

Despite how we suffer I never lose my passion

Messages from our students in Gaza, January 2022



My name is **Amal Abdulralim Ashour** and I am studying to be a pharmacist at the University of Palestine.

This last year was difficult as the measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 had a great impact on us psychologically and emotionally. Every moment there was a possibility of losing a loved one, which made us constantly anxious, but thanks to God I did not lose any of my family.

I definitely felt more isolated at the university, during the period when classes were held online, because of the reduced social contact with both students and lecturers. This affected me a great deal as it was my first semester at the university and I hadn't yet got to know the other students and lecturers. But the situation is now better and more stable. Classes are held in person and students and lecturers have begun to get to know one another

The Israeli attacks in May 2021 also had a very bad effect on my psyche. Every moment I was worrying about losing someone.

Despite all these difficult circumstances, I motivate myself to study and to continue because this is the only way to survive and to build my future. I appreciate the efforts of the women of Sheffield who know, as we do, that education is the best choice for a decent life. Thank you for going on supporting our education.

I am **Norhan Khaled Tawfiq El-Ghafari**. I'm 23 years old, I live in Gaza and I'm studying business administration at Al-Israa University. I've already had quite a bit of work experience and I have done many courses related to my field of study.

It was not easy when COVID-19 appeared. I had many plans and projects in mind. COVID-19 also affected me psychologically. I was very afraid for my loved ones. I was afraid of losing them or harming them and I often needed support from my friends, but I could not see them because of the restrictions that were imposed. I became very depressed



but now the situation is better, the restrictions have eased and I go out with my friends while taking the necessary precautions.

COVID-19 also affected me in terms of university. When the universities were closed I no longer saw my classmates and university lecturers. I studied less because education became remote and I no longer participated in class.

In addition to the suffering brought on by COVID-19, we were exposed to heavy attack from Israel in May 2021. This caused a lot of psychological pressure. I was nervous for the simplest things and became hypersensitive. All the time I was afraid of losing my family or my home. Through this Israeli attack and because of COVID-19, we lost our family income and this has made our situation worse.

Despite how we suffer in Gaza – as a result of economic hardship, wars, diseases, shortages in medical equipment – I never lose my passion. I always try to regain my strength and my ability to help myself and others to become the best people that we can be.

The Sheffield women's scholarship helps me keep my passion, my ability to continue, and my determination to succeed. I would like to thank the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund for their support and assistance to us financially and for giving us hope that tomorrow will be better.



My name is **Zikraa Ezat Abu Swireh**. I'm 19 years old and I'm studying pharmacy at Al-Azhar university.

The economic situation of my family is not good, as my father doesn't work and we receive assistance from social affairs and charities. Our situation has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic negatively affected our economic and social lives and it affected my emotional life too, as it was hard to stay in touch with friends and I could not enjoy the usual social interaction between me and many individuals.

The biggest negative impact of the pandemic has been on my academic achievement, because for a while none of my studies were in person – all of my education went online.

Things got even worse with the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in May 2021. We were in an emotional state of fear and panic. With the lack of tranquillity and lack of sleep, and the fear of losing our lives or losing one of our family members, we suffered psychologically during the days of attack and the violent bombing of the Gaza Strip but, thank God, these days are over. They passed. Things now are fine. We are optimistic that tomorrow will be better and the coming days will bring us happiness and goodness.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the women of Sheffield for their support. You make it possible for us to access our most basic right to education through the scholarships you award. Thank you very much and I wish you all success.

A light lit by the women of Sheffield

A message from Wafaa El-Derawi, January 2022



I am writing to you from Gaza at the end of a terrible year.

Most of the months in 2021 passed under a curfew. The shops and universities were closed, the streets were empty, and people lost their source of income and were pushed under the poverty line more and more.

A curfew was first imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19 and then to protect people from the Israeli bombing at the beginning of May 2021. These Israeli attacks on Gaza killed many people (the UN estimated more than 200 Palestinians died) and the bombing destroyed hundreds of buildings including residential blocks.

It was so difficult to continue after these violent attacks. Returning to work took a long time as we tried to heal our wounds and relieve our pain. It was never easy for children and young people to return to their schools and universities after they had lost teachers and classmates under the rubble of destroyed houses.

However, we worked with all our energy to complete the necessary procedures for the Sheffield Scholarship Fund.

This year the Fund has impacted very greatly on the lives and psychological wellbeing of our students. A scholarship not only relieves the financial burden felt by a student's family, a burden that has increased during this difficult year, but a scholarship gives our students hope that, despite all the destruction around them, there is a light that was lit by the women of Sheffield, that still burns and that will light their way into a better future.

The Fund gave a helping hand to a very large number of students this year, enabling them to overcome their despair and sadness and to continue on their life's journey. Everyone here in Gaza is struggling and fighting for survival and freedom. The Scholarship Fund supports each student to struggle in their own way and enables each to become stronger and more able to face difficult life circumstances

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart all the women in Sheffield, who run the Scholarship Fund, and all the people who contribute to it. You always, including in the most difficult times, show us that there are those who think about us in Gaza and who work for our rights. This helps us to go on with strength and hope.

Wafaa El-Derawi volunteers with the Scholarship Fund in Gaza and is our link to the Fund's Gazan students. We greatly appreciate her commitment to the Fund and all that she does for it.

Meet our new West Bank students



Nagham Khalayleh

Nagham scored a remarkable 97% in her school leaving exams and was accepted by the University of Hebron to complete a four-year course in nursing. It has been a lifelong dream, Nagham says, to become a nurse.

The main reason why I chose nursing was because when I was a little girl my Dad was very sick and I wanted to help him in any way I could and to ease his pain. After he died I started to dream of becoming a nurse so I could help other people and alleviate their suffering.

For me nursing is a noble, humanitarian profession. I hope to complete my undergraduate studies and then practice nursing and I also look forward in the future to helping my family financially. I hope I manage to make my dreams and aspirations come true. And I won't hesitate, if circumstances allow it, to continue my studies and in particular I'd like to do a master's degree in nursing.

Nagham lives in the village of Samoa, sixty kilometres south of Hebron in the West Bank and has five siblings. Three are still at school and one is at university. Nagham was still very young when her father died. Her mother does not have a job outside the home and the family survives on payments from the Ministry of Social Development and from local charities. These do not always cover the household's outgoings.

Qamar Abu-Kharoub

Qamar achieved an average of 93% in her school leaving exams and a top mark of 95% in mathematics. She is now studying IT at Al Quds Open University in Jericho.

I want to become a teacher when I graduate, because teaching will provide me with an independent income. Teaching is also a 'sacred' calling. However in Palestine there are very few job opportunities for new graduates.



Qamar lives in the village of Habla near Qalqilya in the north of the West Bank. She has three siblings. One is at university and two are working to help support the family. Qamar's father

works in Israel as a day labourer. The family's income is not stable, Qamar says, but is usually enough to meet most of the family's expenses.



Eman Al Najjar

Eman scored 97.6 in her school leaving exams and is now studying to be an Arabic language teacher at the University of Hebron.

Eman lives in Fawwar in the Hebron district of Palestine. Her father is unemployed and the family has no stable source of income.

Eman has ten siblings: eight sisters and two brothers. Eman is the first girl in her family to go to university.

Asma Dakhee

Asma is studying nursing at Al Quds University in Abu Dis, Jerusalem. It is a four-year course.

From earliest childhood I aspired to become a doctor because it is a humanitarian profession and one that commands respect within society.

However, my average high school grades did not allow me to study medicine so I decided instead to become a nurse. Nursing is a profession that is very close to medicine. A nurse is the link between the patient and the doctor and we provide the patient with everything they need: care, comfort, monitoring and the medicines to help them recover. My desire to study nursing became stronger during the period when my father was ill and needed help. I looked after him then and helped him.

Eventually, I'd like to become a theatre nurse and to keep abreast of new developments and I'd like to obtain higher degrees in my field.



Asma attended a government secondary school in Jericho where she lives with her family. Since the death of her father, it has been Asma's mother who heads the household. She teaches Arabic in the public school system but the salary is not high. Asma has two siblings. One is at university, the other works to help support the family.

This year's scholarships

Thanks to the incredible and ongoing generosity of our supporters we have been able to award a record **75** scholarships this year! **68** scholarships went to young women in Gaza and **7** to young women in the West Bank. We are delighted that an anonymous donation of £10,000, received in 2020, enabled us to sponsor four new students in the West Bank.

We are enormously grateful to our partners in Palestine, who have continued to administer the Fund despite the pandemic and all the difficulties they face. And our students are amazing! Their determination and their dedication to their studies is a constant source of inspiration. We offer especial congratulations to the **15** students who graduated this year in Gaza!

	Name	Address	University	Subject	From	Amount (\$)
Gaza students we are continuing to support from 2017						
1	Asmaa Iz EL- Dien Abdeen	Khanyounis	Al-Aqsa University	Teaching Arabic	2017	200
2	Abeer Anwar Khalil Maleha	Gaza City	Al-Quds University	Accounting	2017	600
3	Nihal Fouad Nabhan Salama	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Teaching English	2017	300
4	Iman Arrar Mohamed El-Atawna	Nuseirat	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	2017	1000
5	Anwar Saed Sobhi Abu Jalhom	Gaza City	Al-Azhar University	Teaching Arabic	2017	300
Gaza students we are continuing to support from 2018						
6	Rouand Jaber Ibrahim Saeed	Bureij	Al-Quds University	Basic Education	2018	600
7	Noor El- Huda Amin Esmat El-Borno	Gaza City	Al-Aqsa University	Business Administration	2018	500
8	Nehad Raed Ahmed El-Jadbah	Gaza City	Al-Aqsa University	Chemistry	2018	400
9	Yasmin Baker Ismail Shaheen	Bureij	Al-Aqsa University	Basic education	2018	400
10	Rania Khaled Tawfiq El-Damagh	Beet Lahia	Al-Aqsa University	Medical tests	2018	400
11	Rima Fayezi Ali Al-Thawabta	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Accounting	2018	500
12	Norhan Khaled Tawfiq El-Ghafari	Nuseirat	Al-Israa University	Business Administration	2018	600
13	Nahla Mohammed Hassan Ahmed	Gaza city	Palestine University	Law	2018	600
14	Noor Mohammed Ibrahim Rayan	Deir El-Balah	Al-Azhar University	Dentistry	2018	1000
15	Ghalia Ghalib Gabr Abu Khaled	Zwaida	Islamic University	Nursing	2018	600
16	Manar Nafez Mahmud Al-Saidy	Bureij	Islamic University	Nursing	2018	600

17	Hadeel Gamal Abdullah Abu Haya	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Psychotherapy	2018	500
18	Hanady Mahmud Khalil Abu Shawish	Nuseirat	Al-Azhar University	Nursing	2018	600
19	Lamia' Anwar Abdulhameed Abu Hezien	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Business Administration	2018	500
20	Rola Borhom Mohammed El-Quraan	Zwaida	Al-Aqsa University	Nursing	2018	400
21	Malak Ibrahim Ibrahim Qnanish	Khan Younis	Al-Azhar University	Engineering	2018	1000
22	Samaher Akram Abdulsalam Ali	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	English Education	2018	600
23	Marwa Mamdouh Ibrahim Ba'alousha	Zwaida	Al-Azhar University	Engineering	2018	1000
24	Ola Khairi Abdulrahman Abu Harbid	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	2018	300
25	Iba'a Yosif Mohammed Hamoda	Khan Younis	Palestine University	Engineering	2018	1000
26	Alaa Maher Fahmy Al- Ghreez	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Information Technology	2018	600
27	Lama Hussain Nady Hamad	Jabalia	Al-Azher University	Accounting	2018	600
Gaza students we are continuing to support from 2019						
28	Rasha Ahmed Zaher Farj Allah	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Business Administration	2019	400
29	Amal Abdulhalim Mutleq Ashour	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Pharmacy	2019	1000
30	Shadia Yasir Mohammed Ahmed	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Basic education	2019	600
31	Ola Ibrahim Mohammed EL- Shaltawi	Jabalia	Al-Quds University	English Education	2019	600
Gaza students we are continuing to support from 2020						
32	Hala Mohamed Mosa Al-Ramadi	Deir El-Balah	Al-Aqsa University	Design and decor	2020	500
33	Sabreen Salah Nada Al- Rabiah	Beit Hanoun	Al-Quds University	Health department	2020	600
34	May Mohammed Mohammed Madi	Gaza City	Palestine University	Pharmacy	2020	900
35	Donia Loay Saadi EL- Zaanin	Beit Hanoun	Al-Quds University	Information systems	2020	600
36	Shahed Zead Alyan Darwish	Zwaida	Palestine University	Pharmacy	2020	900
37	Randa Rami Fathy Al- Dawahid	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Mathematics	2020	400
38	Dima Darwish Abdel- Razek Al-Majdalawi	Nuseirat	Al-Quds University	IT	2020	600
39	Zikraa Ezat Ahmed Abu Swireh	Zwaida	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	2020	1000

40	Bayan Yoseef Mohammed Abdel Aal	Deir El-Balah	Al-Aqsa University	Nursing	2020	500
41	Mai Hassan Abdel Salam Al-Hamlawi	Bureij	Islamic University	Telecommunications Engineering	2020	600
42	Mona Atef Hassan Salaha	Deir El-Balah	Palestine Technical College	Computer Engineering	2020	400
43	Aya Akram Hussain ElEdeni	Deir ELbalah	Islamic University	Engineering	2020	1000
Gaza students we are supporting from 2021						
44	Dima Hashem Hussein Barakat	Nuseirat	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	2021	1000
45	Raeda Saeed Izzat Al- Buhaisi	Deir El-Balah	Palestine University	Law	2021	600
46	Engy Nidal Mohamed Shaheen	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Business Administration	2021	500
47	Enas Bassam Abdul Razzaq Shaath	Rafah	Al-Aqsa University	English Literature	2021	500
48	Baraa Asaad Harb Abu Lehya	Khan Younis	Al-Aqsa University	Nursing	2021	500
49	Shahed Khaled Hassan Shaheen	Khan Younis	Al-Aqsa University	English Literature	2021	500
50	Malak Hassan Mohammed Al-Daour	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	Law	2021	600
51	Malak Khudair Jaber Ali	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	Nursing	2021	600
52	Hajar Hatem Ramadan Al-Masry	Beit Lahia	Al-Azhar University	Engineering	2021	1000
53	Lama Ayman Khidr Karim	Nuseirat	Al-Azhar University	English French	2021	600
54	Nourhan Yaqoub Salman Abu Sneimah	Rafah	Al-Aqsa University	Teaching English	2021	500
55	Aya Baheej Deeb El- Hummus	Rafah	Al-Aqsa University	Psychotherapy	2021	500
56	Eman Mohammed Ahmed Abu Taima	Khan Younis	Islamic University	English Education	2021	600
57	Nesma Abdel-Fattah Ahmed Al-Sharafi	Gaza city	Al-Aqsa University	Arabic Language Teaching	2021	500
58	Noor Yasser Mohammed Abed	Khan Younis	Al-Aqsa University	Nursing	2021	500
59	Mona Zakaria Hood Saqr	Khan Younis	Islamic university	Teaching English	2021	500
60	Shahed Ismail Ibrahim Qandil	Gaza city	Al-Aqsa University	Applied Technology	2021	500
61	Aya Ahmed Mahmoud Abu Al-Saud	Bureij	Al-Aqsa University	Public relations	2021	500
62	Donia Ahmed Suleiman Abu Marahil	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Business Administration	2021	500
63	Mona Muhammad Yahya Banat	Gaza city	Al-Azhar University	Computer Systems Engineering	2021	1000
64	Alaa Mohamed Hassan Matar	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	Pharmacy	2021	1000

65	Reham Zaki Abdel Nabi Ikrim	Gaza city	Islamic university	Multimedia	2021	600
66	Saja Maher Ali Abu Nabhan	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Gymnastics	2021	500
67	Fatinaa Sohail Al Nadeem	Gaza city	Al-Aqsa University	Basic Education	2021	400
68	Heba Raed Ahmed Abu Khater	Nuseirat	Islamic University	Law	2021	300
West Bank students we are continuing to support from September 2020						
69	Fatma Abbas	Amari Camp	Bir Zeit University	Economics	2020	1025
70	Diam Nasser	Deheisheh Camp	Bir Zeit University	Music	2020	1025
71	Wiam Hameidan	Beata, south of Nablus	Al-Najah University	Computer Engineering	2020	1700
West Bank students we are supporting from 2021						
72	Qamar Hazem Mohammed Abu-Kharoub	Village of Habla near Qalqilya	Al Quds Open	IT	2021	600
73	Naghham Nayif Ibrahim Khalayleh	Al Samoa	Hebron	Nursing	2021	1000
74	Eman Ali Hasan Al Najjar	Fawwar Camp	Hebron	Arabic Language Teaching	2021	800
75	Asma Basil Fathallah Dakhee	Jericho	Al Quds (Abu Dis)	Nursing	2021	1000
Gaza students who graduated in 2021						
	Name	Address	University	Subject		
1	Rozan Nahed Abdulrahman Matar	Gaza City	Al-Azhar University	English Literature		
2	Ayat Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed	Nuseirat	Islamic University	Engineering		
3	Duha Jamal Abdulrahman Abu Haya	Nuseirat	Al-Aqsa University	Teaching English		
4	Rawan Faraj Abdulqader Abu Shammala	Nuseirat	Al-Quds University	Accounting		
5	Salsabeel Salman Hassan Abu Rashed	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Business Administration		
6	Reham Bassam Abdulsame' Abu Saif	Nuseirat	Palestine University	Law		
7	Israa Ra'fat Ameer Abed	Gaza City	Al-Azhar University	Medical science		
8	Shorouq Hassan Mohammed El-Awadi	Jabalia	Al-Azhar University	Psychology		
9	Noor Nael Mohammed Abu Obeida	Khan Younis	Al-Azhar University	Clinical Investigations		
10	Rawan Ali Abdulmajeed Abu Shaweesh	Nuseirat	Al-Azhar University	English Translation		
11	Eliaa Ibrahim Ibrahim Al-Fasees	Gaza City	Al-Quds University	Business Administration		

12	Haya Mohammed Gasem El-Assar	Nuseirat	Islamic University	Mathematics Education
13	Lina Abdullah Mahmud Awadallah	Gaza City	Islamic University	Engineering
14	Aya Mohammed Salama Abu Mandil	Maghazi	Al-Aqsa University	Sociology
15	Tasneem Kamal Ibrahim Dowidar	Gaza City	Islamic University	Islamic Law



The Fund's partner, Mona El Farra, handing out scholarships at the Award Ceremony in Gaza in September 2021

Jordan Valley schools under threat

In October 2021, Israeli soldiers raided Al-Maleh School in the north of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank of Palestine. They removed a classroom, a school clinic and a metal awning installed above the children's playground to provide shade.



The Al-Maleh school had been built at the end of 2020 as part of a local, grassroots Right to Education Campaign. The small school had only four classrooms and to increase its capacity in September 2021 – with help from international NGOs – another classroom was added together

with a school clinic. It was this extra classroom and the clinic that the bulldozers demolished.

The four remaining classrooms and four other schools, located in other Bedouin communities in the Jordan Valley, have now also received demolition orders.

For more information on what is happening in the Jordan Valley to schools, with a sample letter that you can send to the British Foreign Office and/or your MP see:

<http://jordanvalleysolidarity.org/events-action-call-outs/save-jordan-valley-schools-from-demolition-call-for-action/>

Saddleshworth Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund

We had an eventful year, once again, despite the pandemic and its restrictions. Throughout May 2021 we ran a 'do it yourself' event called **Paths to Palestine**. For this we created a pack of local self-guided walks with maps, instructions, and tips on where to get refreshments. The pack also provided updates on our students and the additional difficulties that Palestinians are experiencing because of COVID-19 and the lack of access to vaccinations. We encouraged supporters to take photographs of themselves when out walking, holding a symbol of Palestine, and to send these to us. We then used these photos to produce a poster (*left*), which was shared on social media and in our local newspaper. We encouraged supporters to treat the event as their own personal challenge and some people clocked up 100 miles! The event raised over £4,000 through donations and sponsorship money.



Although COVID-19 restrictions meant we were not able to hold an event for walkers and



Committee members with Debbie Abrahams (MP) and Mona El Farra, holding banner made by Magda Sachs (on right)

supporters to conclude the **Paths to Palestine**

event, committee members did have the opportunity to meet with the Fund's Gaza-based partner, Dr Mona El Farra, and our local MP Debbie Abrahams at the end of June. This was an uplifting occasion and a reminder, should we have needed one, of the importance of the Scholarship Fund in changing lives. In Mona's words, the Fund equips our students to be able to support their communities and to seek positive futures for their own daughters.

When the COVID-19 situation became a little less restrictive in the autumn, we held our first face-to-face event since November 2020. This was a Palestinian themed afternoon tea. To make this as COVID-safe as possible, we operated a ticket only policy with limited places and we served

people at their tables rather than have a buffet. We called the event **Together again for Palestine** and were really pleased by how much people seemed to enjoy the opportunity to get together in person after such a long time. The event raised £1,300.



Catherine Holland and
Sue Warrington preparing
Afternoon Tea in November 2021

As well as our two annual fundraising events we have received a number of donations from supporters this year, including from a local Labour party branch following a talk given by one of our committee members. We now have 37 standing orders, which bring in approximately £380 a month and altogether in the financial year April 2020 to March 2021 we raised £6572 for the Fund.

We continue to be a women-only organising committee with events open to all. Thank you to Maggie Magner

who has been our chair this year (we are currently operating without a formal chair). Committee members are: Michele Abendstern (Secretary), Ann Forster, Jacqui Greenfield (Treasurer), Sarah Hey, Catherine Holland, Maggie Magner, Magda Sachs and Sue Warrington.

Michele Abendstern



Bolton Socialist Club

Owing to the pandemic, Bolton Socialist Club was closed for about eighteen months. However, in October 2021 we cautiously re-opened and a number of meetings and events have taken place since.

In March 2021, during lockdown, we organised an International Women's Day event on Zoom and asked participants to make a contribution to the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund. This raised over £1000. We then extended the appeal to all the Club's members and in the end raised £2,500 for the Scholarship Fund. We also received several hundred pounds in donations and one of our members is currently raising money through the sale of Zaytoun Olive Oil.



During lockdown we did our best to keep members in touch with the Scholarship Fund by circulating the 2021 Newsletter and any other news that we received about the students. We are delighted and proud to support the Scholarship Fund and send our congratulations and thanks to everyone in Sheffield for all the hard work they put in to make it possible. We are fortunate in Bolton that one of our three MP's, Yasmin Qureshi, is fully cognizant and supportive of campaigns in support of Palestinian people.

Neil Duffield



Rotherham Friends of Palestine

In July 2021 the Rotherham Friends of Palestine group held an Afternoon Tea. This fundraising event was the first occasion we'd been able to meet since before the start of the pandemic and it was just wonderful to be able to spend time together. It was a sunny day and we raised a fantastic £285 including donations from people who weren't able to join us. We talked about the Scholarship students and were full of admiration for their determination, passion and courage in continuing their studies in the face of the additional difficulties presented by COVID-19.



Rotherham Friends of Palestine enjoying afternoon tea

During the year we also received several individual donations including a generous gift from a member of the Rotherham Irish Society.

We would like to congratulate the students who graduated in 2021 and to wish the current students all the very best with their studies in these challenging times.

Patricia White



Derbyshire Dales Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund



A small group has come together in the Derbyshire Dales to support the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund. It happened after members of the Fund gave a presentation at a zoom meeting hosted by Wirksworth and District Amnesty International in January 2021.

The Derbyshire Dales group is made up of three people, who represent Wirksworth, Middleton and Youlgreave. We have a larger number of supporters, who have taken out standing orders and who support our fundraising ventures.

Our group organised a stall at Wirksworth Farmers Market in June 2021 to advertise our group and we encouraged people to take out standing orders. In December 2021 we held a Christmas social morning with hot drinks and Palestinian sweet treats at Youlgreave reading rooms. This was well attended and we raised £80 and it was a good opportunity for networking and information sharing. A local supporter who hosts a world music programme on Radio Free Matlock (DJ Su-Ki) has offered to help us organise an evening event some time this year (COVID-19 permitting) which will involve dancing and Palestinian music. We want to use such events not only to fundraise but to raise awareness about the situation in Palestine and the occupied territories.

Seni Seneviratne, Kathryn Taktak, Carole Sedgewick

Palestinian women students imprisoned



Ruba Asi

In last year's newsletter we reported that the Israeli military had detained three female student activists from Birzeit University in the West Bank: Layan Kayed, Elyaa Abu Hijla and Ruba Asi. After a court hearing, Layan spent 15 months in jail and was released in September 2021, Elyaa was released after almost eleven months. Ruba, however, remains in jail. Ruba, a sociology student, was arrested in July 2020 on a list of charges including student activism and affiliation with the student organisation 'Democratic Progressive Student Pole', which is designated an "unlawful association" by the Israeli government. Shortly after

her arrest, Ruba contracted COVID-19 and after almost a year of military detention she was sentenced to 21 months imprisonment. Neither she nor the other two female students, arrested around the same time, had ever been held in Israeli military custody before.

A report by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that that all three of these female students had been arbitrarily detained by Israel's military authorities and that their treatment had been unlawful.

Detention of Birzeit University students continues. Five male students were arrested by the Israeli military in the first week of the autumn semester in 2021. A female student, Layan Nasir, who is studying nutrition and dietetics at Birzeit University, was arrested by the Israeli Security Force on 7 July 2021. The 5.30 am raid on her family home involved seven soldiers and 12 military vehicles. She was charged with membership of the Democratic Progressive Student Pole. We understand that after a month in Damon military prison, Layan is now out on bail awaiting her delayed court hearing.



Layan Nasir



Women in Gaza take to their bikes



Mona El Farra

In the last year or two you may have seen photos on social media of Mona El Farra, our Scholarship Fund partner in Gaza, cycling with **The Big Ride for Palestine**, which tours around the UK, Ireland and beyond in the summer months. The Ride raises funds for, amongst other causes, the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), with which Mona has strong links. When Mona visited Sheffield's fundraiser **Small Park BIG Run** in June 2021 she told us she was hoping to raise money to buy some bikes for women to ride in Gaza. I was intrigued. I began to find out more.

Beyond the age of puberty it seems that it is frowned upon for a woman to ride a bicycle in Gaza. It can be seen as a shameful activity. However, there are women like 34-year-old schoolteacher, Amna Suleiman, who are bravely defying these rules.

"I've always loved bicycles," she told the BBC *100 Women* series. "It was my dream to ride a bike at my age. When I first started cycling I knew people would find it unacceptable. People were staring at me, clearly disapproving."



Amna and her friend with their bikes

But Amna ignored the disapproving looks and through social media she invited other women to join her and a friend for a bike ride. Many women responded positively, but none turned up on the day. Amna believes they were frightened at what the 'authorities' might do.



Amna cycling round her local area

Another Gazan woman, Rania al-Daour, has set up a project called **Breathe Deeply**, with support from an American charity. The project runs women-only sessions in the Yarmouk stadium in Gaza City five mornings a week, when women can ride bikes away from disapproving eyes. Whilst this is a great opportunity, there are women in Gaza who say it's too much of a compromise. The promotional flyer has a photo not of a woman but a man riding a bike and some of the women who have attended the stadium cycling sessions feel

they're being shut away out of sight, when they should be allowed to cycle wherever and whenever they like – just like the men.

Val Johnson



Power to women everywhere

Below is an extract from a letter we received in November 2021 from Dr Mona El Farra, the Scholarship Fund's founder and longstanding partner in Gaza.

A lovely sunny morning. Life continues under siege and occupation. On the surface everything looks normal, at least normal for Gaza. Children hurry to school, laughing along the way. Shopkeepers are still very hesitant to open their shops. The many, small stall-keepers still have no customers to speak of. People are queuing in front of the bank to get their salary for the first half of the month. I suppose it looks and sounds like any other day, the drones buzzing continuously over our heads, a constant reminder of the ever-present threat of another attack, or maybe to remind us that we are under the control of the Israeli occupation? Just in case we had forgotten! The incessant buzzing of the drones is occasionally interrupted by the ear-splitting noise of the jet fighters passing overhead. In training perhaps for the next assault? There are sounds of shooting, which will be at our fishing boats just off the beach. All of this is a routine 'normal day' in Gaza.

Increasing numbers of women are suffering not only from post-traumatic stress after the May 2021 attacks, but from the growing domestic violence of a traumatised and constantly humiliated population. Women and children always take the brunt. And all of it goes hand-in-hand with having to endure a tough poverty, with no prospects for work, or if you're lucky enough to have work a very low income that cannot possibly sustain the life of a family.

Any yet, amidst this dark mosaic of crushing deprivation, comes a brighter side of life. The little hopes that make my day and recharge my batteries, inspiring me to continue with my work and life under siege and occupation.

This morning I met thirty lovely, inspiring women, who have insisted on lighting a candle in our lives rather than cursing the darkness. They have worked hard and have engraved their bravery into the rocks, and today they presented thirty, small, income-generating projects to assist their family's income. These projects ranged from honey production to making spices and herbal remedies, to food production, rearing sheep and calves, participating in the fishing industry, natural cosmetic production, making home-made local detergents, and much much more.

I feel very proud of Palestinian women. This is our resilience, against the occupation.

Power to women everywhere, and love to our supporters everywhere. With your solidarity we can keep fighting this poverty and the oppression of occupation.



Women entrepreneurs (globalgiving.org)

Dr Mona El Farra, Gaza, November 18th 2021

Small Park BIG Run 2021



Undeterred by the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, **Small Park BIG Run 2021** (SPBR) was again highly successful in raising funds not only for the Scholarship Fund

but for the Children's Healing Project in Gaza. We set ourselves a fundraising target of £10,000 so that each project would receive £5000. This felt hugely ambitious, perhaps impossible, as we could only organise very limited activities in Meersbrook Park and we had to rely on supporters to do their own Do-it Yourself activities. But rely on them we could! Supporters ran and walked and swam and did all manner of activity both in their own homes

and in the open air and in the end SPBR 2021 raised a record total of almost £12,000!



Setting off on the *Sheffield Way* walk with the olive branch

One of the great DIY events this year was a walk based on Councillor Peter Price's walk *The Sheffield Way*, adapted to start and finish in Meersbrook Park. Over the weekend small groups took on different sections of the route, passing the now traditional SPBR olive branch onto the next group as they had

completed their section. Altogether the walk covered the 54 miles around the outskirts of Sheffield.

The walk was in solidarity with our partners and friends in Palestine and with our SPWSF students, who have very limited access to roam in Gaza and the West Bank. At the end of Small Park BIG Run we linked up with our partners and friends in Palestine, as we do every year. This was a wonderful and very moving occasion. You can find clips from this online event plus more information on SPBR on our website: <http://spbr.sheffieldpsc.org.uk>.



A DIY running event in Meersbrook Park



The Lord Mayor offers congratulations at the end of the *Sheffield Way* walk

Small Park BIG Run 2022 will take place over the weekend of **18/19th June 2022** and will focus on refugees. We are hoping and planning to go back to a 'live' event, though there will be scope too for the imaginative DIY events that have arisen during COVID-19. Please come and join us in our wonderful small park and BIG community!

Caroline Poland

Arwa Abu Haikal Havard (1973-2021)

We were shocked and saddened in the Scholarship Fund by the news of Arwa's death from COVID-19 on Thursday 4th March 2021 in Hebron, Palestine. Arwa had lived in Sheffield from 2008 with her husband Dave. She went back to live in Palestine in 2014 but returned regularly to Sheffield to visit her friends.

Arwa was dedicated to the work of Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund, the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Northern Women for Palestine. She gave heartfelt presentations in Sheffield, Saddleworth, Bradford,



Arwa (second from left)
with the SPWSF organising group

Stockton and Manchester. She spoke about her life and home in Tel Rumeida, Hebron and of the daily harassment by settlers, the destruction of her family's olive trees and the constant alien presence of soldiers. She translated and read her mother's poems about life in Palestine and she also wrote her own very moving poem after seeing the bloodstains left following the killing of a young woman by Israeli soldiers. She inspired us with her experiences of life under occupation; telling her life story in public took an amazing amount of courage.

While in Sheffield Arwa was employed as a lunch time supervisor in local schools and she set up as a massage therapist. She worked for 'Forever Living' where her skills as an astute businesswoman were obvious and she was very successful in their Middle East section.

Back in Palestine Arwa was surrounded by her family whom she loved dearly: her mother, father, sisters and brothers and a growing number of nieces and nephews. She continued her life-long activism – sitting in front of a bulldozer to prevent the destruction of olive trees by settlers on the family's land and organising activities and trips for children traumatised by living under occupation.

It is as a loving, loyal and supportive friend that those of us who knew her well will remember her best. Arwa had an extraordinary capacity for making and keeping friends. Her generosity of spirit, her warm smile and her exuberance for life will live on in the memories of those who were privileged to be her friend. She is greatly missed.

Catherine Gaze

An Arwa Memorial Fund has been set up in Arwa's name and donations to the Fund will be used to offer additional Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarships.

*A Memorial for Arwa is taking place on **Saturday March 12 2022** from 3-6pm at Christ Church, Pitsmoor. Everyone who knew Arwa is welcome to attend. For more details of the Memorial or the Arwa Memorial Fund please contact catherinegaze@yahoo.co.uk.*



A BIG thank you

In July 2021 we sent **£32,000** to Gaza to cover **68** scholarships. This sum also included a 5% admin fee to Afaq Jadeeda and bank charges. We sent **£5,500** to the West Bank, which covered **7** scholarships and bank charges (we pay no admin fee in the West Bank). Our heartfelt thanks go to all our donors and to all who donated time or other support to the Fund, including:

- ✚ All those who have maintained or taken out a standing order. These regular donations are the backbone of the Fund, allowing us to plan ahead with confidence.
- ✚ Everyone who has made a one-off donation or who has fundraised.
- ✚ Our supporters in Bolton, Saddleworth, Rotherham and the Derbyshire Dales.
- ✚ The choir 'Body of Sound' for donating half the proceeds from their online International Women's Day fundraising concert in March 2021 to the Scholarship Fund.
- ✚ Bev Booker for organising a delicious fundraising cream tea in July 2021.
- ✚ Everyone who signed up for the **Small Park BIG RUN** in June 2021, who took part in the *Sheffield Way* walk or who organised their own, DIY activity. See page 17 for more details and <https://en-gb.facebook.com/smallparkbigrun/>



- ✚ Organisations that have supported the Fund, including Wooldale Quakers. *If you are a member of an organisation and would like someone from the Scholarship Fund to speak at one of your meetings, please get in touch.*
- ✚ People for Print, who print the newsletter beautifully and are so generous in what they charge.



Thinking of raising sponsorship for the Scholarship Fund?

We are now registered on the **Wonderful.org** fundraising platform. It's very easy. You can set up a fundraising page, or simply donate. Go to <https://wonderful.org/charities/1133499>

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. In West Bank we work with a committee of women, all of whom are active around women's education and employment. We route our payments for scholarships in the West Bank through the Teachers Creativity Centre based in Ramallah.

In Gaza 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 the West Bank have adapted these criteria for their own student selection process and, as in Gaza, they keep in contact with the scholarship students and help them overcome problems in completing their courses, i.e. not being able to afford transport, books, equipment etc. Our partners can sometimes access other small amounts of funding to cover 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.



The Fund's organising group

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:

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

Sort code: 05 08 68

Account number: 33288777

Reference: 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.