

# **When Will Wins**

## **About Us:**

The Trust is an indigenous developmental agency established in 1984 in Jerusalem and registered as a non-profit NGO to empower members of the Palestinian community through education and leadership developmental programs targeting Palestinians everywhere.

The Trust has built up a range of effective programs involving and benefiting children, young women and mothers living in marginalized communities aiming at transforming the sense of hopelessness and dependency into individual and collective feeling of hope and capabilities.

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## **Introduction,**

I feel really proud to write these few words and share with you some of the stories about how the Trust of Programs was able to make a difference in the lives of hundreds of families within the marginalized communities.

I put in your hands twelve success stories of twelve wonderful women who have all faced with success and determination the challenge and stood up against the system that limited their path to success. But with a little support and respectful listening to their needs they were able to overcome the obstacles and jump over the fence of all the restrictions placed by the family, community and the political system towards a promising future. I still recall what one of these women said to me one day: “The Trust is the hand which took us out of the mud, without your support we could have sunk”.

Sometimes, all that people need is some encouragement and faith to help them brush off the dust and see their own potential that will pave their path and help them take the first step forward. For all these women in the Trust’s history and for the ones who are just starting with us, I dedicate these success stories, may they be a model for motivating more women in the community.

Farid Abu Gosh  
President of the Trust

# When Will Wins

**Yusra Mohammad**

Usually, educators and people who work in the field of empowering highlight negative phenomena which they face during their work. However, plenty of positive issues in our society deserve diagnosis, observation and documentation in order to be used as an ideal in persistent and insistent work which with no doubt leads to success. This can happen with the existence of self reliance work, objective and positive work environment, in addition to external support.

Success stories which we document here, are told by women who broke the barriers of traditional facts and entered the field of learning, working and creativity. These stories wouldn't have existed without the learning and implementing environment provided by The Trust of Programs. These women now are experiencing the success and are looking forward for more in the future with deeper, richer and more developed experiences. We in The Trust of Programs are proud of this achievement, and of every single line written in these stories. We are proud to draw

this shining and positive image instead of that negative and dark one. The introduced in this book is only a part of the achieved, in which every woman is given the deserved attention in order to function as an ideal for other Palestinian women in their way of learning, work and success.

Our documenting of these success stories, does not mean in any case that the “heroines” have achieved all what they had to, nor does it mean that they are now on the peak, because there is no top and no limit for a person’s success. The life of a human being is a series of connected stations, each station prepares for its next and supports it. This who says “I succeeded, but I still have more achievements to do”, will reach to further achievements which will make him a more creative, nourished person, who will serve society more effectively. This happens through group work within The Trust of Programs, in the interaction between an individual and a group, for there is no success for the Trust or any group without creative individuals. Moreover, there is no vivid and active group without motivated people who benefit their society and serve it in order to develop it in several fields.

Those who claim that we are living in a negative society are wronged, because there are real initiatives and success. There are people who care for improving their abilities in order to use them in their society in its special circumstances.

This introduction is general; however, the reader will sense the specialty of each story and will interact with its teller in her way of lighting the darkness created by the harsh circumstances.

We have translated these stories into English so that they will be spread for more people, and give the opportunity for a larger number of people to feel these real experiences.



**Ikhlas Hilweh:**

## Intimate to Childhood

“Childhood to me is not a field of work or a source of income through a job that I perform. To me it is a continuous, renewable, and loving life that I have not ceased to experience but rather I live it permanently”.

Ikhlas, the teacher, used these words to express her attraction to her work in the field of childhood while we were attempting to enter into her private world to extract the components of her success story.

We noticed through her enthusiasm and intimacy that her job is an open time childhood. This is her way to set her fingerprints on the lives of children who will have their own fingerprints in building society.

### **From Anata to Sorief**

Ikhlas says, “I got married to a friend of my brother at the age of fifteen. I had to move from Anata, a suburb of Jerusalem, to Sorief, a suburb of Al-Khaleel (Hebron) district in the West Bank where his family resides. I lived in this village for eight years

where I tried to work as a kindergarten teacher due to my great love for working with children. However the monthly income was not more than 400 IS which I felt a waste of my energy and time in spite of the fact that I needed the money and I had the desire to express my love for the children that I work with.

I returned to Anata to live near my family where I worked with Beit Al-Maqdis School. At that time I had no qualification. I then moved on to work for the Women's Center at Shu'fat Camp, where I had my real beginning.

### **Qualitative move**

Ikhlas's experience with childhood, that she feels natural for her, continues and grows from one stage to the next. However joining a course for kindergarten teachers training formed a qualitative move in her life and her professional career. She describes that as follows:

"I went to work at the Women Center in Shu'fat Camp where I came in touch with some professional people at the kindergarten who were able to help me and point me in the right direction. They suggested that I take a course in kindergarten teachers training at the Trust. This meeting formed a golden opportunity for me. I followed their advice and joined a kindergarten teachers training course as soon as one became available. The course with its theoretical and practical sides formed a strong bridge through which I crossed to my job with confidence and strength. My driving force was not limited to my love and affection for children any more. In addition I came to rely on educational and practical principles that led me to look at children not only from an emotional point of view but through a vision with a strong desire to elevate the child and establish him/her utilizing these proper and proven educational principles which I learned through the course.



I learned through this course how to be innovative with my work with children especially in the Arts area. I went on to create activities and educational toys from scrap material. I came out with the conclusion that the child represents everything in this world. In order for us to build a firmly connected society then we have to start with the child for society will not be safe and healthy without the proper initial foundation during the childhood phase”.

### **Impact of courses on her family life and her professional experience**

Educational and development courses raised Ikhlas’s professional and social level to where she developed new methods and procedures away from traditional reactionary methods in dealing with life. Ikhlas expressed that saying: “The first thing is that through these courses I felt true self development. Work with children is close to my heart and mind and forms a part of my experience, knowledge, and education. That is, it is no longer a mere enthusiasm and love for children that drives me as it was during the period prior to taking courses. My participation in these courses also reflected on my family for my income improved which increased my contribution to the household expenses. This had a positive impact on the standard of living and the quality of life of my children. It, also, had an impact on my relationship with my children for I no longer use violence and sudden reactions in dealing with them rather I utilize the principles and modern methods that I learned through the courses to manage our relationships. This gave my children a secure and comfortable feeling.

On the professional level I freed myself of my shyness and raised my self confidence to where I am able to hold a dialog

and communicate with the children's parents about all matters concerning their children.

The truth is that my participation in the teachers' Muntada coupled with the benefit I gained from the courses had widened my professional horizons. My concern is no longer limited to the children in the kindergarten where I worked but extended to other kindergartens in the area. I constantly compare children in our kindergarten with children in other kindergartens. My contact with other kindergarten teachers in the area and exchange of ideas and experiences benefited me and reflected positively on the children who are the focus of all our combined experiences. I feel that no one can claim to possess a complete experience but each teacher has his/her distinctive skills and our interaction makes it complete”.

### **Expansive community activities and events**

What draws attention to Ikhlas's experience is that it is varied, lively, and divergent with many scopes. Her work with childhood opened the doors for other fields. She is capable of giving awareness lectures about childhood especially after learning about other organizations within the local community like Bialara as well as her involvement in the project 'Young Men for Change'. She, also gained new skills through her participation in the program 'Count to Ten' which is made up of twenty four episodes that calls for dialog and denounces violence in dealing with others both at home and at work or within the community.

Her active participation and distinction drew the attention of other media organizations like Al-Quds At-Tarbawi that offered her work in educational programs that deal with children.

Ikhlas seems really happy with her success which reflected on her home life as well her work environments. She says:

“Let me give credit where credit is due. Without the courses that I took at the trust I would have remained the shy and uninvolved woman I was prior to that. I owe my happiness and self satisfaction to those who propelled me in the right direction and those who cared for me and gave the opportunity and opened the doors for me to start my life experience. Because of their help my children live comfortably. I learned modern and proved children raising principles, I respect my children rights, and I try to utilize discussions and quite dialog in dealing with them. I try to conduct myself according to sound child raising principles in every situation or encounter with my children. My husband, too, noticed the development in my personality and my professional experience. He encourages and supports me constantly. He admits that he had benefitted from my methods in raising children and learned to apply some of the principles and understandings that he learned from me. His support for me is unlimited to the extent that he accompanies me when I go to film educational episodes at the studio where he offers moral support confirming that he is always at my side”.

### **Success story continues**

Ikhlas does not stop at a certain accomplishment, rather she invests time to gain whatever she can from new knowledge, new understandings, and new experiences from work, home, courses, lectures, And T.V. programs. It is a series of strong circles of communications and harmony where every circle is tied the next to support and enrich it. It is the experience of an educator who knows her way very well and always strive's for the best. She does not give up and she is never bored as long as she can feel the positive results of her work and persistence which she feels

everyday at the kindergarten and at all the organizations where she works. It is a true success story that forms a lesson on how to benefit from opportunities and how to direct one's efforts and energy. It is a true lesson to whomever seeks to build a strong foundation for a similar success story.

## **I'tidal Salaymeh (Um Rushdi):**

### **Innovative coupling of raising eight children while performing community field work**

I'tidal got married when she was twenty years old while living in the old city of Jerusalem. In 1960 she moved to As-Shraf neighborhood in Jerusalem. Getting married at this age meant having children early as well as bearing the responsibility of a family. Her work in community service went side by side along performing her duties as wife and mother.

I'tidal says, “My real beginning came when my child joined Abna’ Al-Kuds kindergarten in Jerusalem where I volunteered to help teachers and to participate in their educational and arts activities. Through this experience I developed the skills to work with children and take care of them through play. I learned through the kindergarten teachers that there is an organization named the Trust that organizes activities and events and offers courses to develop women’s social skills.

#### **The Mother-to-Mother program**

With regard to how she benefitted from the Trust’s courses and in particular the Mother-to-Mother program I'tidal explains: “I took several courses at the Trust; such as Home Counseling

and Guidance, Working with Groups and other empowerment courses. In addition to the courses I utilized my interests and hobbies in sewing and embroidery. I was able to learn from other kindergarten teachers the art of making educational and illustrative toys. The program gave me the incentive to participate in important social and community activities. I learned how to visit families in their homes and I participated in the awareness process. I learned how to deal with the differences among the different families and how to respect other people's privacy. This experience taught me how to be patient and how to interact with my children and husband. What I learned through the program and through my practical participation in social and community events is plentiful. Most of all I learned how to apply sound discussions and healthy dialog in dealing with my husband and children. This helped strengthen our family relations and deepen the sense of belonging to the family. The whole family resorted to sound discussions in solving problems without imposition of decisions from any one. I actually learned that everything may be resolved through dialog. In time women in my neighborhood started giving me great respect as well as consult me and seek my opinion on the most detailed issues in their lives. I would never hesitate to offer my advice according to the educational principles that I learned through the courses I took”.

### **Astonishment Look!**

About the difficulties that she faced due to her decision to go out of the house to take courses and perform field work she explains: “Many relatives and neighbors were surprised at my decision and questioned the reasons behind it. They would say, “How could she leave the house while her kids and husband need her!” Others would say, “Learning at old age!”

I did not pay attention to any of these comments. Instead I became more determined to achieve my goals. My husband's encouragement was a big support for my persistence and success.

One day after another I was able to prove myself at work and proved that will power is the most important factor in the equation. Those who criticized me for leaving the house to learn were forced to acknowledge the importance of my experience and the role I perform. Other women within my neighborhood were pleased with what I had accomplished to the extent that a large number of them set out to take some courses and join activities of the Trust. I am very pleased that I have become an example that many women are trying to duplicate”.

### **Employing manual Art in education**

Her role was not limited to participating in the Mother-to-Mother courses and performing family counseling, but expanded to nourish her gift in sewing, embroidery, and making toys for children especially those used in the educational process.

About the extent of her pleasure when making educational toys and illustrative boards, I'tidal says, “This hobby is close to my heart. I advanced at this work to where I am able to prepare educational workshops for the Trust with all its needs from toys and other illustrative material. I am very proud of my accomplishments especially that it benefits children, teachers, and educators. Today my sons and daughters talk about me with pride and some of them have arranged for me to perform some group workshops at their schools or place of work where I participated with all my skills and knowledge”.

No matter how crowded the words of few lines it will never give this experience what it deserves. We are talking about a wife, a mother and an artist, and a community activist that her family's responsibilities did not deter her from leaving the house to pursue her ambitions. We are talking about a woman who developed her hobbies and talents to become a trainer of kindergarten teachers in developing educational and illustrative materials used in the class rooms. Up to these days and even after becoming a great grand mother in her seventies and with her sons and daughters having established their own families and in spite of the fact that time continues running as nature takes its normal course I'tidal still gives of herself for she believes that work is a form of worship. She said, "I will continue to produce as long as I am able to and as long as my community needs my effort and work". I'tidal or Um Rushdi, as she is known, has a strong message that is driven by a mammoth will.



## **Tahani Abu Ghalyoun:**

### **The Trust showed me the way to pursue my national identity**

To realize your identity as a Palestinian Arab is a national matter especially when you live in an objective environment that forces your identity to be realized early. But when your circumstances do not help you in realizing who you are for many years, it forces you to alter your path in order to realize your identity visually and within your psychological and cultural structures. This requires the help of some people with a lot of awareness, patience, and capacity for tolerance in order to be able to help and assist others in getting out of their maze. It, also, requires a programmed organizational effort to give direction to those who need it and empower those who need empowerment.

Those who think that we are generalizing or we are merely talking will soon realize that we have a live and tangible example of what we tried to portray through the story of Palestinian woman named Tahani Abu Ghalyoun from the Negev. Tahani opened her interview with us by expressing her sincere thanks and appreciation to the Trust for helping her realize her national identity and learn about her culture through that identity. She learned who she really is, what she desires, and what she must do for her community.

## **Who am I?**

Tahani says, “My use of the Arabic language was very limited. The words would betray me as I attempt to express myself. Hebrew was the day-to-day language because of our circumstances, our need to work and our need to mingle and communicate with our Jewish surroundings on a continuous basis. I was torn between my reality as an Arab girl and my need to work, live, and be part of a Jewish community”.

Tahani’s case is a classical example of the situation that Palestinian Israelis suffer from. All efforts are made to cause Palestinian Israelis to lose their identity and break away from their history. Those living in urban areas within Palestinian communities may suffer less due to the interaction with each other. However those living in sparsely populated areas, like Tahani, with minimum contact with other Palestinians suffer from loss of identity and lack of knowledge of their history and heritage.

Tahani continues: “The real problem was not living in a Jewish community, the problem rather centered on my lack of knowledge of the basis of my identity that is: What does it mean to be an Arab and how do I deal with this identity from a point of view of rights and duties? Until God led the Trust to me or led me to the Trust to realize, afterwards, the pleasure of realizing and learning one’s identity for the loss of my identity meant the loss of my self. I was lost but now I found myself. As I look in the mirror I derive the pleasure of being an Arab for I see my Arabic self, my Arabic face, and my Arabic features”.

## **Her story with the Trust**

As Tahani tells her story with the Trust she feels that she is telling an intimate story to one of her friends about a real person of flesh, blood, nerves, dreams and goals. She says, “I was working

as a substitute teacher in one of the elementary classes at Omer Ben Al-Khattab School. About the same time the Trust was implementing their Learn-by-Play program at that school. I decided to join their program with the goal of improving my financial income. However, things did not stop at that but as it turned out to be, joining the program was the beginning of a trip for learning, empowerment and realization of my identity.

After a short period of time I became the program's coordinator in Rahat in the Negev. If I was to detail and describe the extent of my benefit from this program, I would definitely need more time and space for the benefit was tremendous and deep to the extent that it affected my thinking, the way I deal with people, and covered every aspect of my life until it touched my realizing my Arabic identity. Through my relationship with the Trust, I started dealing with a group of people who truly belong to their society and burn like candles in order to give light to others (educating them, encouraging them, motivating them, correcting their mistakes, and leading them to positive thinking). Maintaining positive thinking means that your actions will translate to what is good and useful. I have asked the staff very frequently and on a daily basis what does it mean to be a Palestinian? The answers centered on belonging, hard work, helping others, and assuming responsibility towards society. For belonging remains a word without value until it is translated into actions and results. This is what gives it the deep meaning of belonging with roots deep into the soil”.

### **I am my Language**

As I listened to Tahani relating her story with unparalleled enthusiasm, intimacy, and confidence about the Arabic language and how the Trust helped her develop her language, I am reminded with what the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud

Darweesh once said in one of his interviews when he was asked about his relationship with the Arabic language where he said “I am my language”, which means that the language is one of the components of the identity without it the person is lost. Your language means you, you think through it and through it you communicate with others, develop your cultural, social, knowledge, educational, and innovative capabilities.

With regard to the pleasure and importance of the development of her language, Tahani clarifies that in a manner that proves what the poet Mahmoud Darweesh said. She says “My Arabic language was weak and my vocabulary was very limited to the extent that I could barely carry a short conversation. The staff at the Trust convinced me that developing one’s language is the first step towards developing one’s identity and without our rich language we cannot communicate with others around us and we cannot convince others with our existence and our contribution of works and services. I would get the feeling of pleasure and satisfaction whenever I added a new word to my vocabulary. I set out reading Arabic stories and novels which gradually helped strengthen and develop my language.

My love and affection towards the Trust and its staff has become a driving force behind my learning about the Palestinian society. It is true that I am from Negev but I felt compelled to learn more about my society in other Palestinian cities. I visited Jerusalem and Ramallah regularly and found that there are a lot of common grounds between myself and other Palestinian people wherever I went. I used to think that I could not communicate with people from the West bank which proved very wrong since I get a feeling of belonging whenever I visit a city or village in the west bank”.

## **Relationship between community work and personality development**

Tahani Says,

“My life has changed or better it was developed, for change is sometimes concerned with small matters but development is deep in the roots. A serious development had taken place in my relationship with others. It developed to where I listen to others, give advice, correct what is wrong, direct, utilize educational processes and feel the results of my work through other people’s acceptance to my advice.

In the beginning members of my family could not believe the new development in my life but later started dealing with me as a new person with a message. I departed from the past and its negativity and chose a positive personality. Today I earned the respect and admiration of my community. It has become a fact that people from my community seek my advice and guidance on what to do and I spare no effort or knowledge in helping and serving people of my community.

I used to live with the extended family and I felt that I was discriminated against but today I realized my place and defined my role so that no one can discriminate against me. I am aware of my role and will not accept to be mistreated by any one or allow someone to look down on me. I supported my practical experience with formal education where I elected to study psychology. I studied at a university for one year but could not complete my academic education. Mr. Fareed Abu Ghosh, Director of the Trust advised me to go back and pursue my college education pointing that education deepens and enriches the experience as well as gives it an educational and scientific dimension. I rejoined the university as of the year 2008 with more determination to get my university degree”.

## **A thousand mile trip starts with one step**

Tahani took her first step then her second and her tenth and her hundredth step and covered a good distance on her way to success and attainment of goals. She continues to advance diligently with confidence determined to reach her goals. We are confident that she will get there for she sees the end of the road that will lead her to her goals and knows what she desires for herself, her neighborhood, and her community.

## **Khitam Mallouch:**

Through developing her abilities,  
she moved from a marginalized  
woman into a community leader

*“My membership in the village council at Beit Anan, is the culmination of a hard labor and continuous struggle for years. I wouldn’t have succeeded or gained respect of people in my town if I haven’t made more effort and work at the national level and made voluntary work in social issues.*

These are the words which Khitam Mallouch started her speech with, trying to recall her memories, noting that her life was not easy, **and that her circumstances needed consistency**, since her father died when she was only seven years old, thus her mother carried all the responsibilities in order to raise her daughter and five sons. However, hard circumstances resulted from the father’s death; especially that the mother became under social pressure as a widow, so that she will not be able to marry again and bring a stranger into the life of the family, and thus lose the inbuilt property of her husband.

Khitam's facial expressions changed, and her voice sounded choked, when she started recalling parts of her life history saying:

*“My mother could not stand social pressures in her country. Everything seemed to be against her, social norms, the view of society, everything around her used to say: you are a widow, and you do not have the right to do what other women do. Therefore, one can imagine the situation of a woman who lives in a conservative (traditional) society without any education acquired ever in her life. How could such a woman face harassment and restrictions surrounding her? The result was leaving the country with her six children after she felt that she was rejected. She headed to Dar Al Tifel School in Jerusalem, where she worked so that I can go to school. My mother was the real heroine in this phase; she was like a candle that burns in order to light the way for others around her. She went through **a conflict against life**, but at the end she succeeded in raising and saving us from a misery and we were able to go out for life and face it”.*

## **Marriage at Sixteen Years Old**

A woman who sees herself obliged to go through contradictions in her life and see her daughter's marriage as a saving act regardless of this marriage circumstances. Nevertheless, getting married at a young age is another challenge. Khitam tried to chose her words to explain her marriage in a balanced way, but she could not control her words, and she started spontaneously:

*“I got married in 1976 at Beit Anan. It was a completely traditional matching marriage but I decided not to give up to the circumstances, and not to live the experience of my mother. I used to recall her experience constantly and I tried to avoid what she was exposed to because I closely witnessed her sufferings during childhood, and I felt the injustice when I looked at her when she*



*used to work in cleaning at Dar Al Tifel school to earn a living. I said to myself: If my mother was educated a little bit, things would have been different". Thus, I worked on developing my skills in sewing through participating in courses, but after a while, I found sewing as unsuitable for me; however, I set my ambition free and decided not to stop. I swore not to re-experience my mother's life at all costs, she was treated unfairly and was defeated, and I should rebel against injustice".*

## **National and Social Work Opened the Door for Khitam**

Khitam joined Women's Committee for Social Work in her village , and started to participate in productive and cooperative projects. She felt an overwhelming happiness seeing her hand made work at exhibitions, watched and liked by people, especially in Jerusalem. Social work expanded Khitam's perceptions and helped her deal with people thus her insight became broader than the village, it extended to Jerusalem and other cities, the thing which supported her social status.

## **Arrest**

In 1990, Khitam took a step further when she participated in organizing a folkloric bazaar in Ebeleen. She insisted on preparing for this bazaar though her family and friends advised her not to do any activities in far places. Nevertheless, she insisted, for she believed that social and national activities should not be held only in certain places. They should rather be held everywhere. However, things did not go as they should have at the bazaar. Khitam was arrested by the Israeli forces because she exhibited Palestinian folkloric work and Palestinian flags in addition to the ancient map of Palestine. This was considered as incitement. Khitam says: "I was detained at Al Jalameh prison for 18 days, and

after that, they sentenced me for six months house arrest. During the six months I had to verify my presence through signing up in the military authority offices. My detention was weird for people in my village; how would a married woman and a mother go to a far village, participate in a national activity and be arrested away from her children?

How could she go beyond what is acceptable for a woman in the village, they asked. But I faced all this with determination sticking to my decision. I continued in my social and national activities. Without paying attention to comments of others, or surrendering to social pressures, I continued my struggle until those who were around me accepted my way of life.

Khitam continues to describe her journey after she was released from detention: *“I continued my work stubbornly and became responsible for Women’s committee in Northwestern villages of Jerusalem. In other words, I became a leader for other women. Working in committees wasn’t enough for me, so I established the women club at Bit Anan, which includes 300 women, the thing which enabled those women to take advantage of qualifying courses in sewing, beekeeping, cosmetology, and other subjects”.*

### **“Trust of Programs” – a significant stage in her life.**

Khitam reviews other parts of her experience which became respected from women of her village; they took her as a model. She says: *“On 15-15-1999, I visited Trust of Programs, a visit which was managed by Palestinian Medical relief Society, the institution which nominated me to attend an empowerment course for women in Ramallah”.* The experience was new and amazing for me. Why was it so? Khitam explained that in a long story:

Khitam went through a practical experience full of suffering, sacrifice, detention. Things fully depended on Khitam's energy, her initiatives, and abilities to challenge. But the empowerment course helped her mix between practical and theoretical individual and holistic empowerment, it provided her with methodic knowledge which changed her life. However, the comprehension of the material during the course was not easy and did not pass spontaneously.

We recall part of the words about the course: *“I was silent during the first five sessions- The terms were too hard for me, I told the trainer that I cannot understand what she was saying, and asked her to simplify her words., so she did. Thus, I started to understand gradually what was presented in the course. Each session was the basis of its next., and I gradually turned from a silent participant into an active one who asks questions, and gives her opinion on certain issues.”*

The course opened new prospects of knowledge for Khitam, and she became curious for more. Moreover, what she learned through the empowerment course in Trust of Programs was a motivation for Khitam to generalize her experience, and ask other women to attend a similar course held by the organization. Regarding how she helped other women in her village take advantage of the courser, she explains: “ I said to myself, why don't I pass what I learned for other women? Especially that the empowering a woman, and making her realize her energies, her role and rights are important issues for women who live in villages, because they suffer from being marginalized and persecuted. As a consequence, Khitam initiated a course with the coordination of the women's club, through which I offered all I could for benefiting the participants. I took what I learned

through the empowerment course as a base. I used to review all what I have learnt in the previous course and rehearse on presenting it to the women with the same method which I learnt. The interaction was positive to a great extent”.

### **Membership in the Municipal Council**

Khitam moves to another stage of her life, challenging difficulties, embodying success after success, carrying with her a belief that she is doing something which benefits her society, and what helps her to achieve her goals. Thus she paid no attention to any obstacle.

Khitam says: “ With my insistence, I imposed my will and I nominated myself for the elections of the Municipal Council, and succeeded. And here I am serving the village with loyalty, and I am free of all constraints, and my role as a woman is acknowledged. Today I go out for meetings whenever I want, if my work requires me to do so. I am a public figure now, and my role is known for people”

Today, many women in Khitam’s village and the surrounding villages, look respectfully for her role, and wish to have her strength and insistence. She turned from a marginalized woman into a model one who plays a leading role in society, isn’t this a success story which deserved documentation and popularization?

## **Rola Al-A’li:**

### **“My Life story is my real school”**

Rola says, “Childhood in my case was not fun or playing with other children. It was rather engagement in helping my mother in carrying the burden of house work. I carried a special responsibility towards my family since I was a child. This responsibility has ever increased with the years of my life”.

This is a brief summary of Rola Al-Ali’s childhood. Rola was born in a family where her mother was a teacher and her father was an ailing man receiving ongoing medical treatment abroad. The mother had to work to provide for the family due to the chronic illness of the father. This fact imposed, on Rola, a role in the family larger than a child could bear. She had to help clean the house, prepare food for her brothers and sisters, and stay up the night taking care of their needs.

### **Study and success in tough circumstances**

Rola says, “I pursued my education side by side with all the responsibilities of taking care of my family members and maintaining all the work that the house required. I was determined to succeed and not allow my circumstances to hinder my studies. Upon completion of my secondary education I joined Al-Umma

College in Jerusalem where I received a diploma in elementary education. I was going between my studies and the house chores. I would use the free time between lectures to go home and perform some chores then return to the next lecture and so on...

I had decided not to work after graduation so that I can perform all the house duties. I took an oath to avoid the duplication of my mother's mistakes and promised that once I got married I would not hold any jobs in order to give all my attention to my children”.

### **Marriage and suffering between Jerusalem and the West Bank identities**

Rola's father is originally from Bethlehem, a city in the west bank, while her mother is from Jerusalem's As-Sa'diya neighborhood, known for poverty and crime. The father later obtained a Jerusalem I.D. thus reuniting the family. Rola in turn married a young man from Beit Lahem with a West Bank I.D. that presented Rola with a real challenge. During the first years of their marriage and due to Israeli restrictions the husband, with a West Bank I.D. was forced to live in Beit Lahem while Rola had to live in Jerusalem in order to maintain her Jerusalem I.D. Rola had to raise their four children alone with the absence of their father. She spent several years struggling through the difficult process of obtaining a Jerusalem I.D. for her husband while taking care and providing for their four children. She had been performing the roles of the father and the mother, the care taker and the provider for the children. The responsibility was overwhelming and Rola lived in misery and exhaustion until her husband was granted a Jerusalem I.D. that helped reunite the family.

## **Leaving home for the community**

Rola said about the event that caused a change in her life and redirected her, “The Mother-to-Mother program of the Trust caused me to enter a rich and important stage in my life. My goal from joining this program was to obtain some information and techniques that will help me in raising and taking care of my children. I felt that this course opened new horizons for me to the extent that I became interested in other courses to bolster my knowledge and enrich my experience. I participated in the Women Empowerment course and then a course about tourism guides to the city of Jerusalem”.

Rola spoke so much about the impact these courses had on her and how she was able through these courses to alter her behavior in dealing with her children. She steered away from physical punishment when the children made a mistake offering them advice instead. In addition she learned new cooking methods that made her more aware of preparing nutritionally balanced meals avoiding fried and greasy foods.

These courses, also, helped her adopt quite discussions and constructive dialog with a lot of patience style in managing her life with her husband that had a positive impact on the whole family. Today Rola who was against working outside the house views work as a way to develop her capabilities and abilities and learned how to balance her home responsibilities with work assignments. She works from 8:00 am to 11:00 am as a teacher in one of the elementary schools in Jerusalem and volunteers twice a week as a Mother-to-Mother member from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

Rola says, “These courses taught me how to manage and divide my time between family and work. It showed me how to do

both and succeed. It gave me the chance to break my oath of not working since it helped me do both and be productive. I am sure I am not compromising my duties as a mother and a wife by doing both. The economic benefit through my income is reflected on all members of my family. The fun and happiness through my work is mine but its effect is reflected on the whole family too”.

### **Commitment to the Mother-to-Mother program**

About her commitment and her continued participation in the Mother-to-Mother program Rola explains, “The program is beneficial to my community and helps families raise their children according to modern methods and principles. Subsequently my continued participation in the program is steered by my great desire to serve my fellow citizens who are in dire need of our educational efforts especially in Jerusalem and its poor and marginalized surroundings. As for the tourism guide course I feel that it helped me greatly and I teach what I learned to the children at the school. It is a chance for the children to learn the true history of Jerusalem and its historical land marks. I get great pleasure as I watch the happiness on the faces of the children as I relate to them factual information about Jerusalem historical landmarks: souks, streets, the wall, the gates, the mosques, and the churches. This deepens our children’s national belonging to this city thus cementing the roots in history...”

Evaluating her experience Rola stresses that she is very proud of her accomplishments and feels very satisfied especially that she has a positive influence in her neighborhood. The women in her area trust her and her experience and try to benefit from her knowledge. A number of these women decided to go out of the house and take some courses using Rola’s case as an example. They feel that Rola is a serious and hard working woman able to



develop her capabilities. Some of these women are illiterates who joined some of the courses to fight illiteracy upon direction from Rola.

Rola's experience and her determination to rise up with her family is an experience that deserves to be studied, documented and publicized because in our society we are in dire need to publicize the positive to stop the negative from controlling.

## **Sahar El'isawi:**

### **“A victory over circumstances and changing place”**

Sahar's experience is the best example for a person who was able to adapt and rise above all circumstances no matter what where the challenges. She moved from one environment to another yet was able to achieve success with hard work and patience.

#### **Difficult childhood**

Sahar says, “In 1948 our family was displaced and forced to leave our home in Ramle and move to Jordan where we settled in Al-Hussain Refugee Camp. My father died in a car accident at the young age of 50 while my mother was still a young woman at the age of 38. My mother was left alone to take care of twelve children; five boys and seven girls including myself, the youngest, hardly five years old”.

#### **Ideal mother**

Sahar moves on to talk about her mother and the role she assumed and how she faced the challenges, with determination, all hard work ships without surrendering. She says, “One of God's blessings to our family is that he gave us a very frugal mother with a good mind and insight. A mother that does not

bend, no matter what were the difficulties which she was facing. The death of my father was like a test of her capabilities to prove that she is worthy of her family and children. She started to depend on herself economically and managing her household in cooperation with us the children. We were able to make a living from the profits that my brothers made through the sale of few items within and outside the camp. As a result of the ability of this woman to provide for her children and take care of them as well as her ability to find innovative ways to be contended. She was selected the Ideal Mother five years in a row within the camp”.

### **A child challenges**

As for her elementary and secondary education Sahar says, “Since the death of my father, we the children felt an extraordinary responsibility. We would observe our mother working hard staying up all night to provide for us while forgetting herself. We observed her spend every bit of energy and strength she had in order to make us happy. We were deeply touched by all this and took an oath to never disappoint this great woman. I realized early that success in my studies will be the life saving boat that will take me to the safe shore and that indeed what will bring happiness to my mother. I studied hard without wasting a minute with an attempt to improve my educational level and passed from one level to the next until I completed my secondary school education with an average of 88 percentile.

### **Directly from secondary school to marriage**

Sahar describes the next stage of her life considering that marriage and moving to a new life within new environment unlike her old one represented a hard and complicated challenge as she says, “I married my first cousin, who lived in Ramle, upon my mother’s

wish prior to the announcement of the results of the standard secondary school exam and went back home to live in Ramle. I wanted to continue my education at Beir Zait University but the first uprising in 1987 made the commute from Ramle to Beir Zait impossible which caused the project to be postponed.

Moving to live in Ramle was very hard for there was a huge difference in life between that and living in the Refugee Camp in Jordan. In Ramle the majority of the neighbors were Jewish. I was isolated and lonely with no one to talk to and socialize with. I am a minority now in my own town. This is in contrast to the refugee Camp in Amman where I was near my family and within a familiar neighborhood where every body speaks my language. I decided to work to stay busy and occupy my mind where I worked as a teacher at Az-Zahra school in Lod”.

### **The road to the Trust programs**

Sahar adds, “I lived in a neighborhood where the majority of the residents are Jewish. I gave birth to four children through the year 1993. One day I was surprised to meet an Arab woman in our neighborhood. This unfamiliar sight surprised me to the extent that I ran to her and asked what she was doing in this neighborhood. She replied that she is taking a course at one of the Trust’s program namely The Mother-to-Mother program. Without thinking about the matter and with insistence I asked her if I could join any of the Trust’s programs. She replied with the positive and promised that she will help me with that.

Sure enough I went with her the Trust’ offices where I was allowed to join the ongoing course that she was taking. Upon completion of the Mother-to-Mother course and women leadership course I joined other women in establishing an official committee in

Ramle. The Trust purchased a house for us to practice with the purpose of developing and empowering Arab women in the community”.

### **Head of a Committee**

Sahar says, “I was elected head of the committee that we established for a period of five years. During that period I learned to accumulate more experience and learned how to develop it on a daily basis. I promised myself not to stop at a given stage and say enough. The important thing here is that during a period of ten years through my work as a kindergarten manager I contributed at a similar level with my husband in improving the economic situation of my family. This enabled my five children to live comfortably and continue their academic education. My son Ala’ has a B.A in Economics, while my daughter Suzan has and M.A. in Education and Rawan is specializing in Biology. Today my son Baha’ and I are studying together where he is studying Marketing and Economics and I am studying Education. From the beginning I said and proved it in practice that life must go on and experience must be developed and enriched with education. I must admit here that my husband and my children have been very supportive and very encouraging to me at all levels.

There is no doubt that I owe a lot to the women who introduced me to the Trust and its activities. But I owe a lot more to the Trust and its programs. The courses I have taken at the trust gave me the self confidence and subjected me to new principles and methods that helped mature my ambitions and desires in learning and community work”.

## **Trust program in Ramle**

With regard to the Trust's programs in Ramle and the interaction of women towards the role this plays Sahar says: "The Trust enjoys a great deal of respect in Ramle especially in Al-Ribat, Al-Jawareesh, and the old city neighborhoods where many women took courses and the Trust helped them get out of their confinement to the sphere of working and learning to give and serve their communities. It is very familiar to hear the women talk about the impact of the Trust and its programs on them and their families' lives. I together with other Arab women in Ramle feel very grateful to an organization that took us out of the traditional roles and encouraged us to race against time by offering us courses and education that helped light our paths and enrich our lives. Once a human's appetite is open for learning nothing can stop him or limit him from doing that. After this long experience I feel at ease with my self and in all modesty I feel that I had a positive influence on women in my neighborhood and that many of these women had joined the courses and programs as a result of my encouragement and support".

**Abeer Ash-Shamali:**

“My wealth of my experience is open for all women”

Nothing will stop her eagerness to learn, work, and counsel others. Her mind is wide open for new ideas that she might utilize to develop her capabilities and utilizes what she learned to help and develop the capabilities of other women within her social circle.

Abeer Ash-Shamali, the mother, the educator, and counselor who works day and night studying and working alternating between her regular jobs and volunteering to counsel other women in Al-Jawareesh neighborhood in Ramle. She helps them cope with their environment and teaching them how to solve their problems in an educated and systematic manner. She has become a model for other women who are inspired by her accomplishments and value her experiences to be followed and repeated.

Our observations convinced us that Abeer is a woman who brilliantly combined learning and studying with work and filling her duties toward her family and to develop her personal capabilities as a woman with positive attitudes in her community.

Abeer takes a deep breath as she talks about her success story, “I would not have been able to make the choices that I made nor take the decisions that I have taken had I not been involved in the Trust programs. I would have had a traditional marriage and my education would not have gone beyond secondary school. The Trust courses have given me the self confidence I needed to realize my self worth. It has aroused my thirst for knowledge and learning and empowered me to realize that I have choices to make as long as I can bear the responsibility of these choices. It taught me that I can choose my life partner (husband) based on sound principles thus showing me that there is a better way to live and raise a family. It gave me the incentive to become an educated woman and helped me build the rich experience that inspired other women in my neighborhood. It actually gave me happiness and self satisfaction as it helped propel me to new elevations. This is why I made the decision to share my experience with women of my neighborhood and encourage and inspire women within my society. I feel it is the least I can do”.

### **Her experience with “Mother-to-Mother” Program**

Abeer Says:

“I was eighteen years old when I completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Joining the Mother-to-Mother program of the Trust was my first experience after completing my secondary education. There, I learned how to utilize my capabilities, how to develop them, and learned about the educational tools that I can utilize to deal with family problems, challenges, and how to help others. Upon completion of the above course, the providers realized my motivation and encouraged me to take more courses to develop my capabilities further.



The scope of the courses widened as I took courses like ‘Assistant pre-school teacher’. These courses flared my thirst for knowledge and education to the extent that I decided to pursue an academic educational program”.

### **Selection Awareness**

Her hard work in developing her capabilities helped her adopt new and non-traditional views about marriage. She did not surrender to social pressures and rejected traditional arranged marriage. She believed that her marriage partner must be someone capable and able to help her and work with her in sharing the responsibilities of bringing up a family.

She says “Prior to taking the Mother-to-Mother course as well as other courses and prior to my work experience I would not have been able to choose my husband with such confidence and awareness as I did after my involvement in these courses. Getting introduced to new ideas and new knowledge helped me establish the proper foundation for a shared marital life.

I learned from the courses that understanding, discussions, and role division and integration is based on a real human partnership. I, also, learned how to establish a loving and cooperative family. My warm relationship with my husband and children as well as every thing in our family is subject to discussion and understanding. This is why I can clearly declare that my children are brought up in a proper and healthy family environment...”

### **Paraprofessional then educator**

Abeer continues to focus on her story of hard work and success: “I worked in a hospital at the maternity ward offering translation help to mothers who do not understand Hebrew. I was like the bridge that the women crossed to lead them to the hospital. I

was counseling mothers about baby care and feeding. I worked there for two years then I moved on to work as a pre-school teacher. I felt that the first position complements the second for the experience in any area helps in developing and enriching the human personality by intertwining the knowledge circles. However, working with children led me to academic studies for the purpose of widening the scope of my knowledge in that area. I studied for two continuous years then joined a university for four years and graduated with the First University degree”.

### **Positive Energy**

Learning through offered courses or through regular academic program together with practical work experience without doubt bolsters one’s self confidence and offers one the capability to face any difficulties that one may encounter. As an example of how Abeer faced a personal problem that she suffered and was able to overcome utilizing her rich personal experience and believing in her own capabilities, she says:

“I faced a difficult problem after giving birth to my child. I suffered from depression. One of its symptoms is rejection of the child by the mother. The courses I participated in together with my experience with children helped me overcome this problem. I thought to my self that I must enjoy a sound psychological health as a mother. I refused to take any medication and decided to depend solely on my will power relying on my training and education. Eventually my self confidence and determination prevailed and I was able to recover completely”.

## **A counselor and supporter**

“I am certain that I am following the correct path. As I counsel mothers in our neighborhood, encourage them to take a course, or perform an awareness role to a group of mothers, I feel an overwhelming pleasure. It gives me the self satisfaction that I have done my duty towards my community. I learned through my education and experience to have a positive outlook on life. I place myself in the service of others for this is my message in life. Not a day passes by without me offering guidance, motivating, encouraging, or counseling someone. Today a great number of mothers in our neighborhood are inspired by my experience which motivates them to take courses and join educational programs. My friends, my husband’s friends, a great number of relatives and neighbors, and people of our community do not hesitate to consult with me on a multitude of problems relating to their family and how to deal with them.

The truth is that people’s trust in me increases my determination to pursue the path of knowledge to help me offer more assistance to a greater number of people.”

## **Fayzeh A'nati:**

**“I learned through the Trust what I did not learn from anyone else”**

For a human being to live a hard life in extreme conditions that may prevent one from developing one's self or getting the opportunity to show, prove, and grow one's capabilities through it, is a matter that requires a serious change in one's life that will lead to change and make difference. The 'different person' that happened in Fayzeh A'nati's life is that she heard of the Trust from one of the kindergarten school teachers at Al-Aqsa kindergarten at Shu'fat Camp.

The teacher told her, “There is an organization that holds courses and organizes activities and events that are good for the community in general and women and children in particular”

Fayzeh received those words like a balsam that cures a wound and reduces its pain gradually leading to a complete cure. Fayzeh hurried to the Trust offices and asked to join an empowerment course. She was admitted to one of the Mother-to-Mother course thus entering a new and decisive stage of her life.

Fayzeh says about her experience with the course, “I learned a lot through this course, I learned the proper principles of dealing with children and benefitted from important information about

feeding. I discovered that I was using the wrong methods in dealing with my children that I corrected by following proper modern educational techniques that are far away from using physical punishment and violence. This change extended to my relationship with my husband where I started relying on quite discussions and dialog to solve problems and walked away from severe and uncalculated reactions”.

Fayzeh continues calmly to tell about her benefit from the course saying, “I used to conduct my relationship with my husband according to norms of a person who was born and raised in Gaza. Then I lived under harsh conditions which channeled my behavior only to interact with force. I had to be tough and strong to preserve my rights and prevent being oppressed. I discovered, however, that being strong does not mean being rough and tough in dealing with others for the strength in personality comes from being quite and from the ability to influence others. In the beginning I would not accept any remarks from my husband about any member of my family even in the case where my family member was clearly wrong. Now I look towards these matters with objectivity where I try to place my fingers on what is wrong, point to it, and diagnose it in order to find the proper solutions”.

Fayzeh smiles and gallantly says, “The Trust showed me the way and increased my drive for learning and serving the community My decision to go back to school and pursue a university degree in social service was largely influenced by the Trust, its people, and the courses I attended under their supervision. Someone held my hand and showed me the way and I want to be qualified and capable to hold other peoples’ hands and show them the way. I feel very pleased when I solve a problem or help reduce a woman’s suffering”.

## **Field work**

From the course to the field where she had to deal directly with other women, listen to their problems and suffering, and attempts to offer proper direction based on what she learned from the Mother-to-Mother program. Fayzeh describes her field experience as follows: “In the beginning I faced a number of problems. The make up of the population at the Shu’fat Camp is intertwined and complex especially that I had no prior experience in dealing with men or large women groups. Month after month passed while I was getting closer to people, feeling their miseries, living their ambitions, sharing with solutions, and presenting educational suggestions. Sometimes I would consult my mother who had a rich experience in nursing and had her own expertise in dealing with different communities.

Through this experience my view of my husband’s role changed. I used to think that as a man he does not know about sex education with regard to my daughters. I discovered that the man can help his wife in this area and it should not be confined to the mother alone. In my opinion men must have a role in educating and directing their daughters so as to complete the process. I faced many social problems working in the field because physical punishment of children is widespread and violence against them is prevalent. However through the courses I took I learned to face these and deal with situations that may arise in the field regardless of who caused it. The courses taught me to be calm and collected and to ignore sudden reactions. I learned to take my time, think about the problem, and then try offer solutions avoiding accusations and confrontations”.

## **University study**

Fayzeh's life continues with one success after another. Her appetite is wide open for more accomplishments. After the Mother-to-Mother courses and her field experience offering guidance to women she decided to join the university to deepen her experience. She chose to study social services because she was convinced that helping families in her community forms a successful professional and community strategy. She mentions that many factors influenced her decision to attend a university among which was her reading, her courses, and her husband's encouragement. The courses she participated in were a helping factor in her interaction with the field of the specialty she chose. She did not come out of vacuum rather she sprang from an educational and guidance foundation that helped her understand and grasp the university requirements.

Fayzeh who is close to finishing her university education is looking to work with teen age girls as a social specialist who combines work experience with academic achievement.

## **Influential woman**

Fayzeh says, "My social community view me today as a well aware and educated woman who loves to help others, can influence her surroundings, and gives direction and guidance to those who need it.

I never hesitate to perform my duty. On the contrary I feel very pleased when I solve a problem or help reduce a woman's suffering. I do not exaggerate if I said that many women in the camp have taken educational courses as a result of my encouragement. Women look up to me and I promised myself to be worthy of the respect and responsibility bestowed upon me. I owe a lot to the Mother-to-Mother program and the Trust and try to be faithful

to those who helped me and pointed me in the right direction. Through my membership at the Trust I find it my duty to work honestly and participate with all my capabilities to have positive interaction in an organization that provides community services that is worthy of honest effort and with all our capabilities. Why not while our Palestinian society especially those marginalized communities need our work and our programs”.



## **Muyasser Abu Laban:**

“Doors of the learning schools are widely open through one’s life”

Muyasser tries to invest every minute of her time. She learned that every day must present her with new experiences without hesitation or delays. She dives into these experiences with a challenging spirit that is eager for knowledge which forms her path as a teacher with a life full of hope.

### **Success does not come on the expense of home**

She is a mother to five children the oldest is in **his/her** (she knows which) third year of college and the youngest is 14 years old. She extends her responsibilities concerning each one of her children with follow up attention, encouraging remarks and motivating interaction. In addition she shares her husband the financial responsibility and family expenses using her employment income.

Muyasser says, “I realized early in life that I have to work, study, and contribute positively in serving my fellow citizens. Taking care of my family does not mean staying within the walls of the house. Good management of time and being practical and realistic is bound to overcome any contradiction between

the family demands and field work. I took many courses and accomplished many successes in different fields and I am heavily involved in community work but never compromised my duties to my family”.

### **The opportunity**

With regard to her relationship with the Trust and how she benefitted from this relationship in developing her abilities and capabilities Muyasser says: “Raising and working with children originally stemmed from my love for children and my attraction to their world. I started learning subjects related to childhood and how to take care of children from television until I took a kindergarten teachers’ training course at the Trust. The course taught me a lot in the field of childhood and brought me closer to the world of children. I did not have a clear vision of what I wanted to do and how to go about accomplishing it. The course helped clear my vision and clarify matters enough for me to see my way through. It helped me realize that a desire to work with children alone is not enough. What is required is strengthening, sharpening, and developing this desire with learning and education coupled with practical experience.

Through the course I learned some contemporary and tested techniques and principles in dealing with children as well as how to work in teams. In addition, I improved my skills in the area of utilizing educational toys and other teaching methods. To sum up I learned through the course everything and best of all I gained self confidence and how to give without limits. Now I give and I feel very happy as I see the results of this giving on the children, their relatives, and whoever needs my experience”.

## **Variety of jobs and innovation**

Muyasser moved out from one field to another with a strong will to perform. She worked as a consultant in establishing Al-Huda kindergarten in the Mount of Olive. She directed every aspect of the project taking into consideration all environmental and educational requirements until the kindergarten was completely established. She moved on to work with mothers offering them counseling and guidance on how to raise their children according to modern techniques that she learned through the course at the Trust. She was selected by a number of coordinators and supervisors to work as a counselor at Al-Ma'mounyya girls' school in Jerusalem where she counsels the tenth and eleventh grades.

Her ambition widened to include education where she joined David Yaleen College where she obtained a diploma. She, then, worked as a tourist guide, then, took an advanced computer course, and a group coordinator's course. In addition she works as a coordinator for geriatric people. Concerning her involvement in varied fields and the fear that it may compromise her specialty in childhood, she explained her views in an interesting and convincing manner:

“Life could not be classified into closed margins and boxes to the extent that I can say I work in this field or my specialty is in this field and I have nothing to do with other fields. Community work is intertwined and all fields are related. For example child upbringing cannot be separated from educational work with mothers for giving awareness to mothers is a vital issue in working with children. In addition, my work with children helped with my work at Al-Ma'mouniyya girls' school where I counsel two grades in a sensitive age group. For one to realize the

requirements of this stage one must learn about the childhood stage. The same argument holds true for my work with geriatric people.

As for tourism guidance it taught me about the place (Jerusalem) and its history as well as it developed my style in illustrating, convincing, and transferring historical knowledge in a precise manner. These scopes together developed my personality and deepened my knowledge as well as made me converse and illustrate in a wide horizon....”

### **When learning is open throughout one’s life**

Perhaps Muyasser was able to summarize her story of success but any single day of a success story, should one attempt to give it what it deserves. It will require number of pages to document success because it includes work, decision making, roles, and many other details. If that is the case then what about a woman who works at home, at the kindergarten, at school, in tourism, and with geriatric people in addition to her insistence to take more development and educational courses with the purpose of enriching her capabilities to the extent that she considers life an open school of learning.

## **Maysoun Khwais:**

### **“Gripping happiness from the jaws of sadness”**

Maysoon says, “Upon my divorce I felt that all people are giving me dirty looks wondering about the reasons for my divorce. I would walk down the street with my eyes fixed into the ground trying to avoid eye contact with others. Every day I wished I did not come into this life for no one deserves all this crushing pain and suffering”.

Maysoun started her tale with these sad and painful words as she recalled parts of her life experience especially that she suffered from early marriage with all its physical and psychological impact.

#### **Early marriage**

Maysoon recalls the circumstances of her marriage that she was driven into while she was under fifteen years of age, saying, “I was so naive that I did not know what marriage was all about. I could not realize what it meant to leave one’s home to live with some stranger. I did not have enough time to prepare for the marriage since the engagement and the wedding took place within one month. I asked my mother about marriage and what

my role would be and she replied, “You will know everything on your own when you get married”. Even when I insisted and tried to get some information about marriage my mother would say, “You will know every thing as soon as you move to your husband’s home”.

Maysoun’s move to her husband’s home was a different life experience that carried many contradictions. It was required of her as a young girl, hardly fifteen, to bear huge social responsibilities that she was not physically and psychologically prepared for. However the persistence of the family was stronger than her fear and hesitation. They said, “A girl’s destiny is to get married and marriage protects and preserves a girl’s honor. Weather you get married at an early age or an older age the end result is the same. So why not do it as soon your door is knocked on”.

### **From playing hopscotch to the kitchen**

Among the contradictions that Maysoun related was that her marriage was very sudden. She was having fun with her friends playing hopscotch and other games that little girls in her age group play. She was enjoying the games believing that the games will continue forever. However the gates of the play field closed shut in her face as she was faced with the responsibility of a husband and his extended family. She had to perform all housework chores; cooking, cleaning, dusting, and washing...etc. It meant that she had to wake up at dawn to find her self standing in the kitchen washing, preparing, and cooking with no time to spare. She felt rushed by the family’s demands and chased by time. The duties of a wife according to traditions overwhelmed the young girl and pressured her to no limits. She realized that she was in a race that she will never win.

## **A Child's Divorce**

Maysoun confirmed that her marriage lasted only two years which meant that she got married as a child and was divorced as a child according to the universal definition of the childhood age (i.e. eighteen years of age).

Maysoun confesses that she approached her mother with her desire to get a divorce during the first month of her marriage. Her mother received the news as a lightening shock wondering why her daughter wants to get a divorce saying, "Don't you know that people or her family will not respect the divorcee!"

Maysoun says about her suffering, "As a young girl when I hear my mother mention these words I would force myself to accept the situation pretending to be patient. However I had never acclimated with any aspect of this experience. I felt that it was unfair that my friends are attending their schools and continuing their education while I was treated as a slave by my husband and his family. I tried, many times, to get close to my husband hoping that he will understand my predicament and help alleviate my suffering. All my attempts were wasted and all my pleading went to no avail. The gap between me and my husband was getting wider and wider.

Psychological pressures were my day and night companion. I started hallucinating as I would talk to myself and pray to God that He may save me from a life not of my choosing. My family could not comprehend the extent of my suffering and their usual prescription for me was the same familiar words: be patient, the people, society, divorcee, and shame...etc

One day I went to my parents' house, secluded myself in one of the rooms, and refused to eat or drink. My parents tried to pressure me to return to my husband but I refused with an unparalleled insistence vowing that I will not go back if it meant my life. Once my parents gave up realizing that the price will be very high they agreed to end my suffering and started divorce proceedings. I gave up all financial rights in return for my social freedom. No finances no matter how large it may be will ever parallel the feeling I had once I realized that I will be free. Finally I will be free from a life I was forced into that was never of my choosing”.

### **The Trust opens the doors for her**

Maysoun continues by opening a new page that has a glimpse of hope:

“Although early marriage was hard and difficult yet the way our society views a divorcee is much harder. My biggest shock came on the first day of my divorce. The neighbors started whispering and asking questions. Then I became a watch station for everyone. Every member in my community appointed himself/herself as my guardian with the rights to question and judge every single move I made. I became constantly worried with an overwhelming shame. This situation persisted until one day I heard about the Trust and its services from one of my friends at the Mount of Olive Committee. Instantly I went to the Trust headquarters and joined a qualification course for young women. I learned methods of communications, how to bolster my self confidence, and pave my own way ignoring all obstacles that may propel me backward.

The course afforded me the ability to come in contact with other professional young women with their own experiences



and acquaintances that gave me the incentive to participate in discussions, offer my opinion, and express my self freely. This course pointed me forward and taught me to hold to any threads that may pull me to the future.

I joined other courses like “Learn-by-Play and worked as a volunteer through the schools with this program until I proved myself. I was, then, employed by the program which gave me a strong leap forward.

Participating in the Trust’s programs introduced me to other organizations like the YMCA where I attended courses on child raising, housekeeping, computers, and a course on sewing. In reality all these courses together shared in widening my scope, enriching my experience, and giving me an optimistic and ambitious look on life.

Through the Trust and its programs I was able to get out of my isolation and rise from the state of defeat that I suffered after my divorce. I began to feel my existence and ability to benefit myself and have a positive influence on those around me. I became a good example for many young women who tried to follow my steps. Although my work with the Learn-by-Play program helped with my personal independence without helping with my economic independence yet I continued to work with the program for ten years due to my love for children. *Nothing parallels the smile on the face of a child who comes to me happy and full of pleasure and confidence because he/she attained a good academic or social evaluation”.*

## **A new girl**

Maysoun explains her relationship with her family after her activity in the Trust's programs, "My relationship with my family has taken a positive path different from before. My parents are aware of my existence and my ability to mingle and interact. All matters have turned upside down and instead of fearing for me, their respect for me became the director and controller of our relationship.

I was transformed into a real human being able to voice my opinion within my family where every one will consult with me and listen to my advice. I took care of my mother and all her needs during her illness until she passed on. Today I am taking care of my ill father who consults with me on important issues relating to the life of the family and its future. My word is now heard and my brothers and sisters respect me and admit that I built myself from the ground up. I moved from the victory stage to a stage of building my social and professional personality".

## **My thoughts of marriage**

After all these years of suffering, building, and developing one's personality Maysoun summarizes her vision of marriage as follows: "I consider that any marriage that is not based on love, understanding, and harmony will always be subject to breakup. Marriage against one's desires transforms the life of the family to a burning hell especially the life of the wife within the traditional social understanding that limits authority and decision making to one party, usually the husband".

Maysoun concludes her story with regard to marriage: "I am not thinking of a second marriage if not based on strong foundation or if love and understanding are not the incentive for it. I do not encourage marriage just for the sake of getting married

or marriage for the sake of traditions, people, or as a social requirement. I long for a marriage based on love and harmony but other reasons do not mean any thing to me”.

Maysoun ended her story with life. However the story did not end yet for other chapters of the story are still not complete and will follow. However Maysoun of today is not Mysoun of the past, by all measures she is a new human being.

**Nisreen Siam:**

**“The Trust propelled me out of silence”**

Nisreen insisted to tell us about the stages of her experience from the beginning hoping that her success story will encourage other women in her community to follow her footsteps. She said, “I would like to begin this meeting which I consider a motivating event by stressing that the courses of the Trust constituted a special transformation stage in my life. Through these courses I was able to migrate from a circle of utter silence and isolation into the field of work and production. During this experience I was able to participate and express my thoughts, listen to others and comment on their suggestions, and get a feeling of pleasure as I observe the acceptance on their faces. I was a shy and silent young girl afraid to speak up for fear that my words will not be accepted. The courses released the knot on my tongue and gave my feet the freedom of movement so I can become active in the field”.

### **Farewell to silence**

The rule that ‘If speech is silver then silence is golden’ is not always true. Prolonged silence is a form of negative withdrawal and leads to one’s isolation. Nisreen suffered from prolonged silence

and wished she could break outside its walls. She succeeded but how? She says,

“I had a serious problem with one of my friends which gave me the feeling of betrayal so I resorted to silence. My silence drew the attention of all those around me. I tried on my own to break out of that situation but could not until I participated in the Trust’s courses. In the beginning I was a merely listener without active participation although I had a lot to say. However the way discussions were held and instructions given as well as the friendly atmosphere of the courses motivated me to participate. As though the course helped me hear the voices of silence inside me. Suddenly I found myself bursting to express my views and thoughts. Until now I cannot explain how it happened nor can I describe the astonishment on my face when I first broke my silence. That was the biggest accomplishment for me, although other benefits like gaining skills, and acquiring knowledge followed.

The course I took had a great influence on all aspects of my life. I got engaged during that period in a traditional method with the encouragement of my relatives. I discovered three months later that I have to make a decision that affects my future and I have to do it myself away from being dictated to. I broke up my engagement after I elected to be the decision maker taking decisions that suit me and fit my life direction”

### **Working with Learn-by-Play program**

Nisreen says, “After taking a series of courses and being involved with the Learn-by-Play program learning all I can about the program and applying the theory on the pupils I was qualified to work with this program. I worked for two years where I gained

strength and self confidence. It, also, gave me a monetary income that helped me provide for my self without the dependence on any member of my family. During that period I learned how to drive and purchased a car. I had many options open for me. I worked in a kindergarten then I moved on to work at Al-Ibrahimieh College of Jerusalem in the children section then I moved to work with the Mount of Olive kindergarten where I am currently in charge of the children section”.

### **Marriage by choice**

After all this experience through which Nisreen proved that she was able to work, succeed and excel, and upon changing the course of her life she no longer accepts imposition by others or ready made decisions. She placed everything in her life under her own wishes and control. This experience led her to marry a young man of her own choice. She says, “My selection is based on full awareness of my actions and is based on my own wishes. I am fully aware that what was good enough for me then does not suit me now. I have a real and happy marriage based on satisfaction, understanding, and harmony. I apply all the skills I learned from the Trust to manage my marital life. I am in total harmony with my husband. Without this harmony and support that I receive from my husband I would not have been able to advance so quickly in my work and my life”.

### **And next**

This is a success experience not only on the work and professional levels but extends to the level of building and sharpening the social personality to become qualified to make decisions related to the individual human life on one side and be able to participate in community services on the other side.

Nisreen found opportunity in the Trust's courses and she grasped it with care and caution. She was transformed and she is trying to cause a change within her community starting with children that form the foundation for human societies that once built with care it will create a strong and properly formed society.

## **Hana Safi:**

**“Deserves to celebrate her success”**

Marriage for some women is viewed as closing the doors, limiting their activities and interaction with the community. It is also obliged them to invest all their energy for taking care of their husband and kids and while doing that they lose their own identity. On the other hand there are some women to whom marriage becomes a new beginning where they can prove that they have the ability to divide their time between taking care of the family and study, work, and achieving success without these activities contradict or done on the expenses of each other. Hana's experience proved that she can do it all. Born in Jordan, Hana got married and moved to live in Ramallah before completing her seventeenth birthday. Hana took the secondary school examination while she was married. She then joined the university to study business administration. Hana's relationship with the kindergartens came through her daughter where she placed her. She found herself getting closer and closer to children as she interacted with her daughter's kindergarten teachers and other children at the kindergarten.



## **Interaction with the Trust**

One of the kindergarten teachers advised Hana to take a kindergarten teacher's training course at the Trust so she could develop her abilities and sharpen her skills. Hana followed her advice and enrolled in a kindergarten teachers' training course. The course provided her with the fertile soil on her way to develop and innovate....

She describes her experience with the course saying, "It was a fruitful experience at all measures. I gained a lot of knowledge about childhood and how to deal with children. I learned to listen to others, participate in constructive dialog, and draw conclusions and build on it. I learned how to make educational toys and how to use it in teaching children. What I learned reflected on the kindergarten and my relation with the children. My family realized that I have capabilities in this respect and that I can give to my children and help raise them properly".

Hana's interest in childhood may have stemmed from her concern for her daughter's welfare and benefit, but her ambitions took her beyond that. She realized through the training course at the Trust that she learned to perform multi-task operation. With her eagerness for knowledge and work as a kindergarten teacher, she was able to utilize her hidden capabilities to achieve her dreams. Her drive for excellence propelled her to seek higher academic education to give herself the opportunity to satisfy her large appetite for self improvement and fulfillment. Hana says, "Taking the course at the Trust was a wake up call for me. It showed me that I can be a good wife and a mother and still have ambitions to be a productive human being. I may not have thought of continuing my education had not attended the course at the Trust".

## **A kindergarten Manager**

About the influence that the course had on her professional path she says: “In the beginning I was a regular kindergarten teacher full of enthusiasm for the job and full of love for the children. The course that I took at the Trust offered me a professional dimension founded on educational principles. It is a positive thing to have enthusiasm for your work but to couple that with education, understanding of educational principles, and apply those sound principles makes it comprehensive. In reality, this is what happened in my case. My development drew the attention of those in charge and I found myself a manager of a kindergarten. I applied what I learned in the course and improvised utilizing my experience to elevate the kindergarten where I worked to advanced levels. I concentrated on the internal and external building blocks of the child through organizing the proper activities and utilizing proper toys that fit the child and his/her needs. I can say modestly that I shared in a tangible manner in the development of the kindergarten and strengthening the relationship with the parents that led to an increase in enrolment”.

## **We all develop**

Hana says, “when I first started to work I had a secondary school education with a limited experience. After taking a course at the Trust I decided to improve my educational standing so I joined the university and took courses related to childhood and education.

In the beginning I was afraid I will not be able to couple work outside the house with the family needs without having one side interfere with the other. The specialty courses in kindergarten teachers training not only helped me on the level of childhood but, also, helped me widen my scope, enrich my knowledge, and taught me how to manage my time properly. I was able to couple

work with taking care of my husband and children. What I gained in knowledge, understanding, and academic skills reflected positively on my family. My relationship with my children was getting stronger as I dealt with them as a friend. I listen to them carefully, understand their problems, and give them directions in a quite manner away from violence. My relationship with my husband also developed through dialog, exchange of ideas, and complementary role playing”.

This is how Hana summarized her story with success. It is a story of hard work and persistence. However, success seasons came successively one after another and from one stage to the next emphasizing that man/women possesses a formidable energy of power and will that once employed will find a success story every day.