

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

To withstand the shocks and privations of 2003, Palestinians mobilized themselves at the grass roots. They supported each other through extended families, neighborhood associations, cooperatives, and the network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) built up over the long years of occupation. Last year especially, NGOs were crucial in preventing the society's most vulnerable members from falling through the tattered social safety net. Through programs on behalf of children, the elderly, and the disabled, NGOs helped many of the weakest members of Palestinian society escape from poverty, malnutrition, and disease.

Last year UPA supported NGO projects to improve preschool education, house the elderly, and provide cancer screening and public health education to women. In addition, as part of our Emergency Employment Generation Program (EEGP), we invested in twenty-seven projects to renovate community and cultural centers and youth and women's sports clubs. By enlarging and modernizing facilities, these projects helped our partner organizations improve their services in areas such as job training, health education, literacy education, physical rehabilitation, and sports and recreation. Below we tell the story of an EEGP project that renovated a school for deaf children.

### Al-Murabitat Society

#### Qalqilya

Established in 1960, al-Murabitat Society provides vocational training services for women and physical therapy for disabled children. It also runs a school for deaf children.

The society's main building, housing the school for deaf children and a kindergarten, needed to have broken windows and unsafe wiring fixed and an unfinished second story completed. In 2003, thanks to a grant from the Emergency Employment Generation Program, the society was able to complete the second floor and renovate the first floor and the playground. "It is unbelievable. The whole building has been transformed,





as if we built a new one. And the children have more smiles on their faces out in the playground," commented Ms. Maysoon Sabri, the society's chairperson.

The project came at the right time. In 2003, the Israeli army immured the city of Qalqilya behind a towering wall of concrete. As a result, students living in outlying towns and villages could no longer make it to class. To ensure their continued education, the school had to offer them room and board. UPA's support enabled the school to complete the second floor and

convert it into a dormitory so that students could live in the school.

By generating over 2,000 workdays, the project also helped local workers. Before the intifada, Qalqilya's economy depended on workers commuting to jobs in Israel and on Israelis coming to shop in Qalqilya's markets. Since then, Israelis have ceased shopping in the city, and workers have lost their permission to cross into Israel. Now the wall is choking off business from the city's West Bank hinterland as well. As a result, hundreds of shops have closed, and unemployment is at 80 percent. The temporary jobs created by the project brought vital relief to at least some of Qalqilya workers and their families.

## Al-Amal Society for Children Care

### Khan Younis

Al-Amal Society for Children Care was founded in 1996 by a group of early childhood educators and teachers to help children with special needs. Since then, it has expanded its services to include maternal health and child development. Located in Khan Younis, one of the poorest towns in Gaza, it



provides training programs and public lectures on childhood disease detection and prevention, physical and mental health, first aid, and family planning. Working in kindergartens and preschools, it also trains teachers and mothers in progressive methods of early childhood education.

In 2003 UPA awarded the society a grant for an innovative child development program aimed at kindergartens. The program trained preschool teachers to engage children in interactive games designed to develop age-specific physical, emotional, and cognitive skills. To complement the training, the program equipped classrooms with appropriate toys, storybooks, and games to encourage interactive play and learning. The program furthered the society's goal of introducing progressive educational methods to preschools in Gaza.

## Arab Women's Union

### Ramallah

Established in 1939, the Arab Women's Union of Ramallah long ran a vocational center to train women from the greater Ramallah area in sewing and knitting as a way to earn extra money for their families. Unfortunately, the second intifada beginning in September 2000 forced the vocational center to close because women from surrounding villages could no longer travel freely into town. Nevertheless, the Union carries on its small library for children and its home for the elderly.

In 2003 UPA awarded the Union a grant to do repairs and maintenance of its old-age home. The grant was used to turn an empty, rock-strewn backyard into a simple garden with benches and shade. The elderly can now enjoy the outdoors in a tranquil setting, much improving their quality of life.



## Patient's Friends Society

### Jerusalem

Established in 1980, the Patient's Friends Society of Jerusalem provides public health education and health services to women in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and surrounding vil-

lages. It promotes sound health practices at health fairs, public meetings, and conferences, offers support services to breast cancer patients and their families, and distributes up-to-date women's health information to professionals in the field.



In 2003, UPA awarded the society a grant for equipment and supplies to conduct cancer and bone screening for women. The society provided screening tests for hundreds of women, referring those

found to be at risk to the appropriate specialists. Women who received the low-cost exams were also given informational pamphlets and advised on good preventive practices.