



Seraj Library Project

Seraj's Work

Update to U.S. Board
February 2018



Jai'da, left, one of Seraj's former fellowship students, recently graduated and was hired as the full-time librarian at Seraj's library in Aida refugee camp. She is pictured laughing here with Rana and Saif, two of our current fellowship students.

Update on our Libraries

Seraj library tour

Estephan, Fidaa and I took a tour of all eight of our libraries this month. It was a chance to connect with our scholarship students, other volunteers and our partners in their libraries, to hear their thoughts on their work and ideas for the future, and to share our future plans and activity offerings for the next six months. These visits were extremely useful in reconnecting face to face with everyone involved in the day to day running of the libraries and for us to observe and assess each library's strengths and weaknesses. We had a few moments of discouragement, but overall ended the week on a hopeful and motivated note.

Aida refugee camp

Our library in the Al-Rowwad Cultural Center in the Aida refugee camp is our most beautiful library; this was intentional and vital, as the residents of this camp have been labeled the most tear-gassed population in the world. It's not unusual for the children of the camp to take shelter in our library during Israeli soldier incursions. In this camp with an incredibly high population of children, the UNRWA run schools have an average of 50 children per classroom, so our library offers many needed after-school tutoring programs. Our partner organization, Al-Rowwad, continues to grow and thrive, making excellent use of our library.



Al-Mizzra Al-Sharqiyyeh, Clyde M. Campbell Library

When we repeat our vision statement, “Bad libraries build collections; good libraries build services; great libraries build communities,” we are thinking of our library in Al-Mizzra Al-Sharqiyyeh. We are continually amazed by how this community makes use of the library. In a meeting with the head of the youth council, he repeated their story. The village had nothing until we opened the modest library in the basement of the village council building. He told us they used the library to meet and make plans, and as a result of their active volunteers offering innovative programs to the village youth, they were able to raise funds from within and outside their village to build a four-story community center with an attached soccer field! He thanks Seraj for not only establishing the library, but staying committed to our work together. We’ve invited him to speak to all our volunteers about the importance and power of volunteerism in transforming communities.



Burham village

The Seraj Library in Burham is led by a committed and driven group of women who also run the day-care and summer camps for their and the surrounding villages. Because their daycare makes a lot of use of the library, we were thrilled to be able to surprise them with children's books, educational games, toys, a sun-cover for the outside and a bathroom! For a group of women who rarely find themselves speechless, it was fun to see their surprise. It's always a pleasure for us to see our former scholarship students continuing their work in the library despite having graduated.



Deir Ammar refugee camp

Deir Ammar refugee camp faces some of the highest unemployment in the West Bank as well as being home to a high population of disabled people. Our partner organization, Al-Hayyat, specializes in work with this population. In this library, they had a surprise for us... as a result of their work in the library, they found a funder to create a classroom for disabled children under our library! This is part of Seraj's vision, to be able to give communities the tools to improve themselves and their surroundings.



Jifna village

Jifna was the first library we opened as Seraj in Palestine. We started it with a very small amount of funding we had brought back with us from friends and supporters. The womens group has many plans for the library but we need to renovate and update it a bit to bring it back in step with the rest of our libraries. We are working with them closely to make this happen, hopefully by the fall of this year.



Jiftlek village, Jordan Valley

Jiftlek is different from the other areas in which we work, as they face daily demolition fears, severe electricity and water shortages, limited access to education and very high unemployment. As a result, the community hasn't made regular use of the library, although our volunteers and partners offer special activities on the weekend. We are supporting them in an advocacy campaign within the community to share the importance and helpfulness of a community library and hope to see more people making use of it during this year.



Kufor Ni'ameh village

Our scholarship students in Kufor Ni'ameh continue to be the cheerleaders for all of our volunteers. They post their activities almost daily in our volunteer group and encourage everyone to do the same. They are the ones who starting calling our informal network a family. The village council is deciding if they will move the library to a different location with another partner organization, either the child club or the women's organization. Wherever they choose to house the library, Kufor Ni'ameh will continue to be steady contributor to Seraj's work and will surely remain excellent partners.



Taybeh village

Our partner is Taybeh is an incredibly idealistic and motivated group of college students and young adults who implement our monthly activities in addition to their own – which they fund out of their own pockets. They have many exciting program ideas and are truly a joy to work with.



Update on our Fellowship Students

An impactful program!

The Seraj Fellowship program continues to be one of the most impactful programs we have. This semester we are supporting 19 students, and since the launch of the program we have supported 43. We just received an update from Abed, one of our volunteers from Jiftlek last year. He wrote a touching tribute on our Facebook group: "It's true that my time with Seraj was short, only one year, but it was an amazing experience and the best year of my life. I feel sad I didn't have the opportunity to spend more time with Seraj." Abed has since found a job in Abu Dhabi but hopes to return to Palestine soon. We are so honored to be able to be a part of the lives of these motivated young people and are thrilled to be able to give them a jump start in their lives and careers.



Update on New Libraries

Forming new partnerships

Hizma

Hizma is a village just outside the Wall, 7 km from the Old City in the Jerusalem governorate. The population is approximately 8,000 people. Most of their land was confiscated by Israel to build settlements. We have had several meetings with the village council, led by a woman mayor, and a cultural organization. They currently do not have a library. They face constant closures by the occupying forces and would like to be able to develop a safe place for children to go after school. We hope to sign an agreement with them this month and begin work right away, finishing by the fall. We have the possibility to receive a small amount of funding from The National Bank in opening this library, in order to encourage more social accountability from local investors.



Abu Falah

Abu Falah is a village of 6,500 people north of Ramallah. If we keep moving forward in this partnership and establish a library there, it will be the third library in the cluster of Al-Mizra Al-Sharqiyyeh and Taybeh. We are particularly excited about this location as the partner organization, the youth club, is like-minded. During our first meeting with them, the president of the youth club said “it’s easy to get funding for roads and buildings but they won’t last, we want to invest in the character and minds of our youth.” Hooray! We have big hopes for this cooperation, and they have already said they want to have competitions between their library and the others in their cluster. Before anything else, we look for partners with the right attitude, and we think we have them here. We would like to finish this library in the second half of 2018.



Upcoming Events

We've got an exciting and busy few months ahead!

Seraj Libraries Young Children's Festival

March 11-17

Seraj hosts the only festival in Palestine geared towards ages 3-6 years. This year the theme is "I dream of..." We are bringing a different artist to each community where they will perform an interactive activity with the children, which will be followed by an activity run by our volunteers. We have dancers, painters and musicians and can't wait to see the events!

Seminar on Volunteerism

End of March

Seraj will host a seminar on the importance of volunteerism in our villages and how we can improve participation from our communities. We expect around 50 people to attend.

National Reading Week

April 1-7

As always, Seraj libraries will participate with similar organizations in celebrating National Reading Week in Palestine. We will send an update when we hear of the theme this year.

Tour of German Guitarist and Spanish Cellist

Sundays in April and May

Seraj is hosting a tour of two musicians from the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music to our libraries. We will produce a video of the tour to highlight cultural exchanges in the libraries.

Training for scholarship students on employability

End of April/beginning of May

We will run a training on telling your personal story, CV writing, and interview skills.

Graduation Celebration for our Scholarship Students

May 19 or 20

We have five students who have been part of our fellowship graduating this May, we plan to have a small celebration for them

Layali Ramadaniye

May 23-30

This will be our third annual “Ramadan Nights” festival, our largest event of the year. We will be providing 6 (maybe 7) libraries with a performance by the famed Palestinian puppeteer, storytelling and musicians. We are honored the communities enjoy this so much and look forward to more successful events!

We have so many amazing stories and activities and continue to improve our communication with both you as the board and with a wider audience. We have an Instagram account ([serajlibraries](#)) and a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/SerajLibraryProject). Please see our posts and share widely!