

Relief grant offers Palestinian refugees a chance at university

How a project identified by Aylsham Quaker Meeting is supporting the education of young people in the West Bank.

Ann Pfeiffer, Grants Programme Officer

The Relief Grants offered by Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) are awarded to organisations to help support a wide range of activities. These range from peacebuilding to supporting people who are suffering as a result of social and economic deprivation, natural disasters, climate change, war or conflict.

Each year we receive a variety of applications from projects working in these areas, based in the UK and overseas. The projects themselves do not need to be Quaker-led, but each has to be put forward by a Quaker link person and has to be a tested concern of a local meeting.

In early 2017 we received an application from the John Aves Education Project (JAEP) that was supported by Aylsham Meeting.

The project helps young people from the Dheisheh Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank who want to study for a university degree. The camp was created in 1948 to house refugees from 45 villages west of Jerusalem and Hebron, and was originally built to serve 3,000 refugees. Today the number of residents has reached roughly 15,000. Youth unemployment in Palestine is at 44%, so gaining a degree greatly improves these young people's future employment prospects.

JAEP forged links with Al Quds University in East Jerusalem and together they set up a formal selection process to award a number of undergraduate scholarships each year. To date the project has provided assistance to 26 young people. Most of these are young women, as young men are often the sole earners for their families and can't be spared to go to university.

During the selection process JAEP checks whether students have a clear plan for employment after achieving their degree. Most of the current students are studying medicine, dentistry and nursing, all of which provide a direct path into work. These are also extremely useful skills for the communities in which the students will work. QPSW Grants Group therefore awarded a three-year grant to help support some of these students through their studies.

What is even more remarkable about this project is the way it came into existence. John Aves, then a priest at St. Giles Church in Norwich, was an ecumenical accompanier in Palestine who was reaching the end of his stay when

QPSW Relief Grants

Relief Grants are given to projects for the alleviation of suffering as a result of war, conflict, natural disasters and climate change, but not for immediate crisis relief.

Up to £4,000 can be applied for by individual Quakers with the backing of at least one Quaker meeting. Application packs are available between 1 October and 31 January at www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw-grants.

Grants Group will meet again in April 2018 to consider the next round of funding for projects.

he suffered a fatal heart attack in January 2004. John's writings on his time in the region mention the similarities between the local young men and his sons back home in England, and how their different circumstances meant that very different futures lay ahead.

Yet John's message was one of hope, of how education offered an alternative to violence and presented an effective and positive way of responding to the Israeli occupation. He came across numerous examples of courage and dignity, which convinced him that death and oppression can never have the last word.

Through his family's work in setting up the education project, and now through the funding provided by the QPSW Relief Grant, his vision of a better future for at least a few Palestinians in the region is becoming a reality.



Students attending Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. Photo: JAEP