Jewish and Arab, with ties to either side of the border. The challenge of the school staff was two-fold: to reinforce the message that learning to live in peace is the best cure to the conflict and to help the school community get through the crisis.

To this end, Neama, the school principal, together with the staff, developed a program for parents and teachers that included dialogue sessions, increased participation in the school calendar and professional help for both parents and teachers in dealing with the pressures of the situation and the questions and anxieties of the children. This program includes the leadership of dialogue facilitators, child psychologists and trauma experts.

As children came back to school, but needed to be near air raid shelters, the primary school played host to children from a Waldorf primary school in the region where the kids did not have access to a shelter. These kids were welcomed into games during recess and even participated in some classes.



**Looking
to 2024**

The coming year will be devoted to building our community through the **Parents' — Teachers' Community project**. We are hoping to increase the number of students this year, and are working on attracting families to the community.

Communications and Development





Beginning of the year

Howard Shippin, who had worked in C&D for years, retired in March. Ira Elan took his place, stepping into some of the many, various jobs Howard had been doing, including maintaining the website, updating social media and keeping track of donations.

During this period, our website was hacked, and the company we worked with was only able to partially restore the site — without photos or paragraphs. We made the decision to create a new site, which Howard helped put online, and Ira then began leading a project to update that site and create one that is modern, accessible, easy to navigate and aesthetically pleasing.

We were lucky, at the beginning of the year, to have one intern, Isabela do Santos, from Canada, who stayed with us for six months. Isabela, who is doing a PhD in peace studies, brought a great deal of insight and positive energy to the team. We also had a shorter-term intern, Elena, from Italy who worked in the School for Peace and with the C&D office. Unfortunately, two other interns who had hoped to come did not make it to the village before the war broke out.

Travels to Europe and the US were possible in the first two thirds of the year. C&D head, Samah Salaime went to the East Coast of the US for a whirlwind tour of meetings, and she also visited the UK, where the Friends' Association AGM was held in the House of Lords; she went to Germany and Switzerland to attend their AGM meetings as well. Dr. Roi Silberberg accompanied her to Germany and Ella Givon was with her in the US. Silberberg also went to Sweden, where he was presented with a donation for a classroom in the School for Peace building.

The New York Times came to interview people in the village, including Isabela, and we recognized the value of this kind of exposure in the world.



October

As the media descended on the country, Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom became a magnet for writers and news teams looking for an alternative narrative to the war. With several interviews a week, we assembled a group of people who could speak to a camera in English, and we welcomed them — from Swedes to Australians and Japanese — into our oasis of peace.



While travel was difficult, Samah did manage to make it to Spain to meet the mayor of Barcelona, and to Sardinia, Italy, where she addressed its parliament and participated in a candle-lit peace march.

As our priorities changed, we worked to fund new projects and initiatives. For example, the traumatic effects of the war made a well-functioning Parents' — Teachers Community in the primary school a necessity, and we quickly raised the backing for this project. Despite the war, the C&D team brought in the funding needed to cover the budget that had been passed at the beginning of the year and finished the year with balanced books.



**Looking
to 2024**

Samah Salaima is taking on the position of Co-educational Director, together with current director, Nir Sharon, and the C&D office will be adjusting to the change. Naomi Frid will be heading the C&D team, which will be working more independently, and with both co-directors.

The focus of our fundraising efforts will be adjusted, as well, as the situation changes. Changes may include a return to full university courses, alumni projects, and new projects initiated under the aegis of the co-directors, rather than one of the institutions. A further project on the books is a Peace Hub, which will provide space for peace organizations to work, and hold meetings and conferences.



2023

Income and Expenses



From Friends Associations
\$1,259,024



Building

\$792,370



Staff

\$1,018,781



From philanthropic donations
\$565,205



Projects

\$377,613



Earnings

\$813,507



Other

\$511,121



Total income

\$2,637,737

Total expenses

\$2,699,885

Other numbers

253

Children in
the primary
educational
system

36

major media
reports on the
village

480

participants
in School for
Peace dialogue
courses

19

elected
into village
membership

977

participants in
School for Peace
one-time dialogue
sessions

32

village youth in the
NADI youth club



27,000

guests/visitors to the
hotel/visitors center

Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center





Beginning of the year

This year's rescuers honored in the annual ceremony in the Garden of Rescuers were the Israeli organization B'Tselem and six Palestinian organizations. B'Tselem, which documents illegal actions against Palestinian citizens was represented in the ceremony, while the six Palestinian organizations, all human rights groups, had been outlawed in Israel and could not come. We honored them, nonetheless, refusing to accept the discriminatory edict. Prof. Yair Auron, one of the founders of the Garden, was also honored in the ceremony.

We also began working on the **Garden of Rescuers** project, which involves creating a website to tell the rescuers' stories. Each rescuer whose name appears in the garden will have a QR code attached to the sign, leading curious visitors and educators to the appropriate story on the site. Participants in the ceremony had a chance to try out the project with QR codes linking to the rescuers honored that day.



The Spiritual Center was the center for holiday celebrations, including a special music and dance performance during the overlapping spring holidays. Over the summer, a "Women Moving Together" day-long seminar had participants exploring their feelings through movement, dance, writing and sharing.

The Spiritual Center was also a center for classes, including mindfulness, yoga, and dance, that added to its budget and provided a peaceful setting for these lessons.

The Artist Residency program began to take shape during this period, and a call went out for applications to the program.



October

The Spiritual Center joined forces with the School for Peace to initiate dialogue sessions for village members, as well as bringing a human rights expert in to talk to members about their individual rights to free speech and action.

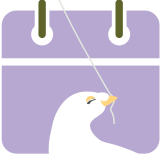


**Looking
to 2024**

Artists will be selected to participate in the residency program, and we will get this part of the project underway. We will also investigate ways to restart the interfaith leaders program that will focus on healing and dialogue between religious groups.

Nadi Youth Club





Beginning of the year

Nur Najjar-Elhuda took over the job of coordinating the NADI youth club in 2023. The NADI has had its ups and downs over recent years, in part due to coordinators who came and left, and in part, according to Najjar-Elhuda, because young people today spend more time with their electronics and after-school classes than did young people of previous generations.

Najjar-Elhuda wants the NADI to be, first and foremost, a place where the kids want to come after school, and where they want to interact with one another and take part in the village community.

To this end, she has begun opening the NADI clubhouse two days a week after school. She purchased games for the room, including a pool table and basketball set.

She has also planned a full schedule of activities, including art projects, field trips and popular pool parties with parent participation. The NADI has taken a leading role in planning and carrying out village holiday celebrations, together with the Spiritual Center, including bringing a troupe of light-dancers to dance in the village streets around the winter holidays.





October

The beginning of the war raised anxieties and fears in many of the children, confusion and worry in others. The NADI became a place where children could come and talk, and express their feelings through art.

The NADI kids also joined with the hotel kitchen to put on a food market for the village in the early days of the war.

Despite the conflict, the aim of the NADI is to provide the children with a framework and a sense of belonging. We continue to do exactly that and to provide them with a safe, caring environment in which to come together.



Looking to 2024

The NADI will continue to offer biweekly sessions, including screening movies and sports events, and continuing to help the kids talk openly. In addition, we are developing leadership projects for the older kids that will include volunteering and bringing them out of the village and into the communities in the region.

Oasis Art Gallery

Belonging to Us, belonging to Them





Beginning of the year

The exhibit "Them and Us" seems almost prophetic, in hindsight. Curator Dyana Shaloufi-Rizek created the exhibit in response to the rise of the racist right-wing parties in Israel's government at the end of the previous year, and the legitimacy their cabinet members give to discrimination and violence. Dyana felt the increasing divide between Palestinians and Jews — not just in their outlook and expectations, but in the way they expressed their identities and viewed one another.

The eight artists whose work came together in the exhibition had no answers as to how to bridge that divide. They only asked questions about that gap in different ways, showed by example, and, as usual, gave visitors food for thought and discussion.

The exhibit ran to the end of September.



October

This was a period in which many artists were processing their shock at the events of Oct. 7 and the ensuing war, wondering how to address these feelings and events in their work. Dyana, like many, found herself cast adrift and the artists she spoke with were not ready to join with "others" in a group exhibit.



Looking to 2024

While this will, apparently, be a year of war, it will also be a year in which Jews and Palestinians must relearn to live together and share their society. A new exhibit is in the planning stages, in collaboration with the Umm al-Fahm Art Gallery.



Humanitarian aid



**Beginning
of the year**

Thanks to our American and German Friends, the humanitarian aid project continued, in the beginning of 2023, to provide drugs and other medical aid to Gaza.

Dr. Raid Hajihia was in Gaza in July, treating refugee children in a clinic there. Samah Salaime, head of Communications and Development, accompanied the doctors' group for two days in order to talk to women about gender-based violence. She got a chance to see Dr. Raid at work, and to report back on the way that young people lined up to be treated by him and the other doctors in the Physicians for Human Rights group.



October

Sadly, the only humanitarian aid going into Gaza was on the large UN trucks, carefully monitored by the IDF. There was no way either to send extra medicine nor to let doctors in to treat children with life-threatening conditions. The clinic, where children had previously stood in line to see the doctors, is no longer there.

Humanitarian aid from the village did not cease, though. Palestinian workers, including some who have been working in Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom for years, had their entry permits revoked. Village members came together to raise money for several families in the West Bank who had depended on that income.



Looking to 2024

While the want is most dire in Gaza, we see the need for humanitarian aid all around us, and we will continue to identify opportunities to help. And, of course, when we can once again help the citizens of Gaza with medical aid, we will do so.

The Village





In May, the hotel hosted a three-day folklore festival, with free entrance and a host of performers from all over the area. The aim was to position the hotel as a center for such events and to position the village as a cultural — or multicultural — center.

An important step in expanding the village was marked in September, when the infrastructure works were completed for the new neighborhood. Now it is up to the new families to build their homes on their plots.

The beginning of the year was one of daily protests, and Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom members debated how best to join. In July, thousands of protestors marching against the judicial reform were hosted overnight in the village.

Elections were held for the Municipal Society Board of Governors. Eldad Joffe was elected Chairman of the Board. He replaces Rita Boulos.



October

The atrocities of Oct. 7 and the ensuing war give rise to heartbreak, anxiety and divisiveness. These feelings were not absent in the village, but we have the means and methods to cope and counter the negative ones. The dialogue sessions, facilitated by the School for Peace, helped village members remember they are allowed to grieve for both sides, and that, despite the difficulties, creating the means to make peace is the only way forward.

The hotel found itself without clientele, as those evacuated from the Gaza border and the North were housed in other places. To keep the hotel open and functioning, the staff reached out to peace organizations, who responded by hosting conferences in the hotel.

The village crisis response team went into action at the beginning of the war, when rocket sirens were blaring daily. Village members volunteered to take turns on guard duty, the shelters were all opened and Municipal Chairman Eldad Joffe worked with the security firm to draw up a list of security needs.

Further bringing the village together, member Adam Ben Shabbat started a podcast by and for village members, so they can learn more about their neighbors and friends.



Looking to 2024

Security will continue to be a primary focus for the village, as will working on cooperation and togetherness. We will work on bringing new members more fully into the community, on providing support to our veteran members and on preserving the unique nature of the village and its strong stance for peace, equality and justice.

Contacts and Support

Contact us:

 Email: info@wasns.info

Online donations:


<https://www.wasns.org/donate>

Web and Social Media:


Web: wasns.org

Photos: photos.wasns.org

 Facebook: [oasisofpeace](https://www.facebook.com/oasisofpeace)

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Association of Friends
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Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom

Educational Institutions and Community

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