

Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund
Newsletter
March 2011



Scholarship recipients with Mona El Farra, the Fund's partner, Talal Abu Shawixh, Chair of Afaq Jadeeda Association (New Horizons) and Abeer Negem, New Horizons Admin Assistant, at the Award Ceremony in September 2010.

'Without the scholarship I would not have been able to make it'

Thanks to our wonderful supporters, **15** women in Gaza are now receiving scholarships to help them attend university. The feedback we've been getting makes clear just how valued the scholarships are.

- I was in the women's committees during the first intifada. I was unable to continue my education due to my early marriage and attempts to have children. After having and raising 4 children by IVF I wanted to return to my studies, and could not do so without the scholarship. I was very determined to continue my education, which will also enable me to support my family.

Neeven Mady, 40 years old, from Shati Camp and a first year student studying Basic Education at Al Quds Open University.

- I would not have made it without the support of the Sheffield Women's Group. My father was intending to educate my brother instead.

Fida Matar, 20 years old from Nusseirat Camp, a second year student studying Mathematics at Al Aqsa University.

- I had high grades at school, but without the scholarship I would not have been able to make it. I am from a poor, working class family. My father is a psychiatric patient and my two brothers left school. We live in a very small house with just two rooms. My mother works on a stall in front of one of the Unrwa schools. I am proud of my mother and the encouragement she gave me to continue my education. This opportunity will give me the chance to change things for my family for the better.

Sauad Gmasy, 20 years old and from Shati camp, in her first year of a degree in Education and Mathematics at the Islamic University.

- ✚ This is my second scholarship year. I will continue my education after marrying this year. My husband is on a low income, and I would not be able to continue my education without the scholarship. I dream of being able to provide enough for my future children and to support my family hand in hand with my husband.

Amany Abu Garaia, 19 years old, from Gaza City and a second year student studying English Accounting at the Islamic University.

Student News

Graduates in 2010

1. Huayda Sbaika graduated in Physics and Biology from Al Aqsa University.
2. Sama Wadi graduated in Applied Sciences & Basic Education from the Islamic University.



Continuing their studies

1. Sawsan Abu Komoz from Shagayaa area of Gaza: 2nd year studying English Commerce at the Islamic University.
2. Amani Abu Garai from Shagayaa area of Gaza: 3rd year studying English and Commerce at the Islamic University.
3. Ablaa Gabayeen: Studying Math and Basic Education at the Islamic University.
4. Randa Faraj Abu Shamala from Nusseirat camp: 3rd year studying Basic Education at Al Quds Open University.
5. Feda Mattar from Nusseirat camp: 3rd year studying Math and Basic Education at Al Aqsa University.
6. Maysa Abu Khadra from Al Bureij camp: 3rd year studying Basic Education at the Islamic University.
7. Suzanne Abu Khadra an orphan from Al Bureij camp: 4th year studying Basic Education at the Islamic University.
8. Mona Ahmad Al Samak from Shagayaa area of Gaza: 2nd year studying English commerce at the Islamic University.

New students starting September 2010

1. Nesma Ataia Abu Zer from Nusseirat camp, studying Arabic language at Al Quds Open University.
2. Reham Taher Abed from Zeitoun, studying Arabic at the Islamic University.
3. Sauad Gmasy from Shati camp, studying Mathematics Education at the Islamic University.
4. Neeven Mady from Shati camp, studying Basic Education at Al Quds Open University .
5. Gada Abu Roomia from Khan Younis, studying Mathematics at the Islamic University.
6. Madlene Abu Shanab from Nusseirat camp, studying English.
7. Islam Ashkar from Nusseirat camp, studying Arabic at the Islamic University.

'The scholarships give a taste of the outside world, of hope'



We held our first Annual General Meeting (AGM) as a charity on 9th November at Victoria Hall in Sheffield. Our guest speaker, Norma Turner, had recently spent two months in Gaza, helping to set up a women's group (as part of a new Women's Centre) and to run an English Club. Norma, who is a member of Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), is a friend of the Sheffield Scholarship Fund's key partner, Mona El Farra. Norma had met many of the Fund's students and gave a most insightful and inspiring talk. Here are some of the key points she made:

- ✚ You should congratulate yourselves: the Scholarship Fund is much valued in Gaza and is well focused and useful.
- ✚ Your partners are able to target your funding to the grass roots. They work with a network of community activists throughout Gaza – mostly people who are poor, such as cleaners in hospitals and cooks, who help identify women who should benefit from the Fund.
- ✚ The contribution that the Fund is to make towards local admin costs will really help (this was agreed at the AGM). Your partners are grateful that the Fund does not demand the same amount of monitoring/form filling as other donors. Still there is a lot to do especially when school students get the results of their school leaving exams in July and candidates for scholarships must be identified and their qualifications checked. Transport to do this is often a problem and the team has also to contact the universities in question and collate the applications.
- ✚ Your partners are very strict about not choosing families they know or selecting more than one candidate from any family. There is great concern to follow a clear process and being fair. There is also monitoring of the students once they start their courses. Mona visits the universities once or twice a year and meets with faculty members to check that the students are studying well.
- ✚ The scholarship funds a 'basic course' such as teacher training or maths. Medicine or engineering would cost a lot more. Basic courses give more

women the opportunity of an education and, given the scarcity of employment in Gaza, are more likely to be used - in teaching, nursing, or in working for a non-governmental organisation.

- ✚ A university education is not a gateway to careers for women in Gaza or towards independence. The country is economically crippled. What a university education does is break the feeling of suffocation and total isolation that people in Gaza feel, opening them up a little bit to other ideas and the outside world. If you do not get to university you are trapped not only in Gaza but in your family. The extended family is supportive but limiting. Marriage is expected and hoped for, children expected and hoped for. If you are single, people feel sorry for you. Young men are very frustrated with the situation in Gaza. This can lead to women being more repressed as life becomes more islamified. I can't give enough sense of how imprisoned people are there. Education is a joy within that imprisonment. That is why the Scholarship Fund is so important.
- ✚ For the small amount of money involved, the Scholarship Fund has a huge impact on Gaza. It is an act of solidarity which is breaking the siege and bringing in other ideas.
- ✚ Gaza is starved of debate and discussion. Academics cannot attend conferences outside Gaza. There is a an insularity. You feel it there. The scholarships give a taste of the outside world, of hope.



Gaza again and again

Mona el Farra

Back to Gaza, Back to Walking

January 2011

Walking during the early hours of the morning this Friday, the town has not awoken yet, but a few children are playing on the side of the road. Some are young girls, smiling, who invite me to join them to play hopscotch. These are girls that are happy playing with little boys, yet soon in a few years they will be forced to be covered. Mixing with boys is one of the great, great taboos. Whether it is because of tradition or religion, it does not matter.

Quite simply, they cannot practice their right to choose what to wear - all are asked to surrender to the rules of the tribe, like herds of sheep. Voices of difference or dissent are asked to shut up when the current is running so strongly in the other direction. I was thinking deeply of the years when the grandmothers of these children walked to schools uncovered, during the Sixties and the secular era of Nasser- how Gaza has changed.

All of a sudden I could hear and see two Israeli gunboats on the horizon, just like two ugly protruding eyes on a huge face. It reminded me of Orwell's 1984, where Big Brother controls and watches over you at all times.

What do we expect next as Palestinian people? I thought deeply about this. Where is the outlet, the solution to this big dilemma? Politicians seems to insist on a constant deadlock, and in the West Bank, Israel proves every day that she is not a partner in peace, as she steals more and more land and continues building new settlements. In Gaza, Hamas rules while Israel controls our borders and continue their daily attacks. Military attacks that are unheard and unseen by many in this world, yet we live under this siege daily. The worst is the constructed division between Hamas and Fatah, and the lack of Palestinian unity. This affects ordinary people's daily lives, from the food we consume to the medicine we need. The other aspect which people feel is the lack of any promise or inspiration on the political horizon.

As for me, I remember my friend's inspiring words, "When things seems so bad, try to focus on small successes." I thought of the work of the Middle East Children's Alliance, the Maia projects, the psycho- social support for children, with their love for art programs, and their chance for self expression. I am determined to continue helping and empowering people with steadfastness. There are thousands of women and children, courageous people who are living under such harsh conditions, who need these programs and the love and support they offer.

With love I send my message, with great conviction that the remedy for Palestine is unity. Unity is the first step towards a clear strategy to determine for ourselves what we need next for our future. I believe strongly that this unity exists in the growing global solidarity movement that stands with Palestinians for peace and justice and against oppression wherever it exists, including within my own land.



With your solidarity and support, we in Gaza will continue. It is a long term battle, but one day we will all prevail.


(This piece was first published on Mona's blog: <http://fromgaza.blogspot.com>)


A BIG thank you


to all of you who organised, helped with, or attended events and/or made donations of time, money or other forms of support to the Fund.

In 2010 we sent a total of **£6,000** to Gaza. We had some wonderful surprises in how people helped to raise this. Special mention goes to:

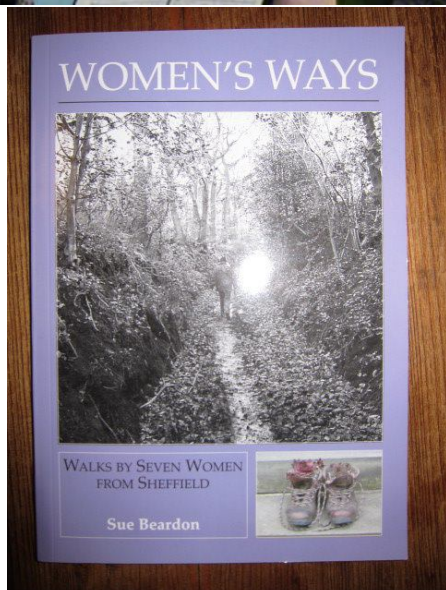
-  Body of Sound and everyone who helped with and attended the Fund's
-  International Women's Day event in March 2010 (see top two photos below).

-  Sue and the contributors to, sellers and buyers of the Women's Ways Walk Book for donating some of the proceeds to the Scholarship Fund.

-  The congregation of St Mark's Church Broomhill Sheffield for their donation.

-  Liz and Emma for asking friends to give donations to the Fund in lieu of gifts for their civil partnership and anniversary party.

- ✚ Jawad for donating part of his leaving collection at work.
- ✚ Jude and Caroline for completing sponsored walks and runs and Tony for completing a marathon in Flanders (see picture of Tony below on the last stretch spurred on by partner Polly and daughter Sally).
- ✚ Bev and 8 Misbehavin for putting on the Gig for Gaza in March and November and to all those who came along (see photo of gig below).
- ✚ Everyone who brought food & attended the picnic in July (see photo below).
- ✚ Saher for her fundraising lunch in July & Luise for her cake sale in September.
- ✚ Everyone who made donations at the Annual General Meeting in November.
- ✚ Helen for the donation she made in lieu of Christmas presents.
- ✚ All those who both contributed and bought items at the bric-a-brac sale in January 2011





- ✚ We are hugely grateful to people who have taken out standing orders, as this regular income means we can plan ahead and commit to more students. We now have an income of **£377** a month from standing orders. This has increased from £352 in 2009 which is amazing given the financial pressures many people are facing.
- ✚ Our new Charity status means we can claim gift aid on many of the standing orders and donations. This gives us an additional 28p for every £1 people donate. If you have a standing order and are a UK tax payer, but have not yet elected for gift aid, please contact us.
- ✚ Our administration and running costs remain very low: less than £100 for 2010. At the AGM in November it was agreed that we should recognise the administrative and organisational effort of Afaq Jadeeda in distributing and monitoring the scholarships and pay 5% of the funds to them to support these activities. This will be back dated to September 2010 and will involve a transfer of £300.

We would like to say a special **thank you** for all her hard work to **Hilary Smith** who has been our Treasurer since the organisation started. Hilary stepped down from the Treasurer role in November but will still continue her support in other ways. We welcomed our new Treasurer, Kaeren van Vliet, to the role at the AGM.

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, with administrative support from Afaq Jadeeda.

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.



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

HOW TO CONTACT US

You can contact the Scholarship Fund on 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.