

Waldorf Education in the West Bank
Al-Eizariya, West Bank
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COVID-19 dramatically changed the course of my project. Having originally planned to continue the educational work I started in Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwestern Kenya, I had to be flexible and adapt to several obstacles when it became clear that internal changes to the organization, as well as policy regulations in the camp, would deter me from implementing my original grant. I wanted to maintain the essence of my project, which centered around maximizing capacity for Waldorf and alternative education in areas caught in the crosshairs of conflict, and had to think critically about adapting to a different model as well as the possibility of a remote project due to travel restrictions.

I ultimately decided to continue my work with House of Hope, an emerging Palestinian Waldorf school located in Al-Eizariya. I had been interning with House of Hope remotely for a little less than a year, and formed close connections with the head of outreach, Thea Lavin, and the two co-founders of the school, Manar Wahhab and Milad Vosgueritchian. Through my internship, which consisted of compiling social media and engagement data, I gained hands-on experience with the school and felt equipped to initiate an independent project. I relied on my background in Waldorf education, experience with teacher training and relationships with House of Hope staff to alter my original grant proposal to fit the needs of the community.

The mission of House of Hope is to strengthen Palestinian society with holistic Waldorf elementary education, accessible vocational training and dynamic social support for marginalized children, youth and women. All staff -- 14 full-time, 2 part-time and 9 volunteers -- are Palestinians of Area C, which gives House of Hope a unique understanding of these communities' needs. Since its founding, House of Hope programs have reached over 15,000 children, 5,000 women and 1,000 youth. Throughout my internship, I sought to learn more about how the Waldorf philosophy manifests itself on an international scale. I utilized my background knowledge about the pedagogy as well as my teacher training experience from Kakuma to research and prepare a mechanism for increased social media engagement with the school. House of Hope's social media is especially important because it raises awareness of holistic learning and emphasizes Palestinian voices. The goal of my Summer 2021 Davis grant project with House of Hope was two-fold: for teacher training participants, the anticipated outcomes included increased understanding of the Waldorf educational philosophy and new skills for adapting art-based approaches in the classroom. For summer camp participants, the goal was to reduce levels of toxic stress, improve behavior in a school environment and increase an understanding of different art mediums.

For three months leading up to Summer 2021, I worked closely with Thea, Manar and Milan, as well as other Waldorf educators, to design a teacher training curriculum and summer camp structure. We met virtually once a week to discuss logistics and think critically about how to incorporate the Waldorf philosophy into the summer camp. Throughout the project, House of Hope continued providing professional development for current teachers and new teachers, and offered practicum experience for Al-Quds university students interested in education. The initial 3 day training focused on general pedagogy and principles of Waldorf education, with an emphasis on art; this initial training was supplemented by additional training sessions throughout the summer camp. Participants were recruited from the Al-Eizariya, Abu Dis and Sawahrah a-Sharqiyah area. The summer camp started after the conclusion of the teacher training course for the following 4 weeks, taking place between 9am to 1pm, 5 days a week. The summer camp curriculum was divided broadly into two age groups. The first, for campers aged 4 to 6, consisted exclusively of Waldorf activities to prepare these campers for their eventual start at House of Hope for the 2021-2022 academic year. The second group was for children

aged 7 to 14. The activities for these groups were a mixture of Waldorf activities seen in the first group adjusted to their age and other more traditional summer camp activities, such as dance. With the Davis funding, both groups accessed expanded art opportunities in a new art studio with teachers who are trained in using these new materials.

Through this project, I learned how to adjust an educational model to a community's needs. Though planning the project entirely remotely had its challenges, I fostered an even deeper connection with the House of Hope staff. My understanding of Waldorf education has expanded as well, and has inspired a commitment to furthering my experience with alternative education in areas caught in the cross-hairs of conflict.

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