

43 women receive scholarships

Yes – this year, thanks to the amazing support we've received, we are sponsoring 43 students. Below we hear from four of them and our thanks go to Safaa A. El Derawi, volunteer assistant to our partner Mona El Farra, for interviewing them and taking their photos. Hear more about Safaa on page 10 and you can find details about the students on page 7.



The scholarship changed my life

Bessan Alarabeed always wanted to go to university. 'At school I dreamed of becoming a famous dentist, but I came to understand that this would be difficult to achieve. I'm one of ten children and my family didn't have the money. Two of my brothers were at university and my sister was sick and needed a lot of treatment.'

But Bessan was an 'outstanding student' and on finishing high school she was awarded a grant that would enable her to go to university. She was overjoyed. She could enter the Faculty of Dentistry at Al-Azhar University, despite the very costly fees. 'I was so happy. My family were very proud.'

I wouldn't give up

Unfortunately, it turned out that the grant was only for the first year. 'My family tried to cover the university fees, but we couldn't raise that sort of money.' Bessan applied for exemption from payment but was refused. She began to think seriously that she would have to leave university. But she could not give up on her ambition.

So she continued to study but under terrible psychological pressure. Then, at the end of the year, the university authorities refused to let her sit the end-of-year exams. 'That was the most difficult situation I had ever experienced – to be excluded from exams because I hadn't paid the university fees.'

The Sheffield Scholarship

Bessan then found out about the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund. 'Getting the Sheffield scholarship was my own miracle. I give thanks to God and to the Sheffield group for gifting me the chance to study through its generous scholarship. This scholarship has changed my life. I'm in the fourth year now of my degree and I study hard. This gives me and my family hope for a better future.'



Getting the scholarship has supported me a lot

Sabreen Albaz lives with her family at Nuseirat refugee camp and is studying health management at Al Quds University.

Sabreen's area of study means she has a good chance of finding work and she is hoping to do a postgraduate qualification after graduating. 'I would like to thank the Sheffield Scholarship Fund for helping me to complete my degree and to achieve my dream of being a useful person in my society. After graduation, I want to help people who are ill or injured, who have to endure the harsh conditions of life in Gaza.'



Overcoming sadness

Sabreen's father died two years ago. Losing her father hit Sabreen very hard and the whole family is grieving for him. He was also the sole breadwinner, so their economic situation has become much worse. 'I have felt so sad losing my father and my life became more difficult. I didn't expect to be able to complete my university degree. Getting the Sheffield scholarship has supported me a lot.'



Studying at the university has made me strong and independent and it has helped me to overcome extreme sadness, so I am grateful for this scholarship. My mother has always given me a lot of encouragement. She says education is the best thing.'

As well as studying for her degree, Sabreen volunteers in a local community association. 'I love art – ceramics, painting and drawing on glass. My dream is to open a big gallery of my work to show the whole world that we appreciate life, beauty and peace.'

My dream of education

Rania Hassaneen is studying education at Al-Aqsa University and is now in her third year. She has a big family (12 members in all). Three of her brothers are at university and her sister graduated from college and is looking for a job. 'Without the scholarship I would not have been able to go into higher education. My family is in a very difficult economic situation and my brothers have more chance of going to university because they're in a better position to get work and earn money after they graduate.'



In Gaza many factors make it difficult to do well at university. 'I sometimes have to miss lectures because I cannot afford to pay for transport and I cannot buy all the books that I need. Because of the way things are here we often have no electricity over

many hours. Also the military attacks on Gaza (during the summer of 2014) caused psychological problems as well as physical damage. I did not expect to stay alive.

'I want to graduate with a good degree and then get some part-time work so I can go on to do graduate studies. I want to develop my skills in English and I want to join some leadership and youth courses. I will also continue to use my skills as a volunteer, helping people.

Thank you again for this scholarship. It changed my life. It helped me to fulfil my dream of education. A lot of people need your help to complete their studies. Thank you very much.'

I was frightened I wouldn't be able to go to university

Dalia Abu Shammalla is studying pharmacy at Al-Azhar University. Despite living in difficult conditions with her extended family, she aims high in her studies and her ambitions.

'I always do my best in my studies. I believe that education is the best way to change my life for the better and not only that – it will improve things for my family.'



Dalia always dreamed of studying pharmacy, but her dream would never have come true if she hadn't had help with paying the fees. Studying at the faculty of pharmacy is expensive. 'I knew that tuition fees in Gaza were very high and I was frightened I wouldn't be able to go to university. The Sheffield scholarship is one of the most important and best things that have happened in my life.'

Dalia works very hard at university, attending all the required lectures. She has also been doing extra training in computer skills, personal development and English. 'I'm always thinking about my life after graduation. I'm frightened that I won't be able to find a job, so I've done training courses in various fields and I've developed a lot of skills. I'm certain that knowing English will help me to complete postgraduate studies and build a career.'



Right to live

The aggression against Gaza in the summer of 2014 left painful memories for everyone in Gaza. Dalia's family were forced to leave their home during the shelling and the house was very badly damaged.

'The most horrible moment was when we had to flee from our homes. I think people throughout the world would learn a lot about Palestinians if they just experienced one minute of war. Our only desire is to have the right to live, no more and no less. One minute can change everything in Gaza. Our dream is to have peace and safety.'

Saddleworth Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund

Saddleworth PWSF is an independent group, formed in 2012. This year the group raised a tremendous £5095.09 to send to our shared partners in Gaza. The group fundraises through encouraging supporters to take out standing orders or to make ad hoc donations and through selling jewellery (made and donated by the sister in law of a committee member). The group also runs 2 fundraising events each year.

- This year our spring fundraiser was a seven mile sponsored walk between Marsden and Uppermill, the distance being the width of the Gaza strip. 40 people, from as far afield as Manchester, Sheffield and Huddersfield, walked in peace and solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza who are unable to freely leave 'the Strip'. One supporter did a sponsored 'read' and one ran in the Morrisons Great Manchester Run.



During the walk we stopped several times to read poems chosen by group members. At our lunch stop, by the canal in Diggle, we raised the Palestinian flag –

much to the surprise of people having their lunch at 'Grandpa Greene's' cafe! The walk was a huge success, not only because it raised almost £4,000, but because it was a great opportunity to talk with our supporters about Palestine and the Scholarship Fund.

- Our second event was an afternoon tea in October. We were very fortunate to have Dr Mona El Farra as our guest speaker. Our MP, Debbie Abrahams, (who is a Shadow Minister and Vice Chair of the Britain Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group) also joined us and music was provided by a local group, Emerald Peak. Around 70 people were present to hear Mona's inspirational address and we raised over £1,300.



Saddleworth PWSF committee members with Dr Mona El Farra and Debbie Abrahams MP.

From left to right: Jacqui Greenfield, Dr Mona El Farra, Debbie Abrahams MP, Michele Abendstern, Kathy Brooks, Catherine Holland, Joy Bishop

Over the year the group has also been **awareness raising**. It gave a presentation and ran a stall at the International Women's Day celebration organised by Oldham Labour Women. It ran a stall at Oldham Council's UN International Day of Peace event in September, and at Greater Manchester CND's Peace and Craft Fair in November.

As with SPWSF, the Saddleworth group's Co-operative Bank account was closed in January 2016. Its account is now with Yorkshire Building Society.

Bolton Socialist Club

Over the last twelve months Bolton Socialist Club contributed £2,360 to SPWSF through its Gaza Women's Education Fund. As Neil Duffield from the Club told us, this fantastic contribution came from a number of fund raising events as well as individual donations:

- Our annual Peterloo commemoration was attended this year by Mona El Farra. Mona has become a regular and very welcome visitor to the club and her tireless activism never fails to inspire us.
- We ran a packed-out Love Music Hate Racism event with Palestinian singer Reem Kelani.



- We held an evening to celebrate the life and work of life-long peace campaigner and women's rights activist Betty Tebbs (now 97). It was attended by Bolton-born actress Maxine Peake.

Betty Tebbs (on the right) at Greenham Common in 1986

- We organised a sponsored walk which a sizeable group of club members came along to.



On a very sad note, we have to report the loss of club member and town councillor Sufrana Ismail who, over the last few years, organised a number of highly successful curry evenings in support of the Gaza Women's Education Fund. She had already planned this year's when she was taken ill and she died shortly afterwards. She is a great loss to us all and will be sorely missed.

As always, we remain committed to the Women's Scholarship Fund and to Palestinian work in general and are deeply shocked and angered by the actions of the Co-operative Bank in closing the accounts of organisations with connections to Palestine. We will continue our work in the coming year and are planning more fund raising events.

Sheffield Palestine Education Network (PEN)

Sheffield Palestine Education Network (PEN) involves staff and students at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and is supported by the University and College Lecturers Union (UCU - SHU branch), SHU Students Union, SHU Palestine Society and Sheffield Trade Union Council. PEN acts as a satellite group for the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund and is committed

to raising awareness about education in Palestine and to forging broader links with Palestinian Higher Education institutions.

Over the last year:

- ✚ Individuals made contributions to the Scholarship Fund and PEN supporters also raised money through a sponsored run (completed by Sara Mills) and via a donation from UCU (University and College Lecturers Union - SHU branch).
- ✚ At an open meeting on 22nd June 2015, Steve Kinneavy gave a talk with slides about his recent house-rebuilding visit to Palestine with the Amos Trust.
- ✚ PEN members responded to the call from colleagues at Birzeit University to defend Palestinian Universities from aggression by the Israeli army with an expression of solidarity, signed by 39 members of staff and students. This was sent to Birzeit and published in BRICUP Newsletter 93 in November 2015.
- ✚ PEN members co-hosted one of the film showings in the Cinema Palestino programme on 11th November 2015 – Benny Brunner's *The Great Book Robbery*.
- ✚ In December, 2015 Sheffield Hallam UCU passed a resolution by PEN supporters deploring the closure of the SPWSF account by the Co-operative Bank and supporting the protest outside the Bank, which took place on 3rd December.
- ✚ In December 2015 PEN held an open meeting where SHU Lecturer Dani Abulhawa gave a talk with slides and video about her recent trip to Palestine to work with SkatePal in developing facilities for skateboarding and skateboarding training amongst Palestinian communities.

For more information contact **Peter Jones** at P.E.Jones@shu.ac.uk

Thank you video



At the SPWSF award ceremony in September three students spoke on video about what their scholarships means to them and to thank the Fund and its partners. The first spoke in English, the second and third in Arabic. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kY6XlqLvLBs&feature=youtu.be>

Our 43 Students!



Students receive their scholarships in September 2015 at the annual award ceremony.

Below you can see where each SPWSF student is studying, the course she is doing and what size of scholarship she received. The size of scholarship is decided by our partners in Gaza, who take into account the cost of the course, whether the student is nearing completion and any individual needs.

Name	University	Subject	US \$
Hala Abu Elkheir Mohammed Alferjani	Al-Aqsa University	Business administration	300
Ruba Hassan Abed Alyasen	Islamic University	Medicine	900
Aya Mohammed Mohammed Almobashr	Al-Azhar University	Law	600
Amani Mohammed Adel Abdelhamed	Al-Aqsa University	English	600
Lamiaa' Badr Abdo Alawadi	Al-Azhar University	Law	600
Heba Khairy Abdelrahman Abu Harbed	Al-Azhar University	Counselling and guidance	600
Amal Ahmed Abdelhadi Almaqadma	Al-Azhar University	English literature	600
Israa' Ali Abdelmajeed Abu Shawish	Al-Azhar University	English	600
Asia Sabri Mohammed Musallam	Al-Azhar University	English	600
Dalia Tayser Mohammed Abu Shammala	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	600
Alaa' Hassan Ibrahim Weshah	Al-Azhar University	Primary education	600
Heba Omar Shehda Jebreel	Palestine College of Nursing	Nursing	600

supporting women in Palestine to access education

Rola Atyya Murjan Abu Zer	University of Palestine	Business administration	600
Duaa' Kamal Kamel Arafat	Islamic University	English	300
Tasneem Wael Abdeljawad Aljamal	Islamic University	Physiotherapy	600
Reham Naser Hussein Shurrah	Islamic University	Nursing	300
Alaa' Fouad Dawood Aljumasi	Islamic University	Medicine	900
Nisreen Naser Muhareb Matar	Islamic University	Law	600
Rola Azmi Abdelqader Alhamalawi	Islamic University	Nursing	300
Ghadeer Khaled Salman Abu Khashan	Al-Quds University	English	600
Nidaa' Khaled Awwad Abu Sweireh	Al-Quds University	Health management	600
Rania Mohammed Abdelaleem Hasaneen	Al-Aqsa University	Primary education	600
Taghreed Ahmed Hamdan Khattab	Al-Aqsa University	English	600
Hanaa Atef Hassan Salha	Al-Aqsa University	Arabic and religion	600
Mai Mohammed Ahmed Abu Shawish	Al-Quds	Primary education	300
Amal Basheer Talab Alghrabli	University of Palestine	Dentistry	900
Mai Jamal Saleh Abu Shaban	Al-Quds University	Primary education	600
Bessan Hasan Musaed Alarabeed	Al-Azhar University	Dentistry	900
Neveen Khaled Mohammed Abu Marshod	Al-Azhar University	Accounting	600
Noor Atta Hamdi Habashi	Islamic University	English	600
Samira Ahmed Saed Wafi	Al-Aqsa University	Business and funding	600
Dena Yousif Jomaa Al-salot	Al-Aqsa University	International administration	600
Hadel Talaat Abdullah Alawawda	Al-Quds University	Primary education	600
Ayat Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed	Islamic University	Engineering	600
Aya Khaled Mohammed Alghalban	University of Palestine	Nursing	600

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Haneen Hamed Deeb Alraie	Islamic University	Medical laboratory science	300
Karama Hassan Mohammed Aldaour	University of Palestine	Pharmacy	600
Sabreen Mohammed Ismael Albaz	Al-Quds University	Health management	600
Khawla Marwan Mohammed Abu Khater	Al-Aqsa University	Sociology	600
Faten Yehia Deeb Obeed	Islamic University	Engineering	300
Rozan Mahmoud Abdelkareem Abu Nijm	Al-Quds University	Accounting	300
Merhan Mahmoud Ouda Saed	University of Palestine	Dentistry	300
Nidaa Kamal Salem Abu Gharqoud	Al-Quds University	Health management	300



Students and SPWSF partners at the award ceremony in September.



Introducing Safaa El Derawi



We are delighted that Safaa El Derawi has taken on the role of volunteer assistant to our partner Mona El Farra and is helping Mona with the Scholarship Fund in Gaza. 'I believe in the right of women to education,' Safaa told us. 'And I know how important the Scholarship Fund is for Mona.' Safaa conducted the brilliant interviews and photos that feature in this newsletter and we are very grateful to her for all that she does for SPWSF. Safaa, as everyone in Gaza, has a lot to contend with when trying to get even simple work tasks done: 'we only get electricity for two or three hours a day and I am often forced to stay up late to wait for the electricity or the internet.'

Safaa is an environmental engineer and she works as a Projects Assistant with the Middle East Children's Alliance in Gaza. Safaa is also a member of a youth group that promotes the right to drinkable water and raises awareness of health issues arising from the shortage of drinkable water in Gaza.

Co-op Bank closes our account

In November 2015 SPWSF received a letter from the Co-operative Bank telling us that the Scholarship Fund no longer fitted their 'risk appetite'.

Yes, the Co-op Bank that prides itself on its ethical credentials was prepared to put women's education as a risk. They told us they would be closing our account in two months' time.



We were not alone in receiving such a letter. Another 20 organisations working for Palestine, including the local and national Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and our sister organisation Saddleworth Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund, were given the same unjust and peremptory treatment.



A lively 'Closing Our Accounts' protest took place outside the Pinstone Street branch of the Co-operative Bank on December 3rd and again on January 23rd 2016. Many SPWSF and PSC supporters closed longstanding accounts. We have made a formal complaint to the Co-operative Bank and are now taking our complaint to the Financial Ombudsman.

We now bank with Yorkshire Building Society. Please note the changed bank details on the last page of the newsletter.

A BIG thank you

In 2015 we sent **£16,800** to Gaza. This covered full scholarships and half scholarships as well as a 5% admin fee to the Afaq Jadeeda Association in Gaza and bank charges. We thank everyone who has organised, helped with, or attended events and/or made donations of time, money or other forms of support to the Fund over this last year, including:

- ✚ All those who have maintained or taken out a standing order. This regular income is the backbone of the Fund and is hugely valued.
- ✚ Supporters in Bolton and Saddleworth and in the Palestine Education Network.
- ✚ Everyone who made a one-off donation.
- ✚ Val Johnson who held a garden party with strawberries and cream teas and Palestinian pottery and jewellery on sale.
- ✚ Sara Mills and Jonny Feldman, who both raised funds for SPWSF through running a half marathon.
- ✚ Maggie Norman for holding a 'stall over the wall' in Upper Padley at weekends when the weather is fine and there are lots of walkers.



Caroline Poland and Hilary Smith

- ✚ Caroline Poland plus friends and SPWSF supporters for walking **287** miles from Kirk Yetholm to around 50 miles north of Fort William. This walk was the first part of the Scottish section of Caroline's epic 'End2End' Right2Roam Walk for Palestine.



- ✚ The Top Shelalas, for their amazing performance at our fundraising social in October.
- ✚ Kath Rangeley for hosting a 'pint & pie' evening.



SPWSF is now registered on **Virgin Money Giving** making it easier for individuals to raise sponsorship. Go to <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/giving/> and use the search facility to find the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund.

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.



Members of the Sheffield Scholarship Fund Organising Group

HOW TO CONTACT US

You can contact the Scholarship Fund on sheffieldpwsf@yahoo.co.uk or by writing to SPWSF, 124 Clifffield Road, Sheffield S8 9DN.

If you wish to take out a standing order with your bank, our bank details are:

Yorkshire Building Society, account name: Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund

Sort code: 60 92 04

Account number 98676538. Please add reference: 07 plus your name.

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.