



1for3 News

* Water * Health * Education *

* الماء * الصحة * التعليم *

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PROGRESS CONTINUES ON THE LAJEE CENTER KINDERGARTEN!

Thank you to all those who donated to 1for3 and the Lajee Center Kindergarten in Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. With individual donations supplemented by some very generous grants, we have met the target for Phase One of the construction, which will include two classrooms. We have also hired a director for the school, Amira Stephan of Beit Jala (see p. 3 for an interview with her). When it opens in September 2021, the school will enroll 50 children ages four and five, 20% of whom will receive scholarship assistance. Public schools in Palestine begin in first grade at age 6. In addition to the director, staff will include two teachers, two assistants, and a custodian. Operational costs for the school are covered by fees and donations through August 2022. After that, institutional funding will be sought to supplement fee income. The estimated annual operating cost of the kindergarten is \$70K, which will be offset by \$15K fee income.



Design and construction have been quite a challenge through this period of Covid-19. The pandemic only compounds the unceasing difficulties imposed by the Israeli occupation. One of the guiding principles for building the kindergarten has been to employ people from Aida camp, where unemployment rates have been running very high, and have been dramatically exacerbated by the pandemic. To date, 30 people have been employed, almost all from the camp, supporting more than 200 family members. Our project managers on site have been efficient and hard-working (with great good humor to boot). Their work has been guided by caring and implacable architects in Bethlehem and in the United

States, Anton Stephan and Hubert Murray. As for the building itself: the interior concrete work is complete, plumbing and electrical wiring are installed, plastering is complete, floor tiling is complete, and interior doors and some windows are in place. The large windows for the south elevation facing the playground arrived and soon we will be able to complete power and lighting fixtures and the installation of toilet and kitchen fixtures. On the outside, a new street wall has been constructed to allow a safe entrance and exit away from the Israeli military base, and the playground is under construction.

Director Amira Stephan is working with teams in the U.S. and in Palestine on developing the curriculum and building up a teaching team ready to open to the first 50 children in September 2021. The early childhood curriculum will overlap with many of the other programs supported by Lajee, incorporating an introduction to music and dance, environmental care, and public health. This project is being developed in accordance with Lajee's guiding principles supporting high aspirations and communal self-determination.

HYDROPONIC GARDEN MAGIC



Thanks to the generosity of more than 130 people, this fall we were able to raise 118% of our goal of \$20,000 to establish a hydroponic system for growing fresh food on the roof of Lajee Center. The hydroponic garden will operate year-round to provide food for 118 families, including over 800 people, all while using 70-90% less water than a conventional system and making use of roof space given that open space is scarce at ground level. So far, the system, designed by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UWAC) in consultation with Yusuf Abudi, is under construction. Lajee expects to plant the first seeds by the end of the year. The hydroponic system will be

maintained by a new employee, a young man from Aida Refugee Camp, along with Environment Director Shatha Al-Azzeh. Youth from the Environment Unit will also help with cleaning and planting. They have already helped to make the rooftop hydroponic garden area more beautiful with their painting. We wish them all happy planting!

THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF THE COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER PROGRAM FOR DIABETES PATIENTS

On November 19, 1for3 and Lajee Center presented a webinar on Managing Chronic Disease in Conflict settings, featuring Health for Palestine Director Dr. Bram Wispelwey, Community Health Worker (CHW) Ashghan Awais, Asmaa Rimawi, an advanced medical student and Health for Palestine researcher, and 1for3 Director Nidal Al-Azraq. They presented data from a two-year study that revealed significant improvement in diabetes due to the Community Health Worker program. Palestinians in Aida and Azza Refugee Camps suffer high levels of diabetes and hypertension. Dr. Wispelwey put Palestinians' declines in health in the context of settler colonialism, presenting on the violence of military occupation and comparing Palestinians' health to that of Indigenous and Black people harmed by settler colonialism in the United States. Moreover, the Middle East and North Africa region currently has the highest rates of diabetes in the world. While the older generation of Palestinians has lower rates than the rest of the region, middle aged Palestinians have higher rates. Rates for diabetes in the West Bank are twice the global rate and more than twice the rate in Israel. Palestinians also have a fragmented health care system that undermines trust and makes it difficult for people to access care. The CHWs become the glue in this system, as Dr. Wispelwey put it, allowing people to find care. The CHW program provides patients with home visits during which CHWs check on both physical and mental health, in visits that, as Awais said, can last for hours. Rimawi, who led the quantitative assessment on the efficacy of the diabetes arm of the program, presented results of their two-year study. For those enrolled in CHW group, the diabetes indicator hemoglobin A1c declined significantly, yielding a meaningful decline in risk of mortality and serious complications. The study demonstrates that CHW programs are, as Rimawi said, "both feasible and effective for improving diabetes within a setting that is prone to chronic violence." During a lively Q&A session, Awais described CHWs' approach in more detail. Al-Azraq discussed how the CHW program is complemented by the hydroponic and rooftop gardens, and how the program strengthens social connections. A public health leader in attendance offered that while the participants' decline in hemoglobin A1c is very positive, learning of the social outcomes of this process is at least as important. You can watch to the full [seminar](#) on the 1for3 Facebook page!

INTRODUCING AMIRA STEPHAN

Amira Stephan has joined the 1for3 team as the Lajee Center preschool director!

Where are you from in Palestine? What do you love about your town?

I am from Beit Jala. I love the nature and old houses in my town. People in my town have strong senses of solidarity with each other. I am grateful that it's a calm town where you can find peace.

What is your background in working with children?

I have been working with children for 15 years as a teacher and the director of a kindergarten. It's always a pleasure to be with children. They are our future and our hope.



Do you have children yourself? How do they influence your vision of early childhood education?

Yes, I have two daughters: Luciana is 13 and Jovanna is 12. They helped me to understand childhood in a new way. We need think from their perspectives, to grow with them with love and understanding. We must be sensitive to their personalities.

What are your biggest hopes for the next year?

To open our kindergarten and to have it meet its goal of nurturing children, helping them to develop life skills, and giving them the foundations for literacy. We want our school to be a place where children build an independent and confident personality so they can begin to take care of themselves in those small ways that make a big difference. Working collaboratively with teachers, we will provide a safe and healthy environment for the children. We will support parents. The kindergarten curriculum will be based on learning through play and active learning. Kindergarten success is complete when children graduate from kindergarten and go to first grade full of life skills, and with a constructive and critical thinking style. All of this serves the child and also plants the seeds for children to change society for the better.

THE NEWS FROM AIDA REFUGEE CAMP

Aida Camp continues to struggle against both the public health crisis and the longstanding violence of military occupation. Three elders have passed away from the COVID-19 virus since March. Many families feel tremendous financial strain as work opportunities have stalled and staggered due to shutdowns. Meanwhile, those working for the Palestinian Authority endured many months of half salaries due to a PA budget crisis. After a relatively calm period, the Israeli army has increased the frequency of its raids on the camp. Elders quarantining from COVID-19 have again had to rush to close their windows to stay safe from tear gas thrown in the middle of the afternoon. About 10 people have been arrested in the last two months, including about five children. We wish these people a safe return to their families and their community.



*On a Sweet Note...*Rasha Al-Azzeh, whose involvement with Lajee has been long and multifaceted, has been featured for in Palestinian media for her Lajee workshop on healthy sweets. Some of the dishes she shared include:

- Date oat cakes
- Almond butter carrot balls
- Dates & dark chocolate oat balls
- Oatcakes with honey, walnuts, and apples

...We wish we were there for some "on the ground" reporting!