



The McCabe Educational Trust

supporting Al Shurooq in Bethlehem

A story of one woman's perseverance

Helen Shehadeh, an elder of St. Andrew's Church of Scotland, in Jerusalem, overcame the challenge of losing her sight at the age of two to become a devoted teacher and director of one of Bethlehem's powerful social work institutions. It is Christians like Helen who are keeping the gospel story alive in the Holy Land today.

Background

Al Shurooq School for the Blind was founded by Helen in 1981 with the aim of enabling blind people in Palestine to become self sufficient and productive members of their society. The first premises were in Jerusalem, but in 1995 they moved to Bethlehem, allowing beneficiaries from the southern part of the West Bank, unable to enter Jerusalem, to gain access to the society's services and programmes.

The school is affiliated to The National Society for the Visually Handicapped and provides total care and education for children ages from two upwards, who are brought to them. Some pay a small contribution towards their upkeep, as their families are able, but many are from very poor families and some have been abandoned. Children come from throughout the West Bank and also from Gaza. After nine years of operation, it became apparent that a prolonged stay at the school estranged the children from their home environment and pulled them back towards being dependent with lower self-esteem and poor social skills. Therefore, in 1990 the society changed its policy from the institutionalization of blind children to rehabilitation and integration into the local community.

A New Beginning

In 2009 the school moved into a brand new purpose-built building. Five years of planning, fundraising and building work finally came to fruition. The new building has three floors and houses thirty children in five bedrooms each sleeping six. There are classrooms, dining and assembly halls, a Braille Production Room and staff accommodation. This whole project was paid for by public donations and the ongoing work is also totally reliant on the generosity of supporters like ourselves. We were delighted to fund the purchase of furnishings for the top floor.

A Thank-you to some very special people

The new school generates a lot of laundry! We are very grateful to the church in Yorkshire that provided an industrial washing machine and dryer. An empty lift shaft now has a lift thanks to the generosity of the remote island community of Stornoway. There are always new projects to be found. If you would like a specific fund-raising idea for your church – just ask!





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Daily Life

Children are accommodated and attend school in the same building. They follow a normal curriculum with classes in Maths, Geography, History and the like. In addition they learn Braille, both in Arabic and English and are taught daily living skills and helped with their mobility. Extra curricular activities such as music and art also feature prominently as do computer classes using synthesizers.

When the child returns home, the school keeps in touch and actively helps them to integrate, providing many of the essential tools they will need including Braille textbooks and typewriters, Braille paper, magnifiers, canes and tape recorders.

Specialized social workers visit the children in their villages and offer them, their parents and teachers, support where often there is great ignorance. There are still many people who believe that blindness is not altogether respectable. This is a prime prejudice that Helen and her staff seek to change. Helen strives to instil confidence in the children to do things for themselves and by themselves and not to be the pitied victims people expect them to be.

A success story

Atieh Subieh came to Al Shurooq in 1996 when he was eleven. He had never been to a school before, as no school would accept him because of his physical and visual disabilities. At Al Shurooq, he excelled and completed a four year course in just two years. He was then integrated back into his local school in the village of Al-Khader where, with the assistance of the Al Shurooq follow-up programme, he finished High School and entered Bethlehem University where he is studying Arabic Literature and enjoying it enormously.

How you can Help

The McCabe Educational Trust supports Helen's work with a monthly remittance towards general running costs. We also provide capital grants when funds are available. We encourage pilgrim parties to include a visit to Al Shurooq in their pilgrimage itinerary. See the work for yourself and become inspired! Many become financial partners in the work. The McCabe Educational Trust makes supporting the school easy. Every donation we receive is passed on to the school in full, with no deductions for administration. In addition, if you are a tax payer, we can increase your donation by 25% through the *Giftaid* scheme.

For more information visit the Al Shurooq website www.nsfvh.org

**This is an example of the work of the McCabe Educational Trust.
Together we aim to leave a footprint on the paths we travel.**



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