

UPA connect

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- Vocational training for youth with special needs in Jordan
- Agricultural development training for female heads of households in the West Bank

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Letter from the Executive Director

“They are an inspiration”

Dear Friends of UPA,

A day before Thanksgiving I returned from a trip to the West Bank and Gaza. During this season we are often reminded of what we ought to be thankful for. This year I am particularly thankful for an experience I had on November 15, 2016 in Gaza.

Although that date commemorates the Palestinian declaration of independence, a statement written by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and proclaimed by Yasser Arafat on November 15, 1988, that was not the reason for my gratitude. Palestinian independence is still very much a dream.

On that day UPA’s director of programs Hanna Rabah and I were blessed to spend a casual day with UPA’s Gaza staff outside the office. This informal setting gave us a chance to get better acquainted with colleagues and learn more about their lives, families, challenges, struggles, hopes and aspirations.

In spite of the ongoing closure of Gaza, the repeated aggression, the disappointment of Oslo and the reality of dependence on this Independence Day, people in Gaza go on keeping the dream of independence alive. The group of young men and women that made the UPA Gaza office their second home are hardworking, compassionate, and sincere. They are dedicated to a just cause, the struggle for human rights and social justice and empowered by deep faith, their resilience is overwhelming. They are an inspiration to us all.

Of this group of ten, six (pictured from left to right: Sabah, Islam, Hadeel, Majed, Nidaa, Sahar) are the mental health practitioners (MHP’s) core group of UPA’s Healing Through Feeling. This program gives Gaza children the support they need to face and overcome the trauma they experience by helping teachers and parents recognize and address the symptoms of trauma in their children and themselves.

The next day we visited one of the kindergartens in the program. There we met Ameerah Deeb. Ameerah is one of the mothers that are participating in the program through her child’s kindergarten.

When asked about her experience she replied:

“I have a beautiful feeling when I am with this group. I am very happy to be learning and am having life-changing experiences by being exposed to these concepts that explain behavior. These sessions are helping me at home with my children and family as well as in my community. I can say this is a common feeling among the other mothers in the program.”

Sabah, Islam, Hadeel, Majed, Nidaa and Sahar (UPA’s MHP’s) spend 80% of their time in kindergartens working with teachers and parents of children to promote awareness of symptoms of trauma evident in children as a result of the ongoing traumatic conditions in the Gaza Strip. The other 20% is spent in the office discussing common trends and specifics of their daily experiences. The impact that 6 people can make compared to the magnitude of the problem is small, however, it is powerful and real.

As a result of a successful pilot project launched in 2015, UPA has expanded this program in 2016 and hopes to double the number of practitioners to 12 in 2017. With your support we can do that.

Sincerely,

Saleem F. Zaru
Executive Director



Food Security Program

Ma'an Development Center

In the village of Beit Qad, located near Jenin in the West Bank, women are participating in agricultural training workshops that are conducted by women. Funded by UPA, the project realizes Ma'an's vision to increase food security among impoverished female-headed households. In a community where poverty is endemic, subsistence farming is key to survival.

A needs-assessment of the village conducted by Ma'an resulted in the idea of targeting this particular group of women and providing training in best practices for home gardening utilizing raised wooden beds. Taking into account the availability of space and water for each household, as well as the effects of climate change, resulting in dry winters, women learned new farming techniques that enhance traditional Palestinian farming methods. Among these techniques are organic gardening, avoiding the use of pesticides, water conservation and composting.

With crops of spinach, fennel, kale, cabbage, parsley and cauliflower, women in Beit Qad are able to sustain their families, sell the excess of produce, and involve their children in the planting and harvesting as a way to teach them methods of sustainable farming.





UPA Inaugurated Surgical Unit in Ramallah

On November 6th with Prime Minister Dr. Rami Hamdallah and Minister of Health Dr. Jawad Awwad in attendance, UPA officially opened a new two-room surgical unit in the Palestine Medical Complex (PMC) in Ramallah. The surgical unit is the first established medical space specifically designated for the UPA **Embracing Life Program (ELP)**. The unit will allow local Palestinian surgeons participating in the program to serve Palestinian patients who have a cleft-lip and/or palate or other craniofacial anomaly.

"We are going forward with the institutionalization and development of the health sector, and we will ensure that we are able to provide high-quality and safe medical services," said Dr. Hamdallah.

UPA Executive Director Saleem Zaru expressed his appreciation for the enormous amount of support UPA has received from its donors, giving special thanks to Bank of Palestine, Smile Train, Ramallah Foundation, Inc., the George and Rhonda Salem Family Foundation, the Muna and Basem Hishmeh Foundation, and Mr. Mahmud Shaikhaly (deceased).

Thank you for helping us reach the ELP's first milestone

Since 2014, you have followed and supported our efforts to improve access to craniofacial care among Palestinian communities. By helping us make this vision a reality, hundreds of young patients and their families can now receive treatment from Palestinian medical professionals who can provide the specialized craniofacial care that was previously severely lacking in Palestinian society.

Your support goes a long way, and we are very grateful.



Parents of a child with a cleft-lip during ELP screening.



Attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony from left to right are Minister of Health, Dr. Jawad Awwad, Prime Minister, Dr. Rami Hamdallah, Executive Director of UPA, Saleem Zaru, Governor of Ramallah and El-Bireh, Dr. Leila Ghannam.

Training doctors, transforming lives

ELP has three major components – one is establishing and expanding professional training for the Palestinian cleft care community; the second is providing Palestinian medical professionals with equipment and facilities; and the third is supporting scientific research.

Training has been ongoing for decade. We are proud to note that there are four local Palestinian surgeons in the West Bank who are now capable of performing cleft surgeries independently, without supervision. Three of these are “master surgeons” because they are capable of training other surgeons as well. Upcoming **ELP** activities for the master surgeons will focus on training five additional surgeons in the West Bank. Training is mainly performed by members of the **ELP** team during delegations to the West Bank twice a year, led by Dr. John van Aalst, the Director of Plastic Surgery and the Surgical Director of the Craniofacial Center at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Ohio. Trainings are also held throughout the year by the local master surgeons.

Equipped with the necessary medical expertise and experience, **ELP** independent surgeons can now provide quality medical services to their patients – a significant contribution to the Palestinian medical sector.

Children born with a cleft lip and/or palate or other craniofacial anomalies receive quality medical care to treat their condition during the delegations and throughout the year, thanks to the support of **ELP**, and thus transforming their lives and the lives of their parents who would have otherwise faced severe financial burdens, not to mention the stigma often directed at those with birth defects. In 2016, 106 surgeries were performed in the West Bank.

ELP is a one-of-a-kind program not only focusing on surgical treatment, but with attention to empower all disciplines involved in craniofacial care, namely, speech and language pathology, dentistry, orthodontics and nursing. Furthermore, in 2016, UPA expanded the feeding program by hiring a feeding specialist to train mothers on how to feed their cleft infants and what feeding supplies to use.

To learn more about the **ELP**, please visit:
www.helpupa.org/embracing-life



A mother with her baby during ELP screening.

What’s Next for the ELP

Construction of an **ELP** center in Gaza is expected to begin soon. Additionally, UPA has arranged access to the Rosary Sisters Hospital in Irbid, Jordan, to Hamshari Hospital close to Ein al-Hilweh and Mieh Mieh refugee camps in south Lebanon, and to Safad Hospital in Beddawi refugee camp in northern Lebanon, all of which will serve as hubs for providing craniofacial care in all the areas where UPA operates.



Dr. Ahmed Bitawi, Director of the Palestine Medical Complex, talking to officials.

Children's Program

Orient Spirit Development Organization

Based in Jordan's capital, Amman, Orient Spirit is a vocational training center where youth with special needs can cultivate their artistic skills in a supportive community environment. Thanks to your support, a grant from UPA's Children's Program allowed Orient Spirit to acquire more tools for its handicraft workshops, which include pottery, mosaic and embroidery, and equipment for music and drama sessions.

The students who participate in these workshops have physical or mental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy (like Abeer, pictured below), autism and Down syndrome, and others come from families with other disabled siblings. Some are orphans and live in an orphanage, and others have siblings or parents who also have a disability.

In Orient Spirit's workshops, these youth find the support and opportunities that develop their ability to focus and improve their sensory skills. Pottery-making, for example, is very therapeutic and supports concentration and motor skills. The workshops also encourage greater social interaction and communication, and boost self-confidence.



An-Nahda Women's Association

Children with special needs suffer social marginalization and isolation and do not enjoy full access to education or recreation. To address this problem, a grant from the UPA Children's Program allowed An-Nahda, which is based in Ramallah, to design and build a new outdoor playground for children with disabilities. An-Nahda provides special education to over 150 children aged 6 to 12. The goal of the project is to provide an inclusive environment where children with special needs at An-Nahda can play together with non-disabled children from surrounding centers.

The playground includes swing sets that accommodate children in wheelchairs. The artificial turf helps keep the playground clean and hazard-free. The playground will also serve as a common area for summer camp activities.

Adults with special needs at An-Nahda take part in maintaining the landscaping of the playground.

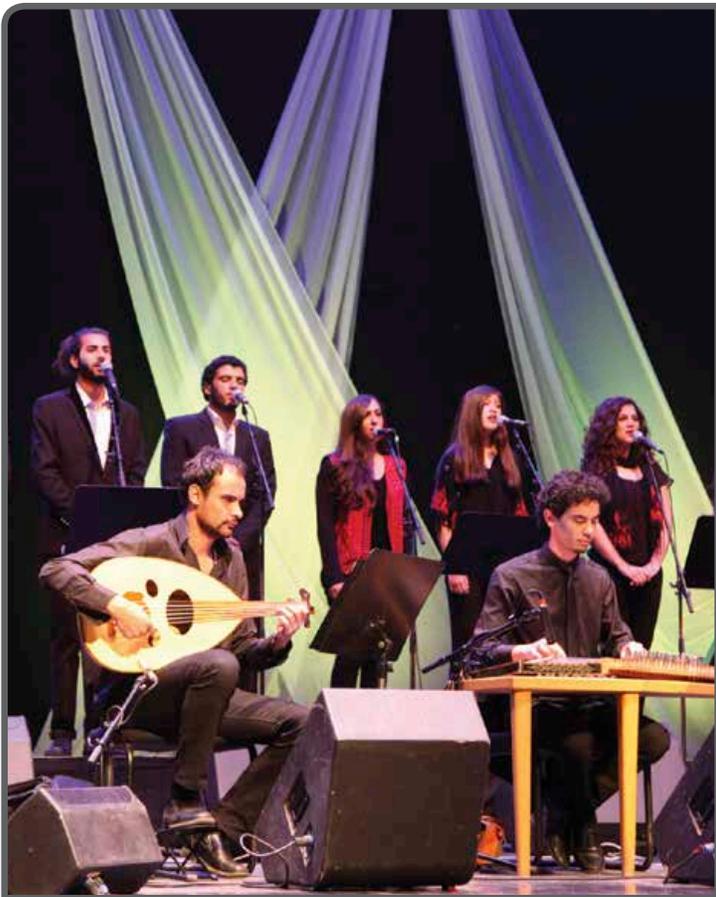
Established in 1925, An-Nahda has been a close UPA partner for many years through the former UPA child sponsorship program, which ended in December of 2011. Your support to the Children's Program helps us continue to provide critical support for an organization doing commendable service for Palestinians with special needs.



The Palestinian Institute for Cultural Development (NAWA)

UPA awarded a grant to NAWA to support its mission to restore and protect the Palestinian collective memory, particularly through music and song, and to engage today's younger generation in its preservation and continuation. The project focused on the restoration and preservation of pre-1948 classical music composed by Palestinian artists. Through the production of audio CDs and live musical performances, NAWA ensures the continued embrace of Palestinian cultural history, and the recognition of Palestinians' achievements in and contributions to art in the Arab world before 1948. Pioneers of Palestinian music recognized in these efforts include Mohammad Gazi, Yahia Al Saoudi, Rawhi Khamash and Yahia Allababidi. The project also enriches music library collections with audio recordings and historic music materials. NAWA ultimately envisions the establishment of a Palestinian Music Library.

UPA staff in Ramallah attended a large musical performance by NAWA in fall 2016, where they received recognition for UPA's support.



UPA Benefit Concert: Music for Life

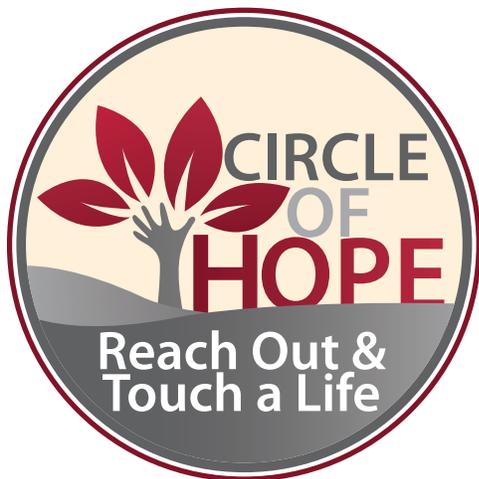
In October 2016, UPA held a benefit concert featuring Ramzi Aburedwan and his Dal'ouna Ensemble. Raised in Am'ari refugee camp, near Ramallah, Ramzi has become a familiar figure among Palestinians from a photo of him as a young boy throwing a stone at an Israeli tank during the first Intifada, a photo that was widely circulated in the press at the time. Having pursued music studies, Ramzi has emerged as a prominent musician in the Palestinian cultural scene and has devoted his life to teaching other Palestinian refugee children the art of music through his own organization, Al Kamandjati. Al Kamandjati works in refugee camps and villages in the West Bank and Lebanon.

The concert also featured Nidal Ibourk, a Moroccan-American singer who delighted the audience with popular Palestinian songs. Supporters of UPA from the surrounding community of Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia attended the evening's event to provide support for UPA's latest programs, Small Business Development, Healing Through Feeling, and Embracing Life Program.



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Help support marginalized Palestinians

In 2015, 97% of UPA's operating expenses went to programs that directly benefited Palestinian communities in need.



Programs



Management



Fundraising

UPA is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible according to applicable laws.



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