

Annual Report 2016

Atfaluna Society for Deaf  
Children (ASDC)\_Gaza



## Dear Atfaluna Friends and Supporters,

As yet another year approaches; **Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (ASDC)** continues to add to its accomplishments and long history of work. The situation of deafness in the Palestinian Society has gone a long way since Atfaluna's establishment 24 years ago. Deaf persons are becoming more independent, as they grow more confident, learning to realize their potentials and rights, and thus giving them the courage to follow their dreams.

Societal acceptance of the deaf community in Gaza is also becoming evident, with an increasing number of deaf children and youth being integrated into schools, colleges, universities and workplaces. As the renowned Helen Keller once said *"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it"*.

To overcome suffering and reach potentials an enormous amount of energy has to be dedicated to make change, a just and noble change! The support and hard work of many persons cannot be forgotten as we display the efforts of ASDC during the year.

Our **Friends, Supporters and Donors** are the backbone of our work. Their continuous guidance, support, loyalty and giving has made our accomplishments possible. For 24 years ASDC has been working alongside a number of **Partner Organizations** specialized in the field of disability, contributing together to the improvement in lives of persons with disabilities across the Gaza Strip. Working together has been an excellent opportunity to inspire creative ideas, brainstorm and tackle problems and think of joint solutions for some of the main problems faced by persons with disabilities in the Gaza Strip.

The **Atfaluna Team** has been working tirelessly to keep ASDC ahead and moving forward. Hand in hand, deaf and hearing, its artisans, technicians, teachers, administrators and support staff have contributed to providing a professional service at Atfaluna, dedicated to creating a better future for the deaf community in Gaza. Our **Beneficiaries** are the Society's strength, their trust in Atfaluna has added to our determination to alleviate their suffering and create an environment for them where they feel wanted, trusted and cared for.

The Society aims to be a leading organization in providing comprehensive services to deaf persons from across the Gaza Strip. We strive to change lives, we aim to continue to lead others and this cannot be achieved without the complete support of a large group of people who believe in the work of Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children.

Delivering long-term quality services requires a lot of trust, hard work and commitment and this can only be achieved with your support. It is our utmost pleasure to convey our thanks to each and every person who has contributed to Atfaluna's work this year. Our donors, partners, staff and beneficiaries, thank you!

Yours Sincerely,

**Sharhabeel Al'Zaeem**  
**Chairman of the Board**

## Vision

To be a Palestinian model with international standards for sustainable development of the deaf communities

## Mission

To improve the lives of the deaf persons in the Gaza Strip through social, economic, cultural, and civil empowerment

## Objectives of Organizations

Atfaluna aims to improve the quality of life of deaf children and adults by providing quality education, health care, social services, and work opportunities

### We will achieve this by:

- Providing service and support that reflects the values, aspirations and culture of Deaf people
- Developing Life skills amongst the Deaf
- Building employability skills for Deaf youth
- Providing Education to Deaf Children
- Developing teaching and learning resources for the Deaf community
- Monitoring, advocacy and awareness of Deaf people, deafness and hearing loss
- Contributing to policy debates that promote mainstreaming of Deaf perspectives
- Continuous capacity and development of staff for consistently high work output and growth

## Values

- **Neutrality:** Atfaluna is an inclusive society that serves everyone regardless of their political, social and religious background or their disability.
- **Respect:** Respect for ourselves, others, and our work and respect for the wishes and dreams of those who are deaf. This also includes the ability to communicate with the deaf in their own language (signing).
- **Transparency:** Being objective in our work and completely honest, clear and open with everyone we encounter in our work.
- **Professionalism:** Atfaluna staff should be qualified, effective and efficient.
- **Loyalty:** Atfaluna staff love and believe in the work of Atfaluna and are dedicated to their workplace and colleagues
- **Accountability:** Atfaluna employee take responsibility for all their actions, are answerable for the use of all resources they have within their work.

## Early Intervention Program



The ASDC Early Intervention Program was established in 2010. It serves an average of 100 deaf child aged between 0 and 5 years on an annual basis. Children enrolled in the program and their parents receive:

- Home-based early intervention sessions for deaf children and their families.
- Center-based individual and group mother-child educational sessions.
- Sign language training courses for family members of deaf children.
- Awareness workshops for family members of deaf children.
- Social services for deaf children and their families.

**The year in Numbers:**

No. of children served	<b>127</b> children 60 females : 67 males
No. of home-based sessions achieved	<b>137</b> sessions
No. of center-based individual and group mother-child educational sessions	<b>686</b> sessions
No. of sign language courses implemented for family members of deaf children	<b>2 courses</b>
No. of awareness workshops for family members of deaf children	<b>2 workshops</b>
Social services offered to deaf children and their families	<b>(855)</b> individual counseling and urgent consultancy sessions for family members of deaf children  <b>(13)</b> debriefing and psycho-social support sessions for deaf children  <b>(137)</b> home counseling visits

**Total of (54) deaf children graduated from the program at the start of the academic year 2015/2016. (38) Of the children were enrolled in special education programs for the deaf, (15) were enrolled in local kindergartens and (1) joined a kindergarten specialized for deaf children with cochlear implantations.**

# Ali,

## The Two-year old Deaf Child

**confident steps towards a bright future !**

Little Ali was brought to Atfaluna Society's Outpatient Clinics for diagnostic hearing examinations; having undergone Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) testing, his diagnosis showed he suffered from severe hearing loss. Coming to the parents as a shock, they completely refused to accept the news. After some time the parents rethought their decision and returned to Atfaluna.



Ali was immediately enrolled to the Early Intervention Program at ASDC and fitted with hearing aids to support his learning process. Both mother and child received support and guidance through home-based early intervention sessions. Ali's mother Bayan enrolled in a number of capacity building courses including sign language training. Bayan was to play the role of teacher as well as mother in the home environment bringing the entire family closer together and enabling the siblings to communicate with their deaf brother. During the home-based sessions Alis' mother was taught how to benefit from items available at home to teach her son and develop his skills further in support of the early interventionist work.

After a few weeks of sessions the early interventionist realized that Ali had a slight problem with his speech abilities, thus referred him to an ENT doctor for further examination. Ali was diagnosed with tongue tie and needed surgical intervention. The results of the surgery were immediate and Ali quickly began to produce sounds. The little boy's progress increased greatly within a short time, all the hard work and support of his family and early interventionist were evident. Alis' auditory, language, cognitive and motor skills were clear.

**“that day I received the news of my son's hearing loss; I never excepted that he will interact so well with the early intervention services and make this impressive progress in his cognitive and speech abilities.” expressed Ali's mother.**

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# Educational Program



Education is the cornerstone of society, for the deaf it is a right that cannot be deprived of them. The Atfaluna School is a leading model example of special education for the deaf; it houses 294 deaf students from Kindergarten to Grade 9 (2015/2016). The subjects taught include: Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Arabic and English Language, Religious Studies, Information Technology, Physical Education, Art and Library .

Each grade level is divided into approximately 3 divisions. Each division is headed by a main classroom teacher either deaf or hearing. Some classrooms are also supported by a second special education teaching assistant. Grade levels are taught all curriculum subjects in accordance with their educational level while Information Technology is introduced to students at Grade 5. To assist the teaching process, teachers use educational models and tools which represent good examples for the students.

**The Year in Numbers:**

Kindergarten Enrollment 2015/ 2016	<b>50</b> 20 Female : 30 Male
School Enrollment 2015/2016	<b>244</b> 113 Female : 131 Male
Approximate number of students per classroom division	11
Approximate no. of units taught for each subject	6 / 7
No. of divisions – Grades 1 to 9	24
No. of leading class teachers	24
No. of deaf teaching assistants	16
No. of temporary teaching staff	6
No of new students enrolled in kindergarten and school for academic year 2015/ 2016	28
No. of students graduated academic year 2015/ 2016	25

**The academic school year has been full of activities and developments which contributed to alleviating stress of the students while building their skills and strengthening their resilience.**



### School activities included:

- Introduction of an **integrated measurement performance system** which is computerized software interrelated between the School, Early Intervention and Audiology Units. The system simplifies information sharing and increases work efficiency
- Establishment of a Science Lab within the School for the deaf students
- Upgrade of the School Computer Lab
- Introduction of educational drama as an addition to the teaching process within the School
- Organizing regular parents meetings and activating a fathers council within the school
- Personalizing teaching methods for students in need of extra educational support
- A large number of private, public and UNRWA schools visited the Atfaluna School during the academic year and participated in a number of joint activities

### Other joint activities included:

- Partnership with **Al-Qattan Foundation** to introduce educational drama as a teaching tool
- Joint activities with **Tamer Institute for Community Education** including lyrical story telling in participation of deaf students and their mothers, and production of animation stories by deaf children aged between 8 and 12 years
- Reading activities were organized in coordination with the **Reading Club** which targeted deaf students aged 14 and above
- In coordination with **Fekra Arts Institute** a total of 80 students joined in drama activities while another 80 students participated in the production of animation stories
- Participation in workshops organized by the **Ministry of Education** which familiarized teachers with the new modifications and changes made to the governmental educational curriculums
- Preparation for and involvement in **International Reading Week and Arab Deaf Week** events
- As part of exercise activities organized with **MAAN Development Centre**, 60 deaf students took part in sport activities and received workout outfits.

**Atfaluna School for the deaf began in 1992. It strives to be a role model in special education for the deaf. To maintain the quality of its services to the students, and to ensure their complete participation, ASDC is in need of annual support in the following:**

- **Transportation acquittal** for an academic year for **100** of the neediest students enrolled in the school, who are unable to keep up with the transportation fees
- **School uniforms and school shoes** for the **250** deaf students enrolled in the school the majority of which live well below the poverty line
- **School bags** for the **250** deaf students enrolled in the school
- **Medical assistance** for **50** of the neediest students whose parents are unable to pay for their medical needs
- **Annual classroom and furniture maintenance and renovation works** to maintain standard of service offered
- A continuous supply of **hearing aid batteries** for the **250** deaf students enrolled in the school .

## Suha... A Deaf Child Successfully Mainstreamed into a Public School in the Gaza Strip!



My little girl Suha has always been *“the quiet one”* among her siblings. I always struggled with her to talk and to express herself. I never imagined she could be deaf! Her first words came in very late and were pronounced differently, but I only thought she was shy and a little spoilt. It was at the age of eighteen months when her father and I were actually confronted with the fact that she was deaf. Suha and her entire class had been screened for hearing loss as part of a community outreach hearing screening activity carried out by Atfaluna Society in her kindergarten. Our daughter did not pass the preliminary test!

Upon being referred to Atfaluna Clinics for diagnostic testing, we were informed that our little girl was severely deaf. She was in need of hearing aids and early intervention to help her catch up socially, educationally, verbally and cognitively with other children her age.

The first shock and first reactions to her diagnosis will remain in my memory for ever. Day after day, things got easier. I was determined to give Suha the best life she deserves; I wanted her to feel no different from her siblings. Her father and I enrolled her to the Early Intervention Program at Atfaluna where she was immediately fitted with hearing aids and we quickly commenced the program activities which included educational sessions, auditory and verbal training sessions, sign language training for parents, and child/family counseling.

Within few weeks, the change was evident. Suha began to speak more fluently and express herself more freely. At home, I practiced with her and taught her siblings everything I learnt during the sessions. I wanted them to be an active part of Suha’s life. Words turned into sentences and minutes turned into hours of play with her siblings. I was exhilarated at this quick paced change.

Now and at the age of six, Suha has graduated from the Atfaluna Early Intervention Program and we have enrolled her in a public school near our home. During the first days of school, I was terrified, I couldn’t imagine what it would be like for my little deaf girl to be among hearing children on her own. Quickly my fears dissolved. Every morning, Suha rushes to wear her hear aids and get dressed for school. As soon as her siblings are ready, she excitedly walks with them to school making sure she arrives early to class. She sits in the first row and listens attentively to her teacher.

Relying on lip reading alongside her hearing has made it possible for Suha to keep up in class.

***“I am extremely proud of this young girl who challenged her fears and social barriers to receive an education. Suha is among the brightest and most talented girls in my class, I help Suha when she needs the extra help and use visual models when necessary to better explain. Suha is class prefect and she reliably assists me with classroom activities.”*** stated Suha’s classroom teacher.

At home I give Suha the time she needs, making sure she understands what she received in class and assisting her in completing her homework. It is not always easy but Suha’s father and I are determined to give our daughter all the help she needs to receive the education she deserves.

***“During break times in school I like to play with my friends and enjoy making new friends. When anyone asks me about my hearing aids I explain to them that they help my ears hear well. It doesn’t bother me that people don’t know what they are, I will explain!”*** expressed Suha

## Audiology and Speech Therapy Clinics



The ASDC Audiology and Speech Therapy Clinics provide services to the public throughout the year. Staffed with a team of professional audiologists, technicians and speech therapists the clinic provides specialized audiology testing, hearing aid fitting and maintenance as well as speech therapy sessions to clients from across the Gaza Strip.

**The Year in Numbers:**

No. of clients tested in Audiology Clinic	<p><b>2,000 clients</b> of which:</p> <p><b>900 returning clients</b> who were conducting regular checkups</p> <p><b>1,100 new clients</b> of which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (600) referred to ENT doctors</li> <li>• (100) with hearing loss in one ear or mild hearing loss and needed a follow up visit</li> <li>• (120) with permanent hearing loss and needed rehabilitation services</li> <li>• (280) passed the test</li> </ul>
No. of persons tested through community outreach screening program	<p><b>6,000 children</b> of which were diagnosed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (2,112) referred to ENT doctors</li> <li>• (312) referred to ASDC for diagnostic testing</li> <li>• (367) passed the test</li> </ul>
No. of children tested through Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) in Audiology Clinic	<p><b>330 children</b> of which were diagnosed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (142) normal hearing</li> <li>• (75) referred to ENT doctors</li> <li>• (113) hearing loss</li> </ul>
No. of hearing aids fittings	<b>77 Hearing Aids</b>
No. of clients evaluated for speech and language problems in Speech and Language Clinic	<p><b>141 Clients</b> of which were served as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (36) referred to other services</li> <li>• (26) received guidance and advise</li> <li>• (79) enrolled to speech and language therapy sessions</li> </ul>

No. of speech therapy sessions conducted for 130 clients	• 1,228 Sessions
No. of speech and language community awareness workshops	• 4 Workshops
Maintenance of hearing aids	• 772 Hearing Aids
Programing of hearing aids	• 132 Hearing Aids
Ear Molds produced	• 550 Ear Molds
Social Support and Counseling Sessions for Clients in need of support and Guidance	• 327 Sessions

Introducing automated **integrated measurement performance system** in the Audiology and Speech Therapy Clinics has guaranteed higher accuracy in maintaining client records and reduced client waiting time.

The **ASDC Clinics** have been selected as a focal point and reference for other organizations offering similar services, with the ASDC Clinics team being selected to train other audiology and speech therapy teams.

# Income Generation Program



## **1. Atfaluna Crafts**

Bold colors, varied patterns and unique designs add to the beauty of the hand made products at Atfaluna Crafts. Representing the design and production skills of the deaf artisans, the income generation program at ASDC is a vital component of the empowerment of deaf youth.

The income generation program employs 45 deaf artisans within its different departments. Each team member is talented in their own way, transforming colors and materials into masterpieces of beauty.

Products are sold the world over, with customers placing orders locally and internationally. Throughout the year Atfaluna Crafts artisans continue to develop new ideas and designs, keeping up with fashion trends and customer taste.

New products introduced during the year included: Cross stitch women's dresses as well as Arabic coffee cups with stand. Additionally a variety of new colors and designs were introduced to existing products including, hand painted dishes, mirrors, rugs, picture frames, boxes, trays, shawls and phone cases.

### **ASDC's participation in local and national crafts events during the year included:**

- Participation in the **Micro-Enterprise Bazaar of the Jerusalem Open Days** organized by the American Consulate in Jerusalem
- **Japanese Cultural Day** organized by the Japanese Consulate in Ramallah
- **Palestine Monetary Authority Exhibition** organized by the Authority themselves in Gaza
- **Sunbula Annual Holiday Bazaar**, organized by Sunbula in Jerusalem

A number of promotional campaigns were also carried out during the year 2016:

- **24% discount** on all the Atfaluna Crafts products and furniture pieces for a period of three days in celebration of ASDC's 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- **25% discount** on all the Atfaluna Crafts products and furniture pieces for a period of three days during the Atfaluna Crafts Bazaar.

## **2. Atfaluna Furniture**

**Atfaluna Furniture** was initiated in the year 2012 after ASDC deaf carpenters received advanced training in designing and producing quality furniture pieces. The Atfaluna furniture products include master bedrooms, children's bedrooms, dining rooms, living rooms and office furniture.

The quality furniture pieces are produced at Atfaluna and sold in the Atfaluna Crafts shop located on-premises. Each piece produced is unique and different. Furniture pieces are prepared and designed according to personalized customer taste.

During the year Atfaluna Furniture introduced arabesque armchairs which were a beautiful addition to the pieces sold at Atfaluna.

A new crafts exhibition is currently under construction within the ASDC premises and will be opened to the public within the coming months. An external entrance will ensure longer opening hours for customers.



**Our products are available for sale via:**

Our **online crafts shop** <http://www.atfaluna.net/crafts> allows customers to place orders from anywhere in the world. Orders can be delivered globally.

Our **permanent crafts shop** on-premises during operating hours. Special opening times can be pre-arranged

*Sales help Atfaluna Crafts maintain jobs for its deaf artisans who are the main bread winners for their families*



## Baha'a

### A Role Model...

Having been born with hearing impairment Baha'a has always felt different from his non-deaf siblings. This feeling continued on with him during his primary school years, where he was enrolled in a public school but continued to struggle to keep up with classes and eventually dropped out at the age of 14 years.

When Baha'a first came to Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children he was just a shy youngster. Having dropped out of school, his parents were not sure what they could do to help their son. Having heard about ASDC and the possibility of enrolling him in vocational training courses at the Centre, his father rushed to enroll him.

Baha'a attended several vocational training courses in various fields before being assigned to the carpentry department, where he learnt the skills of professional carpentry. Twelve years from first entering Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, Baha'a has made major progress.

At the age of 28, Baha'a went on to complete his high school certificate, which he successfully achieved, immediately after he enrolled in a diploma degree in the repair and maintenance of smart phones and computers. Baha'a recently celebrated his university graduation.

At home, the young father is proudly more involved in his children's education and follows up with their teachers in school. Baha'a feels more confident with his achievements and is glad that he eventually had the will and determination to complete his education.

***"I grew up feeling lonely and different from everyone around me. I struggled as a young boy. Atfaluna Society was the best opportunity in my life. I was given an opportunity to learn a skill to support my independence. The income generating program at ASDC is a real opportunity for young women and men just like me, who need a chance in life, an opportunity to learn and grow. Our hard work is proudly exhibited in the Atfaluna Crafts exhibitions and events, displaying to the world that on the contrary to what stereotypes portray, we are capable individuals hoping to live a normal life."***

## Vocational Training and Job Creation Program



The **Vocational Training and Job Creation Program** at ASDC is growing in significance, as deaf children grow into adults. The vocational training program represents an important component which gives youth with and without disabilities the opportunity to learn a vocation, and master a skill which enables them to enter the labor market and become independent adults.

Vocational training courses offered at ASDC include: sewing, embroidery, shoemaking, jewelry making, culinary arts, photography, graphic design, upholstery and furniture making.

As part of the training program at ASDC, youth with and without disabilities attend job counseling workshops and awareness sessions preparing them for their integration within society. The more prepared youth are for their inclusion within Society the more they can succeed in future employment opportunities.

**Job creation** for persons with disabilities relies on ongoing vigorous marketing of their abilities and skills. Palestinian society still lacks much awareness and confidence in allowing persons with disabilities to become openly part of Society and thus, it falls upon the hard work of local organizations to represent the skills of persons with disabilities. Much work has been made in this regard but still more is needed to ensure clear change on the ground.

### **The Year in Numbers:**

No. of vocational training courses implemented	<b>Advanced:</b> (1) Sewing, (1) Embroidery, (1) Jewelry making and (1) Shoe Making  <b>Beginners:</b> (1) Culinary Arts Training
No. of trainees participated in <b>vocational training courses</b>	58 youth with disabilities  (40) Female (18) Male
No. of <b>apprenticeship</b> opportunities in local businesses across the Gaza Strip including embroidery workshops, sewing factories, hairdressing, carpentry workshops, restaurants and graphic design businesses	118 opportunities  (58) Female (60) Male
No. of small businesses approved/ commenced establishment	43 businesses
No. of individual and group counseling sessions conducted for persons with disabilities	1,567 sessions
No. of participants in job counseling workshops	250 participant

No. of participants in community awareness workshops	150 participants
No. of participants in small business management training courses	72 participant (29) Female (43) Male
No. of participants in a youth vocational summer camp:	14 participants (14) Female
No. of participants in recreational activities organized for the vocational training courses participants	215 participants (95) Female (120) Male
No. of home visits conducted for youth with disabilities	180 home visit
No. of local businesses visited and coordinated with, to promote the employment of youth with disabilities	250 local businesses

## Yasmeen... an opportunity to prove herself!

Having completed several culinary arts training courses at Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) Yasmeen's name was repeatedly mentioned for being Among the most highly Motivated and achieving trainees.



Having the passion to cook and the motivation to learn she had the right components to progress in a cooking career. The employment of deaf persons within local restaurants and businesses requires efforts and hard work. To achieve this ASDC livelihood coordinator must market the skills and abilities of the deaf, by bringing more awareness to employers about the abilities, rights and needs of deaf persons. It was through these continuous efforts and meetings that ASDC was able to guarantee an internship opportunity for Yasmeen within one of Gaza's most popular and highly esteemed restaurants.

Upon receiving this opportunity Yasmeen entered the world of professional culinary arts, where she had the opportunity to expand her knowledge and learn professional restaurant techniques and skills. It was during this time that Yasmeen was able to strongly prove her abilities and impress her employer.

***"Initially we just wanted to give a deaf person an opportunity to learn, but now we are highly fascinated with Yasmeen's ability to learn and implement within a fast paced environment that we decided to employ her permanently"*** Stated the Restaurant Owner.

Initially during the three-month internship period Yasmeen received a minimal salary which was urgently invested into covering some of her ill father's medical fees and the procurement of much needed medications. Once the three months period was concluded and her contract became permanent Yasmeen began to receive a monthly salary from the restaurant. It was her commitment towards her family which has now made her contribute monthly to the family home.

After the death of her father, Yasmeen lives with her mother, her brother, his wife and his two children. Feeling the strain on her brother to earn enough money to support his family, Yasmeen is helping her brother by contributing majorly to the family expenses.

## Sign Language Program



Spreading sign language among Palestinian Society is a vital part in creating an inclusive Society. To achieve this ASDC worked hard since its establishment to organize and implement hundreds of sign language courses benefiting tens of thousands of deaf person's families, university graduates, governmental employees including the police force and judiciary staff. The courses also served private sector businesses including banks and mobile company service providers.

**During the year 2016 the sign language program at ASDC offered various level sign language courses, professional translation services and spontaneous sign language interpretation to the local community.**

- Throughout the year, total of (4) beginners and (3) intermediate level community sign language courses were implemented to university graduates, local NGO staff, lawyers and private sector companies.
- The sign language courses focus on defining deaf culture, sign language concepts, and sign language terms and vocabulary. The training courses rely on the strong participation of the trainees who will later on represent and spread sign language to their homes, work places and communities. Sign language handbooks are distributed to participants to ensure that they can practice sign language outside of training hours and represents an opportunity for others to learn from them.
- Updated and modified copies of the beginners and intermediate level sign language handbooks were also printed and distributed to the participants of the courses during the year.
- During recent years adaptation of public facilities to accommodate deaf persons is becoming more common in the Gaza Strip. During the year a leading internet company located in Gaza City requested ASDC's assistance in adapting its facilities to accommodate persons with hearing impairment. Moreover, a nominated team of their staff attended sign language training to ensure that they had the correct skills to properly communicate with deaf customers.
- The ASDC sign language program also produced sign language adapted curriculums for deaf youth enrolled in both the Creative Technology Diploma and Maintenance for Computers and Smart Technology Devises Diploma being implemented by the Islamic University in Gaza.
- Moreover throughout the year sign language interpretation was conducted in workshops, lectures, training courses and meetings where deaf persons were attending to ensure their full participation.

- The Sign Language Program is an integral part of ASDC's work. The program offers free-of-charge sign language courses to the local community throughout the year. Anyone interested in partaking in a course can register via our online registration application on the ASDC website or by contacting Atfaluna directly via telephone or email.
- Our aim is to make more awareness towards deaf culture, deaf language and deaf persons. Community participation in learning sign language is a step closer to reaching our goals.



## Advocacy Program for the Rights and Needs of PwDs

The organization has an ongoing commitment to advocate and promote for the rights and needs of persons with disabilities within the community. During the year many community participations were made and included the following:

- ASDC presented a worksheet titled **“Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children a model of vocational training and employment”** as part of a workshop titled **“Prospects of vocational training and employment opportunities for the deaf”** organized by the Islamic University on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2016
- During a simulation of the United Nations Security Council session organized by the UNDP in cooperation with Fakhoora , Atfaluna Director debated child protection during times of armed conflicts
- The organization participated in a worksheet titled **“The future of inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Palestinian Universities”** as part of a workshop titled **“Reviving international day of persons with disabilities”** organized by Handicap International in cooperation with UNDP, GIZ and PNGO
- ASDC participated in the annual convention organized by PNGO titled **“Situation of civil society for the year 2016 – Civil society Organizations between undermining and enablement”** by presenting a worksheet titled **“Strengthening the resistance of civil society organizations – the rehabilitation sector as an example”**
- ASDC contributed in preparing a policy paper **“Strengthening the resistance of disability rehabilitation organizations”** and headed the workshop which was organized by PNGO in partnership with Norwegian Peoples Aid
- ASDC headed a workshop organized by the PNGO rehabilitation sector to discuss the fact sheet prepared by the sector titled **“The effect of the disablement of the legislative council on persons with disabilities”**
- A training course was organized by ASDC to prepare a framework to implement an inclusive approach in the Gaza Strip. The training was attended by representatives of local and international organizations, Ministry of Education Higher Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Health
- Participation in a discussion about the Governmental Report related to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will be presented to the United Nations with an additional report enclosing the PNGO’s rehabilitation sector comments about the report.
- ASDC signed a protocol of cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the PNGO rehabilitation sector to develop a computerized database for persons with disabilities. ASDC signed the protocol since it is a member of the development committee and the coordinator of the rehabilitation sector
- The organization took part in a massive demonstration organized by the rehabilitation sector in PNGO in celebration of World Disability Day. ASDC Director made a statement on behalf of the rehabilitation sector in front of the United Nations Office in Gaza City
- ASDC signed an agreement with Friends of Thalassemia Organization to provide thalassemia patients with free-of-charge hearing services
- The organization contributed to preparing a strategic plan for Disabilities Representative Persons Network as part of ongoing cooperation between Disabilities Representative Persons Network and GIZ
- ASDC participated in a number of meetings with GIZ to discuss implementation processes to promote an inclusive approach for persons with disabilities in Palestine.

## Atfaluna Achievements

ASDC is proud to represent the deaf community in the Gaza Strip through a host of projects and programs. Each year marks a number of new accomplishments by the organization and adds to its history of achievements. For the year 2016, these are our key achievements:

- **NGO Development Center granted ASDC a “Certificate of Compliance with the Palestinian NGO Code of Conduct”**
- ASDC has adopted a child safeguarding policy within the Organization and is working on fully executing its strategies
- ASDC has signed a contract with **PricewaterhouseCoopers** to become its financial auditors
- During the academic year 2015/2016 a total of 54 deaf children graduated from the Early Intervention Program at ASDC
- Graduation of 25 deaf students from the Atfaluna School during the academic year 2015 / 2016
- Establishment of a science lab within the ASDC School
- Upgrade to the Atfaluna School computer lab
- ASDC organized an early detection and intervention services symposium
- Introduction of an inter-related, integrated performance measurement system software within the Audiology Clinics, Early Intervention Program and the ASDC School
- The ASDC Clinics have been selected as a focal point and reference for other organizations offering similar services
- The ASDC Clinics team have been selected to train other audiology and speech therapy teams
- Atfaluna Crafts participation in 3 crafts events organized in the West bank and the Gaza Strip
- Implementation of several promotional campaigns conducted throughout the year for the local public
- Introduction of new products to the Atfaluna Crafts collection
- Expansion of vocational training fields to include traditional Palestinian shoe making and jewelry making
- Participation of (58) youth with disability in vocational training courses at ASDC
- (118) temporary job opportunities for persons with disabilities in the fields of sewing, embroidery, carpentry, hairdressing, culinary arts, and graphic design – (58) females and (60) males
- Commencement of establishment of (43) small businesses for youth with disabilities in the fields of sewing, hairdressing, graphic design, culinary arts and photography
- Participation of (400) youth with and without disabilities in community awareness and job counseling workshops
- (250) local businesses visited to network and coordinate the employment of persons with disabilities in the various fields
- Implementation of (7) community based sign language courses for members of the community
- Adaptation of local businesses to accommodate needs of deaf persons.4

# Challenges

- **Financial Crisis**

The most critical challenge faced by ASDC during the year is the lack of financial stability within the organization to cover the expenses of the various programs it offers. The main cause of the financial situation is the major reduction in donor contributions to the region as well as reduction in ASDC self-income due to ongoing political and economic instability. Due to this the organization has had to follow prompt and immediate precautions to reduce expenses and operational costs without affecting the quality of the services and programs it offers. The precautions taken by ASDC included reduction in electricity and fuel consumption, reduction in staff salaries, seizing all hiring processes and replacing them with voluntary work and externally supported temporary employment job opportunities. Strong efforts were also made to inform partners of the difficult situation and discuss possible solutions to the problem as well as search for immediate and possible long term funding opportunities.

- **The siege on the Gaza Strip**

The ongoing siege on the Gaza Strip has had a devastating impact on the social, psychosocial, economic and health components of life. This in turn has been negatively reflected on local organizations working with persons with disabilities including ASDC. The most evident effects of the siege on Atfaluna Society are:

- Difficulty in supplying assistive devices to persons with hearing loss has affected the overall educational levels of deaf children enrolled in the Atfaluna kindergarten and school, as well as those enrolled in public schools. Moreover, the overall social life of deaf adults has been affected.
- Difficulty in travel to and from the Gaza Strip has limited the organizations ' ability to keep up with developmental trends, build staff capacities, and also weakened its ability to maintain strong relations with its international partners
- Difficulty in importing raw materials and supplies for the Atfaluna income generating program and limitations on exporting products has led to a decline in the organizations self-income

- **Increase in Competition**

Since its establishment Atfaluna Society has been known for its strong neutrality policies which serve all sectors of society without discrimination. Due to the Palestinian political division a number of new organizations emerged which supported certain political agendas and financed according to these agendas. Additionally, international organizations which were once funding organizations have become service providers, thus competing with local NGOs for funding opportunities and service provision. This new reality has weakened the organizations ability to provide funding within an already difficult and limited financed rehabilitation sector.

- **Weakness in Governmental Roles**

Lack of a unified government which financially and conceptually supports local NGOs through supporting their programs and promotes their work during international gatherings added to the deterioration of the situation. The absence of utilizing the Legislative Council has halted the passing, follow up and advancement of legislations. Moreover, the absence of a monitoring role of the legislative council on legislative authorities contributed to the non-passing of legislations which benefit persons with disabilities and organizations working with them. Since ASDC is one of the largest organizations serving persons with disabilities, it has been significantly affected by this political absence causing it to lose some of its advantages on a local and international level.

## How Can you Help!

To maintain our services to the deaf community in the Gaza Strip and to continue our programs we need your help! Please donate to any of the programs listed, every amount helps:

### **1. The Needy Student Sponsorship Program:**

Contribute to covering school expenses for needy deaf students: School Transportation (home-school-home), Hearing Aid Batteries, Ear Molds, School Supplies (school uniform, school shoes, school bags, stationary, etc.), Daily Hot Meal, and Medical Assistance.

### **2. Deaf Education Program:**

Contribute to salaries of special education teachers for an academic year

### **3. Hearing Aids and Batteries:**

Contribute to reducing our long waiting list of children and adults in need of hearing aids and batteries from across the Gaza Strip.

### **4. Work from Home for Women with Disabilities and other Disadvantaged Women**

Help support home-based work orders for disadvantaged women who will be given the required supplies such as fabrics, threads, notions, scissors, paints, brushes, etc. to complete their work and will receive paychecks on a monthly basis provided that they have completed the work.

### **5. Fuel Supply**

Contribute to the fuel supply needed to operate generators to maintain ASDC School and kindergarten, vocational training center, crafts production unit, audiology and speech therapy clinics, early intervention and social services units operational.

Our needs are urgent and ongoing. Please feel free to make a bank transfer to any of the bank accounts shown below:

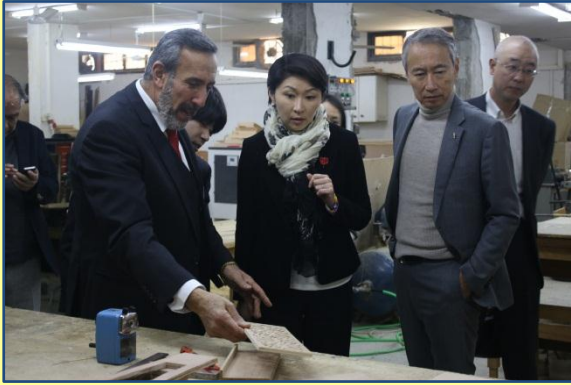
**Our needs are urgent and ongoing. Please feel free to make a bank transfer to any of the bank accounts shown below:**

Bank of Palestine	Al-Quds Bank
<p><u>Intermediary bank: (for international transfers only)</u></p> <p>Name: Citi Bank Address: New York, USA ABA#/SWIFT Code: CITIUS 33</p> <p><u>Beneficiary Bank:</u> Bank of Palestine Ltd. Bank No. 89 Branch: Main Branch –Gaza 49 Omar El Mokhtar Street P. O. Box 50 Branch No. 451 SWIFT: PALSPS22 Beneficiary’s Name: Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children Beneficiary’s Account No: 515828/0 Beneficiary’s Telephone No: (972-8) 2828495 or 2865468</p> <p>International Bank Account Number (IBAN): For USD (\$): PS57 PALS 0451 0515 8280 0130 0000 0</p>	<p>Name: Quds Bank Address: Ramallah, Palestine ABA: 021000018 Swift Code: IRVTUS3N</p> <p>Beneficiary Name: Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children Beneficiary Account No.: 1550555</p> <p>International Bank Account Number (IBAN): For USD (\$): PS02ALDN060215505550020010000</p> <p>International Bank Account Number (IBAN): For Shekel (NIS): PS81ALDN060215505550420010000</p>

## Atfaluna Guests 2016:

**Atfaluna has been privileged with visits from a host of friends, partners and guests during the year and included:**

- Members of the Fakhoora and Qatar Red Crescent Society, Gaza Office
- Mr. Takeshi Okubu, Japanese Ambassador to Palestine
- Dr. Abdallah Al -Franji, Gaza Governor
- Members of the Church of Scotland
- Ms. Pirkko-Liisa Kyöstiä, Representative Office of Finland in Palestine
- Ms. Nida Dalmantaite, Representative Office of Lithuania in Palestine
- Delegation from the Representative Office of the Republic of Ireland in Palestine
- Delegation from the Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom
- Mr. Bo Schack, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza
- The Palestinian Union of Deaf
- A delegation from CBM, Germany
- A delegation from the Belgian Development Agency (BTC)
- A delegation from the German Foreign Affairs Office and from CBM, Germany
- A Japanese parliamentary delegation



**Japanese parliamentary delegation**



**Dr. Abdallah Al-Franji, Gaza Governor**



**A delegation from CBM, Germany**



**Members of the Fakhoora and Qatar Red Crescent Society, Gaza Office**



**Mr. Bo Schack, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza**