



Quaker Education in Palestine since 1869

Former Student Appointed as Upper School Principal



Riyam, Upper School Principal, with the teachers during a workshop done at the beginning of this school year.

It is our pleasure to announce the appointment of Dr. Riyam Kafri Abu Laban as the Upper School Principal. Riyam comes to us after serving as a researcher, a founding faculty member at AlQuds Bard College for Liberal Arts and Science in Jerusalem and the Content Editor of *This Week in Palestine* — a very popular online magazine focusing on Palestinian culture.

Riyam is not new to the Ramallah Friends School community though. She is a graduate of the school and considered a “lifer” — as she started with RFS in kindergarten. Riyam received her undergraduate degree in Chemistry at Earlham College and her PhD in Organic Chemistry at the University of Tennessee. She describes herself as the luckiest person in the world because she is the principal at her own school. When asked why she came back, she said, without hesitating, “Because RFS is a place

you can work with hope.” She emphasized the independent nature of the students, the culture of self-governance and their critical role in carrying on the Palestinian heritage.

Stemming from her time as a student, Riyam places a high premium on school’s Quaker roots and seeks to continue to instill the values of respect, equality, service and integrity in all aspects of the RFS community.

Her passion and energy for education are obvious from the second you meet her. She radiates excitement and doesn’t hesitate to engage with students, teachers, staff and visitors alike. Riyam is motivated by hope and committed to action. She looks to continue cultivating a culture and community that understands and uses the school’s heritage as a guide to the future.

We are honored to welcome Riyam back into the RFS community and look forward to working with her.

Friends School Newsletter

Winter 2015



Frieda with RFS students in costume.

Frieda Khayat Named Interim Lower School Principal

Deputy Principal Frieda Khayat was appointed as Interim Principal for this school year. Frieda has been working as Deputy Principal at RFS for the past 11 years and brings much commitment, experience and compassion to her students and staff. Some administrative changes took place allowing this transition to happen, namely the appointment of Lower School counselor, Adele Jaraiseh as Assistant Principal as well as others to ensure the formation of a cohesive and efficient team.



Ramallah Friends School
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*Photo on the cover:
 Ramallah Friends School graduating class of 2015*

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Students Have a Say Too

By Duha Al-Masri, Head of Preschool

What distinguishes progress is feeling that you can always do more. You do not settle and you do not accept the status quo and will only be satisfied when you achieve the best of what this life has to offer. This is a general rule and guide to our educational process. We always work towards improving our academics so advancement on one level drives change and leads to better learning outcomes.



A Kindergarten student along with her parent.

For several years, parents stood in line to talk to teachers about the performance of their children. Students had no role in the assessment process. But the time has come for students to share and take ownership of this process that primarily involves them and impacts their lives. As educators and as parents, we encourage and support children in their pursuit of knowledge and celebrate their educational accomplishments.

In the preschool over the last two years, we have implemented an effective assessment philosophy based on the Primary Years Program (PYP). During this upcoming academic year the process will include the elementary classes. At the end of each Unit of Inquiry, we hold meetings between students, parents and teachers. Students are an integral part of the assessment process and play a critical role in their own learning as well. During these meetings, students convey their own understanding of their learning experiences. Each student shares his/her portfolio with parents. Then parents can see their children's learning, affirm them for their success and consider how to further support their learning.

At the end of the meeting, parents fill out a form that helps us assess the extent of their understanding about the work their child has done in the completed Unit of Inquiry.

The pictures you see show this at work. It was a powerful demonstration of learning (in addition to being sweet to see). Children showed how using tools contributes to learning and community. Parents participated and teachers facilitated. All came away better able to inspire and share learning. It is a strong foundation for children at the Ramallah Friends School.

Lower School News in Brief

By Frieda Dahdah Khayat, Lower School Interim Principal

“**Collaboration leads to success**” is this year’s motto. Through our induction week, all the school employees’ self-confidence was renewed, as our trust in their capabilities was made clear. Staff, teachers, administrators and workers all collaborated to ensure a smooth beginning and seamless transition of the administration. Additionally, the welcoming environment helped the students quickly adjust to their second home for the new school year.

We are all very proud of our great achievements in the past couple of months. Here are some of them:

- **PYP Candidacy:** We submitted an application for candidacy for the Primary Years Program (PYP). This is a major step for implementing the school’s educational and student development plan. Also, the program of inquiry and meetings for grades Lower Kindergarten through Grade 4 were completed.
- **Discipline:** We conducted a thorough review of the discipline policy and made revisions to ensure its alignment with Quaker values, government standards and the PYP philosophy.
- **Belonging to the Community:** We believe it is important to engage and serve our wider communities. We are actively collaborating with organizations to expand our reach and ability to make a difference. We have rebooted our activities and partnership with the municipality’s green initiative — a step that we hope will lead to a more environmentally-friendly school. In addition, our fundraising bake sales started at the beginning of October and will continue until the middle of December. This is part of the White Gifts Program that teaches our students to sympathize and support those who are less fortunate.
- **Welcoming Activity:** More than 500 parents, students and staff attended the back to school party in September and enjoyed a wonderful evening full of fun and educational activities.

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Towards PYP Authorization

By Nancy Sanderson Swartz, Dean of Academics

The proud culmination of a month's work, preparing the extensive on-line International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (PYP) Application for Candidacy, was realized on September 30th as Lower Kindergarten students gathered to watch one of their classmates push the submit button to send the application to the International Baccalaureate (IB) for review. This journey began in 2011 when Duha Al Masri, Head of Kindergarten and PYP Coordinator, began the collaborative planning process with kindergarten teachers to develop subject standards and a written curriculum.

Kindergarten teachers went back to school themselves, taking PYP workshops in Amman to become familiar with the six PYP trans-disciplinary themes that drive conceptual learning for all grades, and to learn how to develop creative units of inquiry for each theme, delivered with student-centred teaching, learning approaches and criterion-based assessment of learning.

PYP aims to create knowledgeable communicators and caring inquirers, as it encourages all learners to remain open-minded while exploring both the similarities and differences between themselves and others. Students become balanced individuals, as they come to understand the world — and their role in it — through reflection. Even the youngest become capable risk-takers who take action to effect change and demonstrate fairness and honesty as principled learners. These IB Learner Profile attributes are developed by teachers and celebrated by parents.

The process spread in 2013 with Duha's leadership, as PYP standards and practices began to be implemented for one grade level each year, with Grade 5 to complete the transition next year. A PYP workshop to be delivered in-school will be organized next August for all primary teachers. While the PYP written curriculum is almost complete, the transition of all primary grades from subject-based instruction to differentiated trans-disciplinary learning engagements will be completed over the next three years. The Programme of Inquiry will continue to be reviewed and revised each year as teachers reflect upon their students' learning and assessments. We are confident that with the tremendous effort our teachers exerted so far, we will receive the PYP Authorization in two years' time and be the first PYP school in Palestine.



RFS Kindergarten student while submitting the PYP application for candidacy.



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Finally, thank you to the many local and international volunteers, the PTA, parents, Upper School students and employees who collaborated and helped us kickoff the year successfully. Your continuous support for our school is highly appreciated.



Left to right: Face painting during the Back to School party at the lower school; Lower school students with their parents playing games during the Back to School party.

From Their Screens to Their Hands

By Salim Zughayer, RFS Information Technology Manager



RFS students during their Technology lab class.

Technology class just got a lot more exciting at RFS. We are always looking for new ways to engage students, share knowledge and enhance the learning process. We are committed to being at the forefront of education and determined to provide RFS students with continued opportunities in experiential learning.

In 2013 we partnered with Al-Nayzak, a Jerusalem-based organization working to increase opportunities for young people in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) to expand our technological capabilities. Initial projects included teacher training and the implementation of smart boards in our classrooms.

Today we want to update you on the interactive technology and robotics laboratory. With the help of Al-Nayzak, we installed 16 computers and development workstations, lab tables and innovative instructor teaching tools. Beginning in 7th grade, students have the opportunity to learn about technology by experiencing it.

Students learn the art of stop motion animation and movie production. They are able to experience architecture and modeling development through the use of Google Sketch. They become familiar with website design, and even learn how to build their own websites. And, they learn the intricacies of robotics — beginning with building the robot and writing the code to live tests and demonstrations.

This laboratory allows students to see ideas come to life. Connections are made between what it means to design and what it means to build. It starts with an idea — students brainstorm what they want to create, develop drafts and designs on the computer and then begin construction. Something that once sat on the computer screen is now in their hands.

Technological literacy is becoming increasingly prevalent in our everyday lives and is a critical skill in the global workforce. This classroom encourages students to be creative while introducing them to the fundamentals of the STEM world. We are excited to continue to find innovative ways to teach and look forward to helping our students bring their ideas come to life.

Upper School News in Brief

By Riyam Kafri Abu Laban, Upper School Principal



- The school year began on a high note with a productive induction week for teachers where the focus was team building and breaking the ice. The new Principal and new Dean of Academics joined the teachers in this productive week. A key workshop focused on finding common ground between the school mission, Quaker values and International Baccalaureate Learner's profile. (pictured above)

- For our students the beginning of the school year began with the Back to School party, a tradition over a century old that is planned by the student council. Games, music and food punctuated a fun summer night.
- Student Council elections took place during the first week of October. The elections were preceded by a week of campaigning on campus. Worth mentioning is our students' commitment to simplicity in campaign posters, which were all handmade. This year's student council is led by Ibrahim Mseeh (President), Fadi Toubassi (First Vice) and Layla Atta (Second Vice).
- Monday morning chapel continues to serve as a creative space for students and teachers. Eleventh graders turned parts of Father Ghorio, the novel they read in Arabic, into a mini musical, while our traditional dance enthusiasts have given their peers beautiful and energetic dance pieces. Our students' musical tal-

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My Westtown Experience

By Elyaa Abuhijleh, 11th grade

Taking the risk and applying to the International Exchange program was one thing, and getting the acceptance letter from Westtown was another. The application procedure was nerve wracking; a lot of essays, recommendations and time.

When I received my acceptance letter, it was hard to process. I was in shock! Not only had I finally won something, but I realized that I am actually going to leave my family, friends and Palestine for an entire year.

In my first week at Westtown, I was still in shock. However within two weeks, I became homesick and wanted to get on the first flight home. I was the only Palestinian, one of two Arabs. I clashed with a pro-Israel girl during my first week and felt that everything went downhill.

Fortunately, I was surrounded by the most cherishing, caring and supportive individuals on earth. I had received support from all people at Westtown at all times. I could always seek help in my dormitory from the girls I lived with and my dorm parents. I could talk to all my teachers and friends without feeling like an outsider. I was lucky enough to gain friends and make unbreakable bonds with people all over the globe. I met people from Spain, Congo, Iceland, Brazil, Germany and many other places.

Beyond that, I had the opportunity to learn how to co-exist with various mindsets and become an independent and responsible individual. I don't think I have the capacity to describe my experience at Westtown, not even if I tried to do so in a million years. However, two words that would sum up my feeling towards my Westtown experience are blessed and honored. I am grateful for an opportunity that not a lot of Palestinians are exposed to, and because I was able to represent Palestine.

The last day at Westtown was heart breaking. I had to say my goodbyes again but this time to a new family, new friends and a new home — Westtown.



Elyaa Abuhijleh

Upper School News in Brief continued from page 4

ents continue to impress everyone, from our talented violinists to our magical pianists. Chapel has been a witness to our gifted students and their passion for music.

- Chapel has also been used to raise awareness on several issues. Speakers like Dr. Abdel-Malik Jaber, an RFS parent and a well-known IT and communications specialist and businessman, spoke to our students about his journey from a small Palestinian village with very little resources to the board rooms of some of the most important telecommunication companies in the world. He spoke of the importance of education for Palestinians in building their country and their own future. Omar Barghouthi, a leader in the “boycott, divestment and sanctions” (BDS) movement, spoke to our students about BDS as a form of nonviolent resistance against Israeli occupation and reminded them of the school’s Quaker values and commitment to activism. He emphasized that BDS is perhaps one of the most efficient forms of nonviolent resistance, and he encouraged students to focus on such positive roles.



Upper school students during the Student Council elections campaign.

From the Director's Office

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

I am sure many of you have heard of the political turmoil our part of the world is facing yet again. This, no doubt, has had an impact on our students and our entire community who are among the true victims of the unjust military occupation. There has been a lively debate on campus about the most effective forms of resistance and, more importantly, the means of resisting, which takes into consideration our Quaker traditions of non-violence, action and peace. While the various opinions are respectfully exchanged on campus, a powerful consensus seems to clearly arise: *We are called to resist injustice by exerting our efforts on education and service.* Hence, the importance of the work we do at RFS. In addition to the impressive activities mentioned in this newsletter, here are a few more from my end:

Go Palestine Summer Camp was a huge success as it brought together 28 international campers of Palestinian origin and 15 RFS high school students for a three-week service and cultural immersion program. More information can be found on www.summerinpalestine.org.

"I Know I can Summer Academy" was held again this summer bringing a total of 215 students for a five-week long English immersion program targeting students from ages 8-17. This program is run in collaboration with *Teach for America* from where most of the 18 teachers come. More information on www.iknowican.net.

A **Parents' Open Forum** was held at the beginning of the school year. Personally, the purpose was to brief RFS parents on most recent developments as well as to formally introduce them to Upper School Principal, Riyam, and Dean of Academics, Nancy. Over 200 attended and enjoyed refreshments and an open discussion.

USAID ASHA positively reviewed our Grant Application submitted in April last year. RFS will receive \$700,000 that will fund the installation of photovoltaic cells that will generate much needed electricity for our campus consumption, will create an outdoor Environmental Learning Center, restore the rock court surrounding our campus to its glorious past, complete the sports field track and surroundings, provide funds for a multi-media lab, as well as other things. *We are immensely grateful for our relationship with the ASHA and its team!*

Philip Hussey, the great-great-great grandson of Anna and Timothy Hussey who were Quaker missionaries from Maine and were instrumental in establishing RFS at the turn of 20th century, is interning with RFS this Fall assisting with communications, new website development (stay tuned), social media and much more. It is lovely to see the over century-old family connection come full circle.



Top: Two Go Palestine Campers bidding each other farewell; above: Upper School Principal Riyam sharing her vision with parents.

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*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2015-16 range from U.S. \$2,700 to \$4,100.

For further information and inquiries, feel free to contact our office at development@rfs.edu.ps or Tel: +972-2-295-2286, www.rfs.edu.ps.

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Friends School, Ramallah/AI-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General, 1 April - 31 October 2015

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*Above: Kindergarten students along with their parents;
above, right: Lower school students during the bake
sale for White gifts.*

Friends School Newsletter

