

Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund  
Newsletter  
March 2010



*Students receiving their scholarships from Mona el Farra, the Scholarship Fund's partner in Gaza.*

## Education: the key to empowering women

The Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund is now supporting **10** young women in Gaza! This is an amazing achievement; a testimony to the generosity and commitment of our supporters,

'I am very proud of this project,' says Mona el Farra, our partner in Gaza. 'Because I have always believed that education is the key to empowering women in our society – with or without the constraints of the Israeli occupation.'

The Scholarship Fund has exceeded everyone's expectations. It came out of an International Women's Day event in Sheffield in 2005, which sparked a debate on how women in Sheffield could support women in Gaza. Advised by Mona el Farra, the group who organised the International Women's Day set up a scholarship fund for women who might not otherwise be able to access higher education.

In 2005 we gave out our first four scholarships. This was a very big step. We were committing to funding these four students for the duration of their degrees. The first three students have graduated but growing support for the Fund means that we are now funding 10 scholarships. We are also able to support community based 'peer educator' courses for women who have not accessed higher education (see Women's Empowerment Project on page 3).

The Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund has been an inspiration to other donors. International funds in Gaza are now supporting a total of **89** young people to gain higher education.

## Scholarships

These are the 10 women the Fund is currently supporting to gain higher education:

1. **Huida Fadel Subeeka**: Aqsa University studying Biology: from Rafah
2. **Sama Yusef Wadi**: Islamic University studying Basic Education: from Jabalia
3. **Maisa Abu Khadra**: Islamic University studying English Language: from Nusseirat
4. **Suzanne Abu Khadra**: Islamic University studying Basic Education: from Nussierat
5. **Randa AbuShamala**: Al Quds University studying Social Development : from Bureij
6. **Amani Abu Garaia**: Islamic University studying Commerce: from Jabalia
7. **Feda Matter**: Al Aqsa University studying English: from Nusseirat
8. **Mona Asamak**: Islamic University studying English and Accounting: from Zaitoun, Gaza
9. **Abla Gabayeen**: Al Aqsa University studying Mathematic Education: from Shagaia, Gaza
10. **Sawsan Abu Elkomboz**: Islamic university studying English and Commerce: from Zaitoun, Gaza.

We wish all ten a successful year with especial good luck to those starting their courses!

## Why a **WOMEN'S** scholarship fund?

*Education in Gaza is not easy, but it is highly prized and the incentive amongst the women to continue is very high*  
Mona el Farra.

The Fund came out of International Women's Day and has at its heart the concern to enable women to reach their potential and take up leadership positions within Palestine. 'The Fund not only gives young women a chance of education,' Mona el Farra explains. 'It also challenges some of the difficult gender issues facing many poor families in Gazan society.'

Here is an example. One of the students we now support had already started a degree in English and was doing well when her father decided to take her out of university. He was a fisherman with no work due to the continuing Israeli siege of Gazan coastal waters. When Mona el Farra went to visit the family they were living in 2 rooms with no furniture or possessions to speak of and the father said he could not afford to let his daughter continue her studies. He had five other children and he was keen to give a chance to his son. It was only because the funding through

the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund was available to his daughter that she was able to go back to university where she continues to do well.



## **The aftermath of the Israeli offensive of January 2009**

It is a real credit to the Palestinian people that universities in Gaza went back into operation so quickly after the devastation of the Israeli offensive in mid January 2009. The Israeli authorities have allowed very few construction materials into Gaza. Little of the extensive damage caused to homes, civilian infrastructure, public services, farms and businesses has been repaired. This is because the civilian population, and the UN and aid agencies who help them, are prohibited from importing materials like cement and glass in all but a handful of cases.

Jeremy Hobbs, Oxfam International Executive Director, wrote in a report in December 2009: 'World powers have failed and even betrayed Gaza's ordinary citizens. They have wrung hands and issued statements, but have taken **little meaningful action to attempt to change the damaging policy** that prevents reconstruction, personal recovery and economic recuperation.'

It is immensely to the credit of our scholarship students that they have continued with their studies in such circumstances.

## **Women's Empowerment Project**

Over the last two years the Fund has supported community based courses for women. These courses are part of a 'Women's Empowerment Project' for women aged 18 – 40 who have completed secondary schooling and who are selected from the community to be trained as 'peer educators'. The courses are run in local community centres and cover subjects such as health education, nutrition, dental health, and household financial management. The courses are popular and the women highly motivated and enthusiastic. After the Gaza bombing by Israel in mid January 2009, the courses resumed after only a week or ten days, sometimes in makeshift buildings. This was because as well as formal learning, the courses offer

a chance to women to get out and meet others and exchange experience, ideas and support. This has helped women rebuild their lives and their communities after the devastating destruction of the Israeli attack and to manage the severe economic situation brought about by the Israeli siege.



## **A BIG thank you**

We now have **£352** a month income from standing orders! We are very grateful to everyone who supports the Fund in this way.

We have sent a total of **£7,900** to Palestine during 2009. This has been made possible not only through standing orders but because of the wonderful and varied fund raising activities undertaken by our supporters. A particular thank you goes to:

- Sheila, Val, Hilary and Caroline who gave donations from parties
- Jonny, Jo, Melinda, Steve, Hils (sponsored run) and Caroline (sponsored walk) for their efforts for the fund.
- Tassibee women's group and other individuals for their donations.

A hugely popular fund raising venture this year has been the beautiful greeting cards designed, made and sold by Claudia. Thank you, Claudia!

We are very pleased that our administrative costs (bank commission and agent charges on the transfer of money to Gaza) have totalled only £47 throughout 2009.

A special thank you to Hilary Smith, our treasurer.

**Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Fund!**

**Please continue your support.**

## **The Scholarship Fund now a charity**

The Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund has been given charitable status. This means we can raise substantial extra sums of money through Gift Aid from the many donations we receive. Our charity number is 1133499.

The founding group originally decided against applying for charitable status as there was a fear that we would be hemmed in by bureaucracy. However, we began to see that if we were a charity we might be able to attract more support from people who were sympathetic to our cause, who might be reassured by charitable status.

We received invaluable help from Bev Cross, Legal Consultant at Voluntary Action Sheffield, when making the application for charitable status. She guided and advised us through the legal minefield. Thank you Bev!

To comply with the Charity Commission's legalities we now have a Chair and five Trustees, lots of paperwork, and a very legalistic sounding new constitution. However, our bi monthly meetings are still as informal as ever. We have always minuted the meetings so that hasn't altered. We are, however, becoming such a large group that we have outgrown the Blue Moon and are looking for somewhere else central we can meet.

Especial thanks go to Val Johnson for leading the Fund successfully through the application for charitable status.



*Meeting of the Sheffield Scholarship Fund Organising Group at Blue Moon Cafe*

## **How the Fund works**

The Fund is managed in Sheffield by a small coalition of women working in partnership with the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and in Gaza by a panel drawn from the Board of Directors of the Red Crescent Society and the Union of Health Work Committees.

Candidates for scholarships are nominated by their local community centre and are either ready to enter university or are in the first or second year of a course but



unable to continue for financial reasons. There are strict selection criteria for the Scholarship Fund, which include having attained 65% or above in high school grades, socio-economic background, commitment to the community, and personal and family circumstances such as a recent home demolition, or war injuries.

Our partners in Gaza keep in contact with the scholarship students and help them overcome problems in completing their courses, from bombings to not being able to afford transport, books, equipment etc. Our partners access other small amounts of funding to cover some of these additional costs.

In Britain the Fund's supporters make donations or monthly contributions through a standing order, and/or by organising or taking part in fundraising events. Any contribution is much appreciated. Standing orders are particularly welcome as they enable us to estimate our income more accurately and to plan.



## HOW TO CONTACT US

You can contact the Scholarship Fund on [sheffieldpwsf@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sheffieldpwsf@yahoo.co.uk) or by writing to SPWSF, 124 Cliffe Road, Sheffield S8 9DN.

If you wish to take out a standing order with your bank, our bank details are:  
Co-op Bank, account name: Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund  
Sort code 08-92-99  
Account number 65236686.

Please contact us if you do take out a standing order. In order for the Fund to claim back any tax you may have paid on your donation/standing order, can you please supply your name, address and postcode and indicate that you are a tax payer and wish the Fund to claim gift aid. Our charity number is 1133499. Thank you for your support.