

SPOTLIGHT: Nadera Tannous

Helping Girls in Nazareth Build Better Lives

Nadera Tannous is the director of the NA'AMAT Technological School, a high school in Nazareth that helps Israeli Arab girls, who have previously struggled in school, become empowered and contributing members of society. The school prepares girls for college and also provides vocational training in a variety of careers. It has helped many girls, who might otherwise have been consigned to lives of poverty, to complete their education and to become independent. The school occupies a beautiful, multi-million dollar facility that was built in 2012 through a unique partnership between NA'AMAT USA, the Irwin Green family and Israel's Ministry of Education. Along with modern classrooms, it features a Vocational Training Center and a gym. The school is planning to add culinary classes this fall.



NA'AMAT USA: Tell us about your school.

NADERA TANNOUS: Our school is the largest NA'AMAT school in Israel. It was founded in 1967 as a club for girls. At that time in Israel there was a need for textile workers. So the school taught sewing and dressmaking. In 1970, the school added lessons in English, Arabic, math and other academic subjects. I began working at the school then as an English teacher. In 1995, I became the principal. At the same time, the school became a high school, authorized by the Ministry of Education. When I became principal, we had 80 girls. Now we have 339 girls. The school has 56 teachers and 18 additional staff. I have a very good staff.

Our school is one of 17 schools operated by NA'AMAT in Israel under the direction of Mina Shefy. Half are located in Arab sectors and half in Jewish sectors. Some are for girls only; others have boys and girls. We all teach the same curriculum, but each school provides vocational training best suited to students in their area.

NA'AMAT USA: What is the school's mission?

NADERA TANNOUS: We believe in giving girls opportunities to learn vocations so they can work and become independent. We also prepare students for the Bagrut examination (a prerequisite in Israel for higher education) so that they can attend college or university. We teach

graphic design, hair styling, early childhood development and other subjects. We are planning to offer culinary classes. When we add new classes, we look to the needs of the community. In Nazareth, tourism is developing quickly. Girls trained in hospitality can find jobs. However, in order to begin teaching culinary arts and meet the certification requirements of the Ministry of Education, we need a big kitchen. That will cost a lot of money.



NA'AMAT USA: How did the school come to have such a wonderful facility?

NADERA TANNOUS: We moved into this building three years ago. It was built as a joint project of NA'AMAT USA, the Irwin Green Family and the Israeli Ministry of Education. NA'AMAT USA donated \$1 million specifically for the construction of our school. We are very grateful for their support and would not be here without it.

Irwin Green, who made a similarly generous donation, died in 2009, shortly after the groundbreaking. It had been his wish that the school be named after his late wife. When he passed away, we consulted with his children and decided to name the building after both parents, Bethea and Irwin Green. The Greens' son, Don, comes to Nazareth every year for our graduation ceremony. That means a lot to our girls.

NA'AMAT USA: Tell us more about your students.

NADERA TANNOUS: They are from Nazareth and the surrounding area. They are girls who, for one reason or another, aren't able to continue their studies at regular schools. They come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, many are from broken homes. Some have learning disabilities. We have several deaf students. We provide them with an environment where they can succeed. Our class sizes are small; classes have from 13 to 20 students. In many classes, students are divided into smaller groups according to their abilities. That helps them learn.

We give these students a chance to complete their education. We make sure they continue through the 12th grade. When these girls come to us, they often lack motivation. In their regular schools, they felt like failures. We encourage them. We have a psychologist and an educational counselor on staff to help them. It takes a lot of work and it takes belief in our girls. Without that belief, they would not succeed. This year, we had 20 girls complete the Bagrut examination. We also received permission from the Ministry of Education to add 13th and 14th grades. It will be the equivalent of a junior college.

NA'AMAT USA: What about your teachers?

NADERA TANNOUS: Our teachers have a hard job. Yet, if you come to our school in the morning, you see that they are all smiling. We start classes at 8:00, but some of our teachers arrive early to prepare hot chocolate and tea for the girls, something they do not get at home. Many of the students have trouble reading Hebrew, so the teachers read to them from the newspaper. They socialize with them to create an environment where they can start their studies.

NA'AMAT USA: What would you like members of NA'AMAT USA to know about your school?

Nadera Tannous: We are a unique school. We create vocational and educational opportunities for our girls. We also teach them to be good mothers. We teach them about manners and good child rearing. They are the mothers of the future. On Saturdays, we open the school to the girls and teach them music and dance. We teach them how to play the guitar. These are things that they do not get at home. We are helping them build better lives.