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# Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children



## Annual Report 2020

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## Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children

Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, is a registered Palestinian NGO located in Gaza City, has been working in the field of persons with hearing disabilities education and allied services since 1992. Literally thousands of deaf children and adults and their families are served annually at Atfaluna through persons with hearing disabilities education, audiology, speech therapy, income generating programs for the deaf, vocational training, parents', teachers' and community training and awareness programs, and a host of other services and programs. The organisation currently employs 137 permanent staff members of which 60% are deaf. Atfaluna's services focus on serving persons with hearing disabilities in particular and the community in general. This focus comes in light of the inclusive development approach Atfaluna adopts to create an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities within an all-inclusive environment free of limitations.

Respect of human rights is a key component throughout the organisation. Atfaluna adopts the Convention of International Human Rights and International Laws as well as Palestinian laws in this regard. Due to this Atfaluna has developed several policies which guarantee equal rights for everyone and has worked on adopting it and publicizing it to organisations working in the field. It has also developed practical procedures to guarantee accomplishment and a inclusive complaint system; among these policies are:

- **Child protection policy**
- **Neutrality and non-discrimination policy**
- **Conflict of interest policy**
- **Anti-corruption policy**

Atfaluna considers itself a learning organisation, it believes in the principle of change, it continuously works to modify its techniques and train its staff to keep up with changes and trends within the charity sector, administrative, financial, social, psychosocial, educational and vocational in line with world visions and keeping with the Palestinian setting.

The family environment at Atfaluna and close social bonds and high dedication and commitment which ties the Atfaluna staff together makes Atfaluna stand out as an exceptional model for the work of NGOs who continue to serve their communities regardless of difficulties and challenges.

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## Vision

A Palestinian disability inclusive society where persons with disabilities enjoy their full rights.

## Mission

Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children is a non-profit organization that endeavours to empower persons with hearing disability as well as persons with other disabilities in the Gaza Strip and improve their quality of life within a disability-inclusive development framework.

## Specific Objectives

- Provision of an educational environment suited to the needs and outlook of students with hearing disabilities
- Development of the life skills of people with hearing disabilities
- Building employability skills of youth with disabilities
- Support to early intervention services and early identification of hearing problems
- Awareness raising of local community towards people with hearing disability
- Organizing advocacy campaigns to support the rights of people with disabilities
- Reinforcing inclusive development approach in all services offered by the organisation to persons with disabilities
- Ongoing development of staff capacities to ensure best results are continuously.

**Through a host of programs offered within the organisation throughout the year the following programs offer high quality services to the Atfaluna community:**

### Sign Language Program

Sign language is the primary language for people with hearing disabilities, it is their mother tongue, it gives them the means to express their thoughts and communicate with their surrounding environment. Palestinian sign language is considered the corner stone for deaf culture in Palestine and which helped establish their independent identity. Year after year the language developed carrying with it, history of generations of people with hearing disabilities.

The sign language training program in ASDC welcomes all persons of the community with special emphasis on family members of people with hearing disabilities and other service provision staff members including doctors, social workers, private and public-school teachers, police officers and university students.

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## **Aim of the Program**

The program aims to develop Palestinian sign language in a way which enhances and spreads sign language in order to ease communication and integration of people with hearing disabilities within their households and in the community as a whole. Bolstering the inclusion of people with hearing disabilities allows them to convey their thoughts and feelings and helps them in understanding their surroundings better therefore becoming an equal and important part of it.

## **The sign language training program works to:**

Implement beginners, intermediate and advanced level sign language training courses throughout the year

- Conduct specialized academic sign language courses
- Update and develop sign language enabling it to keep up with other languages
- Offering sign language interpretation in courts, police stations, hospitals, etc.
- Take part in formulating pressure groups to advocate in support of people with hearing disabilities and spreading of sign language in addition to adaptation of public and private facilities to accommodate people with hearing disabilities.

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## **Second: Atfaluna Units and Programs**

### **Education Program**

#### **Early Intervention Program**

The early intervention program consists of a group of educational, rehabilitative, protective services offered to children with and without disabilities in need of extra developmental and educational assistance and is linked to early identification of problems or disabilities among young children.

The program is considered the foundation for other educational programs since it trains and rehabilitates the children socially, educationally and prepares them for formal education.

#### **Home-Based Educational Sessions**

The home-based educational sessions are implemented as part of the early intervention services. Both mother and child receive training through a series of intensive activities which focus mainly on the mother who is guided through communication development enabling her to become the primary educator for her child with hearing disability at home. The program targets children from new-born to five years old. Once they reach the age of five the child is enrolled in pre-school where the child begins the formal education system.

The early intervention program is implemented in all four geographical areas of the Gaza Strip and serves approximately 100 children annually. The program works to guide and assist families of newly diagnosed children with hearing disabilities during the early critical days through individually implemented plans and includes social guidance, counselling and home visits to the families. Parents are also enrolled in early intervention, communication, and sign language training in addition to awareness workshops for family members in various fields.

#### **Atfaluna Inclusive Nursery**

This unit was newly established within Atfaluna in 2017, it offers the necessary healthcare, personal hygiene, nutritional and behavioural guidance for 15 children with and without disabilities aged younger than three years on an annual basis.

#### **Atfaluna Inclusive Kindergarten**

The ASDC kindergarten is based on learning through play and educational play corners. It aims to create positive change within the children's hobbies, habits, skills and abilities from physical, mental, psychosocial, and social aspects through activities that mainly focus on self-care, developing communication skills using sign language and alphabets and creating self-acceptance

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among children with and without disabilities and their families. A total of 50 children with and without disabilities are enrolled within the program annually their ages ranging between 5 and 6 years of age.

### **Aim of the Program**

Providing children with and without disabilities aged between 0 and 5 years and their families with guidance, prevention, rehabilitation, education services to ensure the necessary interventions are available from the very early signs of any delays which may hinder a child's stable development within an inclusive development approach.

### **Atfaluna School**

Atfaluna School has been offering academic educational services for children with hearing disabilities in the Gaza Strip since the year 1992. The Atfaluna School is considered an educational model which endeavors to achieve inclusive development for students with hearing disabilities. The schooling system at Atfaluna starts at kindergarten level and continues onto primary and middle school. The educational process in the school depends on a dual language system which includes verbal and Palestinian Sign Language. The average number of students enrolled in the school is 170 students annually ranging in age from 6 to 17 years of age.

The academic curriculum consists of two main factors: (1) hearing loss rehabilitation subjects including auditory training and auditory speech training and (2) educational subjects including Arabic and English language, mathematics, geography, computer and information technology, civic education, and science. Additionally, the students are introduced to non-curriculum subjects including arts, crafts, and drama.

To ensure the best possible educational environment is available for the students in class the number of students in each group is limited to 12 students at most allowing teacher and student to have close one to one communication. Each classroom is furnished with a large mirror and other visual tools to assist children with residual hearing to practice speech in class. The school has also adopted an educational moving class system which requires the students to change classrooms depending on the class schedule. The school operates five days a week from 8 am till 2 pm.

### **Atfaluna School works hard to provide high quality services to the students with hearing disabilities through:**

- Development of special educational curriculums that accommodate the abilities of students with hearing disabilities due to lack of formal curriculums available to them on a

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national level. The curriculums are inclusive and informative and specially formulated to suit the deaf student's needs including Palestinian sign language and speech language exercises.

- Provision of non-curriculum activities including library sessions, arts and crafts classes
- Provision of healthy and balanced nutritious meals for the students enrolled in the school throughout the academic year to ensure the students maintain their physical and mental abilities that allow them to concentrate in class and have the energy needed to fully cooperate during lessons. The lunch program at Atfaluna has proved vital to support the educational accumulation of the students which under the deteriorated conditions in Gaza has affected the majority of the deaf students' families.
- Social support and counselling for deaf children and their families to resolve issues preventing the inclusion of children with hearing disabilities within their families and communities

### **Aim of the Program**

Achieving comprehensive cohesion for students with hearing disabilities and enabling them educationally and including them within the Palestinian society and attaining them their full rights.

### **Academic Teaching Staff**

The Atfaluna School teaching committee consists of 45 teachers, 22 of which are with hearing disabilities. The team consists of administrators, educational supervisors, social workers and counsellors. The organization makes every effort to develop the teaching skills of its academic team in the school and has therefore, submitted its teaching assistants all of whom are with hearing disabilities into five-year training program consisting of communication development and academic sign language. The organisation also regularly enrolls its staff in capacity development training to support their teaching skills.

### **School Social Services Unit**

The unit employs a social worker and school counsellor as well as a counsellor assistant who has hearing disability. The unit offers several support programs for the students with hearing disabilities enrolled in the school that aims at improving their lives and improving their educational achievements through offering them social and psychosocial interventions in addition to building the students awareness as well as their families through individual and group counselling sessions and regular home visits. The unit conducts open days that include

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recreational as well as non-curriculum activities for the students as well as educational and recreational field trips.

### **Community Centre for Adult Education**

The community centre at Atfaluna works to develop the community through learning and training activities and as a resource for community information, services, resources, arranging and networking. The core concept of the Centre's idea is based on offering courses that aim at enabling, social transformation, quality of life through learning for life, fulfilling resources and social activities.

The activities within the Centre are flexible and susceptible to sharing and can be led by any member of society. While support procedures are in place and available through strengthening cooperation, networking and partnerships.

### **Main Responsibilities of the Community Centre**

1. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and building employability skills based on local market needs
  - Providing the community with TVET activities based on beneficiaries and local market needs through the vocational training program available in the Centre.
2. Information and Studies:
  - Community information and services
3. Feasibility studies and needs assessments
  - Counselling and guidance services
4. Community Development:
  - Local community activities “occasions, celebrations, world celebration days...”
  - Promoting creative ideas and adopting and developing small discoveries
5. Organising and Networking:
  - Enhancing ties among government and non-governmental organisations
  - Enhancing ties with local and international universities
  - Enhancing the concept of sharing and exchanging experiences among individuals and organizations
  - Enhancing learning for life.

### **Aim of the Program**

- Achieving the concept of learning for life



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- Social and economic enablement of community members
  - Improving communication and community social cohesion
  - Enhancing and developing the community
  - Prompt response to community demands

### **Vocational Training Program**

The vocational training program is one of the ASDC programs which aims at enabling persons with and without disabilities in the Gaza Strip through vocational training which improves their chances at locating job opportunities within the local labour market.

The program offers short- and long-term training courses in a range of fields including: product design, sewing, embroidery, carpentry, furniture production, furniture painting, upholstery, painting on wood, pottery production, pottery painting, arabesque design, jewellery making, photography, fabric and rug weaving.

Participants of the vocational training courses also take part in job counselling workshops where they are informed about employment laws, the Palestinian disability law and fundamentals of human rights. Business owners and employers are also invited to the workshops in an attempt to bring together the opinions, fears and ideas of both parties in order to minimize pre-conceptions about persons with disabilities limitations in the workplace.

### **Outpatient Clinics**

The outpatient clinics in ASDC were established in the year 1993 to provide comprehensive and varied services to all age groups and from all areas of the Gaza Strip. The services provided include primary and diagnostic hearing testing, hearing aid fitting, ear mould production, hearing aid repair, speech and language therapy. The department includes the following clinics:

📌 **Audiology Clinic:** offers its services to the local community, the clinic employs audiology experts specialized in evaluating and diagnosing hearing problems and hearing aid fitting. The clinic also includes two labs one specialized in hearing aid repair and maintenance and the second in ear mould production. The clinic also employs a social worker which provides services to the clinic's beneficiaries.

📌 **Speech and Language Development Clinic:** the clinic consists of two units both offering speech and language development services to children enrolled in the Atfaluna early intervention

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program, the Atfaluna School and other students from outside Atfaluna in need of speech therapy sessions.

Outreach Community Hearing Screening Clinic: the work of the clinic is part of ASDC's outreach services being offered to the community. The clinic offers free-of-charge hearing screening on a daily basis in local kindergartens, public schools, UNRWA schools, local organisations, local CSOs, across the Gaza Strip. During screening activities community awareness is carried out by an awareness expert and information filled brochures are distributed to the beneficiaries. Thousands of persons are screened for hearing loss on an annual basis through the outreach program. Referrals are made to ASDC outpatient clinics for further testing and diagnosis and often to other specialized doctors depending on the case.

### **Social Services Program**

The program offers its services to adults with hearing disabilities and their families. The program receives cases transferred from the different departments of the organisation and other service provision organisations.

#### **The program offers the following services:**

- Provision of individual and group psychosocial sessions for adults with hearing disabilities and their families
- Provision of awareness and cultural workshops for adults with hearing disabilities and their families in day-to-day related topics.
- Networking with public and private sectors to locate job opportunities for the youth with hearing disabilities
- Referral of youth with hearing disabilities in need of services from other local NGOs
- Contributing to formulating pressure groups that promote the rights of persons with disabilities to employment opportunities
- Distribution of humanitarian assistance to needy families of persons with hearing disabilities and other marginalised groups (specially women) in the Gaza Strip

#### **Aim of the Program**

Improving the social and psychological aspects of life for persons with hearing loss and their families in the Gaza Strip.

### **Atfaluna Crafts**

The Atfaluna Crafts production unit was established in the year 1998 to fulfil the needs of youth with hearing disabilities to rehabilitate and strengthen their skills. The program successfully trained thousands of persons and provided job opportunities to hundreds of them in the local job market. In addition to establishing small businesses for them. Since its establishment the

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program has been in continuous development. A number of units were established within the department and include:

- The crafts production unit and includes crafts production units including: carpentry unit, sewing unit, embroidery, pottery production and design, painting on wood, rug and fabric weaving, in addition to the crafts and furniture shops located within Atfaluna and in external locations.

The department employs 51 women and men with hearing disabilities, and is made up of five main workshops furnished and operating according to a comprehensive production system (design, production, marketing).

**The workshops include:**

- Carpentry and wood painting
- Sewing and embroidery
- Rug and fabric hand weaving
- Painting on wood
- Pottery production and design

**Stages of Production**

**1. Design:** each department is responsible for the product design of its products; a specialized team of employees put together creative new ideas linking between Palestinian tradition and modern designs. A sample of the new idea is made and viewed by customers who give their opinion on colour, shape and texture.

**2. Production:** new designs and orders are processed by the production team who prepare the raw materials required to complete the order and proceed in preparing the order with utmost accuracy and care. The pieces produced include women's clothing, decorative items and furniture pieces.

**3. Marketing and Sales:** the beautifully produced hand crafts are sold in Atfaluna's permanent showroom located in the ASDC premises. The products are sold locally as well as internationally via Atfaluna's online product catalogue. In the year 2013 Atfaluna launched its furniture showroom which sells hand crafted furniture pieces including dining rooms, living rooms, guest rooms, etc. All the items available in the showroom are produced by deaf artisans. All proceeds of sales are re-invested into the society to contribute towards covering expenses of the production unit.

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**Work from home program**

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The program supports more than 150 women and men with hearing disabilities and other marginalized women who graduated from the ASDC vocational training courses. The program provides them with the raw materials and tools needed to produce handicrafts which are then marketed and sold within the Atfaluna Crafts stores.

### **Aim of the Program**

Empowering deaf youth and improving their quality of life through vocational training and job creation.

### **Child Protection Unit**

Since the year 2016 ASDC began to systemize its work in compliance with child protection as an important component of the organisations work. Working with large numbers of children has been a big part of Atfaluna's work for many years, it was therefore important that the organisation took this important step in providing a safe environment for children. In 2017 ASDC formally adopted its own child protection policy in compliance with local and international standards. The organisation is completely committed to this policy throughout its programs and activities.

### **The child protection services and activities at ASDC include**

1. Formulation of a child protection committee assigned to follow up and ensure proper implementation of the ASDC child protection policy
2. Authorisation of behaviour foundation within ASDC
3. Establishment of a complaint follow up system specifically formulated for child harassment and abuse
4. Spreading child protection culture among local organisations
5. Implementation of many activities to increase student awareness as well as community awareness towards child protection, children's rights and enablement.

The child protection unit will continue to facilitate activities that contribute to spreading information about the unit's work.

### **Inclusive Education Program**

This program works to reinforce inclusive education opportunities within public schools and universities by networking and coordinating with the Ministry of Education, UNRWA education unit and Palestinian Universities. To achieve this the program works on training teaching staff, students and their relatives on concepts and procedures of achieving inclusive education within schools and universities. Since the establishment of the inclusive education program at ASDC in

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2017 it has successfully included tens of students with disabilities in public schools and universities side by side with their non-disabled peers.

### **Aim of the Program**

Provision of an inclusive educational environment for people with disabilities in public and private educational facilities to guarantee equal opportunities for students with disabilities with non-disabled students.

### **Advocacy and Networking**

The advocacy program began its work in 2011 to support persons with disabilities through activating social, economic educational, health and civil disability laws and gaining local community and decision makers support to create real change in the reality of persons with disabilities in benefit of the entire community.

Six pressure groups operate within the program consisting of persons with disabilities and representatives of civil society organisations. These committees work within a clear strategic plan that aims to create community mobilisation that believes in the cause being followed. Each of the committees has adopted an objective that it works on achieving. The objectives laid down as part of the strategic plan of the program include:

- Spreading inclusive development principles and working on adopting the inclusive development framework that was developed by ASDC
- Integrating early hearing detection and intervention services for new-borns within the primary health care sector in the Gaza Strip
- Facilitating the mobilization and access of services for people with disabilities
- Reinforcing sign language within the Palestinian society
- Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to job opportunities within the community
- Promoting deaf sports programs and activities
- Promoting the rights of children with disabilities to protection against violence, abuse, and exploitation

### **Atfaluna School**

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middle school. The educational process in the school depends on a dual language system which includes verbal and Palestinian Sign Language. The average number of students enrolled in the school is 170 students annually ranging in age from 6 to 17 years of age.



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The Atfaluna School works hard to provide high quality services to the students with hearing disabilities through:

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- Development of special educational curriculums that accommodate the abilities of students with hearing disabilities due to lack of formal curriculums available to them on a national level. The curriculums are comprehensive and informative and specially formulated to suit the deaf student's needs including Palestinian sign language and speech language exercises.
  - Provision of non-curriculum activities including library sessions, arts and crafts classes
  - Provision of healthy and balanced nutritious meals for the students enrolled in the school throughout the academic year to ensure the students maintain their physical and mental abilities that allow them to concentrate in class and have the energy needed to fully cooperate during lessons. The lunch program at Atfaluna has proved vital to support the educational accumulation of the students which under the deteriorated conditions in Gaza has affected the majority of the deaf students' families.
  - Social support and counselling for deaf children and their families to resolve issues preventing the inclusion of children with hearing disabilities within their families and communities

### **Aim of the Program**

Achieving comprehensive cohesion for students with hearing disabilities and enabling them educationally and including them within the Palestinian society and attaining them their full rights.

Academic Teaching Staff:

The Atfaluna School teaching committee consists of 45 teachers, 22 of which are with hearing disabilities. The team consists of administrators, educational supervisors, social workers and counsellors. The organization makes every effort to develop the teaching skills of its academic team in the school and has therefore, submitted its teaching assistants all of whom are with hearing disabilities into five-year training program consisting of communication development and academic sign language. The organisation also regularly enrolls its staff in capacity development training to support their teaching skills.

School Social Services Unit:

The unit employs a social worker and school counsellor as well as a counsellor assistant who has hearing disability. The unit offers several support programs for the students with hearing disabilities enrolled in the school that aims at improving their lives and improving their educational achievements through offering them social and psychosocial interventions in addition to building the students awareness as well as their families through individual and group counselling sessions and regular home visits. The unit conducts open days that include recreational as well as non-curriculum activities for the students as well as educational and recreational field trips.



## Community Centre for Adult Education

The community centre at Atfaluna works to develop the community through learning and training activities and as a resource for community information, services, resources, arranging and networking. The core concept of the Centre's idea is based on offering courses that aim at enabling, social transformation, quality of life through learning for life, fulfilling resources and social activities.

The activities within the Centre are flexible and susceptible to sharing and can be led by any member of society. While support procedures are in place and available through strengthening cooperation, networking and partnerships.

### Main Responsibilities of the Community Centre

1. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and building employability skills based on local market needs.
  - Providing the community with TVET activities based on beneficiaries and local market needs through the vocational training program available in the Centre.
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4. Organizing and Networking:
  - Enhancing ties among government and non-governmental organizations



- Enhancing ties with local and international universities
- Enhancing the concept of sharing and exchanging experiences among individuals and organizations
- Enhancing learning for life

### **Aim of the Program**

- Achieving the concept of learning for life
- Social and economic enablement of community members
- Improving communication and community social cohesion
- Enhancing and developing the community
- prompt response to community demands

### **Vocational Training Program**

The vocational training program is one of the ASDC programs which aims at enabling persons with and without disabilities in the Gaza Strip through vocational training which improves their chances at locating job opportunities within the local labour market.



The program offers short- and long-term training courses in a range of fields including: product design, sewing, embroidery, carpentry, furniture production, furniture painting, upholstery,

painting on wood, pottery production, pottery painting, arabesque design, jewellery making, photography, fabric and rug weaving.

Participants of the vocational training courses also take part in job counselling workshops where they are informed about employment laws, the Palestinian disability law and fundamentals of human rights. Business owners and employers are also invited to the workshops in an attempt to bring together the opinions, fears and ideas of both parties in order to minimize pre-conceptions about persons with disabilities limitations in the workplace.

## Outpatient Clinics

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maintenance and the second in ear mould production. The clinic also employs a social worker which provides services to the clinic's beneficiaries.



2. **Speech and Language Development Clinic:** the clinic consists of two units both offering speech and language development services to children enrolled in the Atfaluna early intervention program, the Atfaluna School and other students from outside Atfaluna in need of speech therapy sessions.



3. **Outreach Community Hearing Screening Clinic:** the work of the clinic is part of ASDC's outreach services being offered to the community. The clinic offers free-of-charge

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hearing screening on a daily basis in local kindergartens, public schools, UNRWA schools, local organisations, local CSOs, across the Gaza Strip. During screening activities community awareness is carried out by an awareness expert and information filled brochures are distributed to the beneficiaries. Thousands of persons are screened for hearing loss on an annual basis through the outreach program. Referrals are made to ASDC outpatient clinics for further testing and diagnosis and often to other specialized doctors depending on the case.

## **Social Services Program**

The program offers its services to adults with hearing disabilities and their families. The program receives cases transferred from the different departments of the organisation and other service provision organisations. The program offers the following services:

- Provision of individual and group psychosocial sessions for adults with hearing disabilities and their families
- Provision of awareness and cultural workshops for adults with hearing disabilities and their families in day-to-day related topics.
- Networking with public and private sectors to locate job opportunities for the youth with hearing disabilities
- Referral of youth with hearing disabilities in need of services from other local NGOs
- Contributing to formulating pressure groups that promote the rights of persons with disabilities to employment opportunities
- Distribution of humanitarian assistance to needy families of persons with hearing disabilities and other marginalised groups (specially women) in the Gaza Strip

### **Aim of the Program**

Improving the social and psychological aspects of life for persons with hearing loss and their families in the Gaza Strip.



## Atfaluna Crafts

The Atfaluna Crafts production unit was established in the year 1998 to fulfil the needs of youth with hearing disabilities to rehabilitate and strengthen their skills. The program successfully trained thousands of persons and provided job opportunities to hundreds of them in the local job market. In addition to establishing small businesses for them. Since its establishment the program has been in continuous development.



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### **A number of units were established within the department and include:**

The crafts production unit include crafts production units including: carpentry unit, sewing unit, embroidery, pottery production and design, painting on wood, rug and fabric weaving, in addition to the crafts and furniture shops located within Atfaluna and in external locations.

The department employs 51 women and men with hearing disabilities, and is made up of five main workshops furnished and operating according to a comprehensive production system (design, production, marketing).

### **The workshops include:**

- Carpentry and wood painting
- Sewing and embroidery
- Rug and fabric hand weaving
- Painting on wood
- Pottery production and design

### **Stages of Production**

1. **Design**: each department is responsible for the product design of its products; a specialized team of employees put together creative new ideas linking between Palestinian tradition and modern designs. A sample of the new idea is made and viewed by customers who give their opinion on colour, shape and texture.
2. **Production**: new designs and orders are processed by the production team who prepare the raw materials required to complete the order and proceed in preparing the order with utmost accuracy and care. The pieces produced include women's clothing, decorative items and furniture pieces.
3. **Marketing and Sales**: the beautifully produced hand crafts are sold in Atfaluna's permanent showroom located in the ASDC premises. The products are sold locally as well as internationally via Atfaluna's online product catalogue. In the year 2013 Atfaluna launched its furniture showroom which sells hand crafted furniture pieces including dining rooms, living rooms, guest rooms, etc. All the items available in the showroom are produced by deaf artisans. All proceeds of sales are re-invested into the society to contribute towards covering expenses of the production unit.



## Work from home program

The program supports more than 150 women and men with hearing disabilities and other marginalised women who graduated from the ASDC vocational training courses. The program provides them with the raw materials and tools needed to produce handicrafts which are then marketed and sold within the Atfaluna Crafts stores.

### Aim of the Program

Empowering deaf youth and improving their quality of life through vocational training and job creation.



## Atfaluna Craft Shop



## Child Protection Unit

Since the year 2016 ASDC began to systemize its work in compliance with child protection as an important component of the organisations work. Working with large numbers of children has been a big part of Atfaluna’s work for many years, it was therefore important that the organisation took this important step in providing a safe environment for children. In 2017 ASDC formally adopted



its own child protection policy in compliance with local and international standards. The organisation is completely committed to this policy throughout its programs and activities.

**The child protection services and activities at ASDC include**

- Formulation of a child protection committee assigned to follow up and ensure proper implementation of the ASDC child protection policy
- Authorisation of behaviour foundation within ASDC
- Establishment of a complaint follow up system specifically formulated for child harassment and abuse
- Spreading child protection culture among local organisations
- Implementation of many activities to increase student awareness as well as community awareness towards child protection, children’s rights and enablement.

**The child protection unit will continue to facilitate activities that contribute to spreading information about the unit’s work.**





## Inclusive Education Program

This program works to reinforce inclusive education opportunities within public schools and universities by networking and coordinating with the Ministry of Education, UNRWA education unit and Palestinian Universities. To achieve this the program works on training teaching staff, students and their relatives on concepts and procedures of achieving inclusive education within schools and universities. Since the establishment of the inclusive education program at ASDC in 2017 it has successfully included tens of students with disabilities in public schools and universities side by side with their non-disabled peers.

### Aim of the Program

Provision of an inclusive educational environment for people with disabilities in public and private educational facilities to guarantee equal opportunities for students with disabilities with non-disabled students.



## Advocacy and Networking

The advocacy program began its work in 2011 to support persons with disabilities through activating social, economic educational, health and civil disability laws and gaining local community and decision makers support to create real change in the reality of persons with disabilities in benefit of the entire community.

Six pressure groups operate within the program consisting of persons with disabilities and representatives of civil society organisations. These committees work within a clear strategic plan that aims to create community mobilisation that believes in the cause being followed. Each of the committees has adopted an objective that it works on achieving.

### **The objectives laid down as part of the strategic plan of the program include**

- Spreading inclusive development principles and working on adopting the inclusive development framework that was developed by ASDC
- Integrating early hearing detection and intervention services for new-borns within the primary health care sector in the Gaza Strip
- Facilitating the mobilization and access of services for people with disabilities
- Reinforcing sign language within the Palestinian society
- Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to job opportunities within the community
- Promoting deaf sports programs and activities

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- Promoting the rights of children with disabilities to protection against violence, abuse, and exploitation

**To empower persons with disabilities to overcome excluding barriers, improve their participation and claim their rights within the framework of Disability Inclusive Development**

**Educational capacities and skills of Atfaluna school staff with hearing disability are developed**

Atfaluna school teachers have received many courses to develop and develop their teaching abilities in various fields such as "inclusive approach, e-learning strategies and mechanisms for its application.

These trainings and courses have positively affected teachers in building their educational and functional abilities, which have helped them communicate effectively with school students with disabilities and without disabilities, especially during the quarantine period caused by the Covid19 pandemic.

Thirty-six teachers in our school and kindergarten with hearing disabilities and without disabilities received a comprehensive e-learning strategies course (concept, justifications, strategies, application mechanism) which aims to enable teachers to continue to provide remote learning services in a holistic and systematic manner in light of the spread of Covid19 pandemic, and 5 teachers participated in training workshops on distance education and the use of educational platforms.

Twenty-five public school teachers have also been trained in comprehensive education strategies and distance education strategies, and teachers' communication skills with students with hearing disabilities have been refined through two sign language courses. There has been a marked improvement in teachers' ability to communicate with students with hearing disabilities.

Eight orientation workshops (two speech therapy workshops, two workshops in the field of educational guidance and four workshops in the field of special education) were carried out for private education teachers, speech specialists and educational guidance employed in public schools with the participation of 321 beneficiaries. The workshops were carried out interactively, allowing everyone to share experiences.



## E-Learning during Covid19 pandemic

During the Covid19 pandemic, quarantine led to reliance on distance learning platforms, so the skills and abilities of our school and kindergarten teachers in the field of videomaking were developed to harmonize, develop and harmonize ways of communicating remotely with school students through various online educational platforms such as Zoom and various social media. Atfaluna school and kindergarten teachers made 150 systematic and non-systematic videos and sent them to the school's 181 students (110 students, 71 students) and our 58 kindergartens (24 males, 34 females) with disabilities and without disabilities through WhatsApp groups established as part of the Covid19 emergency response plan.

Many videos were shared by teachers and students, 85% of whom interacted dramatically, such as summarizing lessons, resolving different issues through innovative videos and sharing them with teachers as well as with their colleagues.

It is worth mentioning that through the results of the follow-up and evaluation reports, 83% of parents following the distance education process expressed satisfaction with the educational services provided by the staff of Atfaluna school through online platforms, where 75.6% of the parents of Atfaluna school students reported that electronic lessons, interventions and communication with students and parents had a positive and creative impact on the school

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students who felt included and involved in the educational process, which reflected positively on their mental health and educational abilities.

With the development of trends and taking into account all possibilities and recommendations, e-learning has become a necessary need and logical orientation for 10% of parents who have benefited from the effectiveness of e-education and the possibility of replacing formal education, as the majority of the obstacles to the adoption of distance education relate to logistical matters such as the availability of the Internet, and the availability of the tools and electronic devices necessary to complete the process of distance education.

In this regard, Atfaluna has developed its own educational strategy for 2021-2023, where its staff has taken into account overcoming the gaps and gaps that students, parents and various educational institutions face with regard to inclusive distance education, and developing a plan to develop the remote education process in a successful and effective interactive manner based on the foundations and strategies of the inclusive approach.

The first grade printed sign language manual has also been developed for distribution to teachers in public schools where children with disabilities have been included.

The sign language guide for all subjects from grade 1 to grade 9 and a social media bulletin has been developed through YouTube.

### **Inclusive Approach Program**

As part of the inclusive education approach, 69 students (31 males, 38 females) were included in 28 public schools and continued to receive academic support and psychosocial counseling along with their parents, teachers and counselors, in addition to including 31 children (14 males, 16 females) with hearing disabilities in public kindergartens after being provided with early intervention service and counseling.

ASDC has also worked on promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities in public schools to ensure the provision of high-quality educational services to children through a series of services provided by speech therapists and special education teachers

In addition, ASDC has worked on promoting the concept and strategies of inclusive education for each of the beneficiaries themselves (service providers), parents of children with disabilities, teachers and counselors of public schools, and decision makers in the Ministry of Education.

A total of 341 graduates of speech therapy and education counseling were employed in 196 public schools, where the speech therapists surveyed 31,194 (14,447 males, 16,747 females) to determine the number of students with speech problems. Based on the survey, 2,938 students were diagnosed with speech problems (1,493 males and 1,229 females with speech problems, 105 males and 111 females with speech problems accompanied by other disabilities).

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Based on the survey, 2,938 students with speech problems were identified (1,493 males and 1,229 females) with speech problems, and 105 males, and 111 females with speech problems accompanied by other disabilities.

According to the specialists' reports, 9.5% of the students who were evaluated inside schools were targeted, and 46% of the students who received speech therapy sessions showed improvement as a result of the speech service provided to them.

Numbers of students who showed improved pronunciation (665 males and 577 females with speech problems, 59 males and 45 females with speech problems accompanied by other disabilities).

On the other hand, special education teachers who were assigned to public schools have conducted a classroom survey to identify the educational needs.

The survey was conducted for 6,634 (2,346 males, 4,288 females). Based on the it, it was found that 93.1% of the students suffer from learning difficulties and need special education services, of whom 18.4% are students with different disabilities (1,794 males and 3,223 females have learning difficulties, 574 males and 595 females with different disabilities).

According to reports from special education teachers, students included in special education groups showed an improvement in the academic achievement. As 35.7% of students in special education groups showed improvement, and 44.1% of students with sensory disabilities who received special education services showed improvement.

In order to complete the series of services provided to students with different disabilities included in public schools who receive services from speech specialists and special education teachers, educational guides have provided psychological and educational counselling services to students and their families, with 10 children supported during actual working periods of beneficiaries within schools. 018 students (2,208 males without disabilities, 6,922 females without disabilities, 483 males with disabilities, 405 females with disabilities) as well as support and guidance to parents 3,719.



### **Capacities of parents to communicate with their hearing-impaired children are built**

The ASDC has implemented many various interventions aimed at developing the communication skills of parents with their children with hearing disabilities by conducting sign language courses. This has reflected positively on the mental health of the child. In addition, improving parents' communication with their child with hearing disabilities increases their ability to understand and meet their child's needs, with 12 sign language courses for parents of school and kindergarten students receiving 229 parents and community institution workers receiving various interactive signaling courses.

The ASDC has implemented many interventions aimed at developing the communication skills for parents with their children with hearing disabilities through implementing interactive sign language courses for the parents. The ASDC's interventions positively reflected on the child's mental health and promoted the child's engagement with the family members.

In addition, improving the parents' communication skills has increased their ability to identify and fulfill their child's needs. 12 sign language courses were implemented for parents of school and kindergarten students, where 229 parents and services providers have received sign language courses.



As part of the Covid19 emergency response plan, counseling and continuous psychosocial support have been provided to mothers on how to use social media to access the educational services for their children, which showed satisfaction among parents.

ASDC staff has created WhatsApp groups to communicate with parents and exchange written, visual and audio information to stay informed of everything related to the school's methodologies, strategies and plans. These groups have become an important resource for parents of students to exchange information and counseling.



**Outcome 1.1.2 Children with hearing disability and their family members are psychosocially empowered**

**First: Psychosocial conditions of persons with hearing disability and their families are improved**

During the quarantine period, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, children with disabilities had to stay at home, it was observed that children were hyperactive and psychologically disturbed by the state of isolation they live in as a result of not meeting their teachers and classmates and the lack of activities carried out.

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Therefore, individual and group psychological support and unloading sessions were held, in addition to providing the necessary guidance to students, especially regarding the Covid19 pandemic, and this was done through electronic platforms, where they benefited from psychological support activities during the reporting period, 1186 children (626 children, 560 girls) with disabilities. Disability and without disability, including 593 children with disabilities (338 boys, 255 girls).

326 parents (16 males, 310 females) participated in psychological support sessions and family counseling on how to communicate with their children and provide them with the psychosocial support needed services at home to overcome psychological difficulties their children go through. However, 93.5% of the children showed improvement in their psychological manners.

In addition, the parents felt that their relationship with their children with disabilities improved, and they emphasized the increased level of effective communication; as they became aware of their children's needs and ways to meet them.

Training courses were also implemented for 18 children in the field of peer support for young children with and without disabilities. The courses aimed to enable them to provide psychological support to their peers inside and outside the school.



## Second: Children are engaged in extracurricular activities

A number of students have been trained on circus skills, acrobatics and on a number of other extracurricular activities. These activities were carried out in partnership with a number of centers and institutions such as The Gaza Circus Club, Al Qattan Center and Tamer Institute for Community Education.

Extracurricular activities have led to the discovery of many talents among children with disabilities, as well as new friendships and relationships with their colleagues with and without disabilities.

The urgent need for distance communication has led to the adaptation of modern teaching methods and to the development of educational plans and methodologies at Atfaluna School. Where the focus on refining and developing the technical and creative skills of students has been increased by including them in the society effectively and engaging them in events, activities and courses.

The skills of the students have been developed in several areas such as theatre and drama, sports, painting, arts, photography, science, reading, dabkeh and other folklore activities. During the reporting period, 1,490 children with and without disabilities (722 males and 768 females) were involved, including 587 children with different disabilities (314 males and 273 females).



### Third: Home Visits

Atfaluna's staff has carried out 230 home visits to children with disabilities and their families to provide family counselling and psychological support. Parents reported improvement in their communication and treatment with their children after the field sessions.

### Persons with Disabilities are economically empowered

#### Building the capacity of persons with disabilities to improve their access to job opportunities

Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children has implemented a number of projects to empower people with disabilities economically by building their functional capacities and engaging them in the labour market. Atfaluna has implemented the "Job Creation" project. The project has enabled 341 beneficiaries by enhancing their abilities to meet the needs of labour market, especially since the vast majority of beneficiaries are considered the breadwinners of their families.

The regular work of the beneficiaries during the first quarter of the project has resulted in them gaining various functional skills and practical experience in their field. Besides, it has expanded their awareness and knowledge of the concept, basics and strategies of inclusive education.

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The practical application of beneficiaries in their field of work supported by counseling and monitoring in the working environment by Atfaluna staff has expanded their horizons and given them the confidence and ability to provide high-quality services that enhance the inclusive education process for children with disabilities in public schools.

During the second quarter of the project's implementation period, the spread of the Covid19 pandemic in the Gaza Strip brought the project to a standstill, which significantly affected the continued development of the skills and capabilities of beneficiaries and their acquisition of new experience and functional skills in their field. As they needed more accumulated practice, support and direct guidance in their work environment, which is of great importance in increasing their self-confidence and abilities and gaining real practical experience as a pillar of their future career. The results of the reports proved that 97.6% of beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the employment opportunity offered to them within the action-for-money programme.

Besides, 98% of the beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the value of the monthly salary they received during the project.



During the reporting period despite the spread of the Covid19 pandemic, Aftaluna was able to carry out many training courses and initiatives in both face and distance through the zoom program to develop the skills of trainees in various fields according to their interests and orientations (gastronomy, sewing, embroidery, confectionery industry, doll manufacturing course, upholstery and sofa industry, wood antiques, furniture, graphic design, self-employment, content industry).

The courses benefited 141 trainees with and without disabilities (61 males, 80 females), of whom 90 were with disabilities (46 males, 44 females).

The results of pre and post tests for participants in self-employment courses and digital content courses showed a marked improvement in the technical skills of trainees, with the results of the digital content course showing a 58% improvement in the skills of trainees, while for the self-employment cycle, the tests showed a 50.7% improvement.

The results also showed a 82.4% improvement in personal, social and professional skills and orientations, and the results of the survey of trainees who received employment as a result of joining the self-employment course and the digital content course showed that 15 of the 34 trainees (44% of the participants) had opportunities to earn income as a result of remote work.

## **Outcome 1.1.3 Children with hearing disability have access to auditory services**

### **1.1.3.1 Auditory access of persons with hearing disability improved**

Atfaluna audiology unit has installed hearing aids for 54 children with hearing disabilities. The installation of hearing aids for children with disabilities improved their verbal communication and ability to communicate and learn as 55% of children with hearing aids improved their ability to hear from the hearing aid to the point of normal hearing until light hearing loss.

In addition, hearing devices were made for 80 children with hearing disabilities, which increased their access to hearing aids, improved their chances to be included in the society.



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## Second: Hearing Screening

The hearing screening service was carried out for 1,481 beneficiaries (833 males, 648 females), which helped the staff to diagnose the severity of hearing loss level of the children and adults.

Thus, providing the necessary medical interventions and services to address the hearing problem. In addition to conducting periodic tests to ensure the safety and quality of headphones. In addition to teaching parents how to use headphones in the most appropriate way to ensure the development of the child's hearing skills and improve his/her ability to communicate.

During the reporting period, a rapid hearing test was carried out for 4,519 beneficiaries (2,228 males, 2,291 females), 44 of whom were transferred for hearing examination, in addition to the transfer of 49 children to medical clinics.

## Third: Speech Therapy Sessions

Speech therapy sessions for 397 children (262 males, 135 females) were implemented individually and collectively through the speech and language program. Children with intermediate hearing disability are transferred to receive auditory sessions that improve their auditory memory and increase their ability to distinguish audio in order to be later included in the inclusive program at Atfaluna.





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## **Early Intervention Courses for Mothers**

In 2020, despite the exceptional hard conditions, Atfaluna has provided many educational and rehabilitative services to children from birth to the age of five with special developmental and educational needs and is linked to the early detection of disability or problem.

This programme is the basis on which other educational programmes depend, where children and their families are trained, socially and educationally, qualified and prepared for regular education, with 170 children (96 males, 74 females) benefiting from early intervention programmes.

According to the results of specialists' reports, 27% of children who received early intervention and hearing services achieved the objectives of early intervention sessions and plans, and that 60% of the targeted children showed improvement as a result of the sessions and services they received from the units and programs of Atfaluna.

Early intervention services have also included early intervention courses for 115 parents under the age of 5 with hearing problems (12 fathers, 103 mothers) and included courses to train parents to provide the needed support and intervention services for children at home.

## **Protection system for children with disabilities has been prepared and deployed**

During the reporting period, psychosocial intervention models and assessments for psychological support services for children with and without disabilities and their families in the Gaza Strip were developed with the participation of persons with disabilities with the aim of developing the social interaction of children with and without disabilities. Besides, a toolkit for extracurricular activities was prepared. Intervention measures have also been implemented to protect children with disabilities by reporting and investigating if cases of abuse are identified in the school.

## First: Advocacy Campaigns



### The “Let’s Learn Together” Advocacy Campaign

Atfaluna advocacy unit has recently launched the "Let's Learn Together" campaign in light of significant pressure and threat to the right to education for persons with disabilities due to the Covid19 pandemic and the closure of all educational institutions and the use of distance education, and the marginalization of the right of persons with disabilities to access inclusive education and educational opportunities.

In light of such situation, the "Let's Learn Together" campaign has been launched to support the right of persons with disabilities to education and the consistency of online educational curricula and platforms and to provide the needs of people with different educational disabilities depending on the type of disability.

The campaign was launched through a press conference attended by a large number of journalists, various media agencies and a group of young social media activists, who tweeted constantly on the right to inclusive education for people with disabilities.

The campaign included a range of digital activities expressing the right to education and equal educational opportunities between persons with and without disabilities, including 5 radio and television meetings, 5 meetings with human rights activists, 3 Zoom meetings on the right to education for persons with disabilities (how parents communicate with their children with

disabilities during quarantine and on the inclusion approach), the publication of many written and illustrated success stories for persons with disabilities, as well as a number of messages delivered to decision makers.

The campaign also included the publication of three billboards and four radio spots aimed to deliver messages about the right of persons with disabilities to access educational opportunities and services within an inclusive community.

The "Let's Learn Together" campaign targeted people with disabilities and highlighted the right to inclusive education and the terms of a inclusive approach, inclusion and adaptation. It has raised the awareness of community members and social media activists about the rights, educational needs and mechanisms of including people with disabilities in the society.



## Second: Workshop

Atfaluna advocacy unit has held a number of awareness workshops on the rights of persons with disabilities and on the concepts of the inclusion approach, inclusive society and appropriate terminologies that should be used when delivering messages to persons with disabilities.

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Seventy community members, with and without disabilities, have benefited from the awareness workshops which had a significant impact on raising community awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, mechanisms for community inclusion and effective communication.

Community Center for Adult Education held a number of workshops targeted employers and decision makers. The workshops aimed to educate the employers about the qualifications and the abilities of persons with disabilities and their employment needs.

In addition, awareness workshops aimed to raise employers' awareness about the right to work for persons with disabilities and the possibility of providing employment opportunities appropriate to the needs and possibilities of persons with disabilities. These workshops have had a positive impact on the employment status of a number of persons with disabilities, and these meetings have been effectively reflected in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market in various areas such as cooking, sewing and embroidery, marketing and video making.

### **Third: Field Visits**

Community Center for Adult Education has carried out 60 field and marketing visits to various institutions with the aim of raising awareness about the right of persons with disabilities to work.

The child protection unit has implemented the "Without Barriers" initiative, which targeted various transportation institutions in the Gaza Strip. It has carried out a number of field visits to raise awareness about adapting different transportation to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

The visits had a positive impact that was effectively reflected, with institutions welcoming the idea of adaptation the workplaces and transportation and including persons with disabilities into the labour market.

### **Societal partnerships to advocate for changes in policies and regulations are concluded**

Community Center for Adult Education has implemented partnerships with various civil society institutions to share experiences and services and implement the strategic objectives of Atfaluna, such as the partnership with The Khuza'a Community Youth for Adult Education and other centers and institutions.

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In addition, the work has continued among a number of other community institutions such as Tamer Institute for Community Education, Nawa for Culture and Arts and SOS Children's Villages.

**To strengthen Atfaluna’s sustainability within the framework of Disability Inclusive Development**

**Atfaluna’s institutional performance is strengthened further**

Community Center for Adult Education has prepared a trainer selection guide by holding a workshop to develop the trainer selection manual with the aim of having a clear plan of the most important knowledge, skills and experience needed by the trainers/t center, and a matrix of qualifications for trainers/at.

In addition, the capacity of the Community Center for Adult Education staff to implement community initiatives has been improved. The team's skills and abilities on inclusion approach strategies and inclusive education have been refined.

Atfaluna’s hearing unit has developed the outpatient department's case management program to facilitate the follow-up process for the development of the situation of persons with disabilities after the hearing examination.



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### **Quality of Atfaluna's interventions is improved**

Atfaluna monitoring and evaluation team periodically updates the needs of the community, especially persons with disabilities, and develops their intervention mechanisms to suit their needs, especially in the period of the covid 19 outbreak and the use of home quarantine.

In light of this, Atfaluna has released four papers on the needs of the target groups and published them and distributed them to partners and financiers, including a fact sheet on the needs of persons with disabilities in the Covid19 period and the impact of home quarantine on persons with disabilities and their families.

Monitoring and evaluation measurement of the impact of Atfaluna's interventions on beneficiary groups, in order to reach the real impact of the Atfaluna's interventions and programs and identify gaps and shortcomings in order to address them and develop effective and constructive solutions.

Atfaluna's marketing unit has developed Atfaluna's website for sale and promotion of Atfaluna products, in order to increase access locally and internationally.

### **Quality of Atfaluna's interventions is improved**

Following the outbreak of covid19 pandemic, and the need to close all institutions and stop a number of services and programmes, this situation necessitated the development of ASDC's emergency response plan. All the tools developed plans to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities at that time.

### **First: Educational Services**

Atfaluna staff worked on the use of various technological means and electronic platforms to continue the educational process, where he created educational groups for students through WhatsApp to exchange educational lessons and systematic and extracurricular activities.

In addition, Atfaluna school photographed all the lessons and put them on the school's social media account in order to reach all students.

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Teachers also carried out home visits accompanied by the school's social worker to distribute the booklet on lessons to all students who were unable to communicate electronically due to the lack of electronic devices and internet lines.



## Second: Safety Precautions

Atfaluna's staff has developed community and health messages to educate community members about precautionary measures to prevent COVID19 pandemic, and to share useful media materials across the Atfaluna's various social media platforms and media.

In addition, it has shared periodic psychological support packages for children and parents, shared recreational materials with children and translated all messages and information materials in sign language, taking into account other types of disabilities.



### Third: Emergency Humanitarian Aid

Atfaluna psychological support unit has implemented psychological support meetings through the application of individual and collective "Zoom", in order to provide psychological support to all persons with disabilities, in addition to providing psychological support to women with disabilities and parents on the concepts of protection, how to communicate and ways to promote resilience and mental health.

Atfaluna's team provided and distributed 4,190 food baskets and supplied them to 1,470 families in difficult economic conditions, including people with disabilities, 1,483 sanitary packages, cleaning materials and 1,512 child psychological support packages were distributed and delivered to beneficiary homes within 14 days of the Covid19 outbreak and household stone.

In addition, ASDC has adapted all activities, programmes and services implemented to meet the overall closure and home quarantine conditions, including early intervention services, educational and psychological support services. Some 17,000 masks were produced within Atfaluna's production units and distributed to beneficiaries and employees of local institutions in the Gaza Strip.

**To become a catalyst and recognized resource in the field of Disability Inclusive Development.**



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### **Innovative working modalities and disability inclusion solutions relevant to the Palestinian context are developed**

Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children is an important key reference in implementing the inclusion approach, including persons with disabilities in the community and implementing various inclusive programmes in all educational, health, economic and psychosocial areas.

### **Enhance lifelong education opportunities for community members within an inclusive framework**

#### **Lifelong education concepts are promoted and accessed**

Community Center for Adult Education of Atfaluna has promoted lifelong learning concepts by conducting several courses in various life skills such as networking and communication, leadership, digital marketing, etc. The center's staff has also carried out a number of professional trainings for persons with and without disabilities in order to contribute to a sustainable source of income in various professional fields such as furniture industry, embroidery and sewing.

The courses have helped to network with a number of institutions, restaurants and other centers to include persons with disabilities who have been trained in the labour market to enable them economically. Where a paid practical training opportunity was provided for a number of Persons with and without disabilities in order to develop their technical and professional skills and to enhance the communication between persons with and without disabilities.

Vocational courses, networking and communication have been increased economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, as the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market has resulted in them receiving a permanent or semi-permanent source of income after completing the practical training period, where they can support themselves and their families. The courses have also contributed to the development and strengthening of the capacities of persons with disabilities and the employment skills needed for the labour market.

In addition, as part of the development of creative youth skills, the center has implemented a number of 2 youth community initiatives, the "Be Safe" initiative and the "People-Colored Images" initiative, which aimed to promote community participation and skills in writing initiative proposals, leadership, community dialogue, enhancing personal and social communication skills, and developing environmental awareness.

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Community Center for Adult Education has implemented 3 online neighborhoods and 6 dialogue meetings to promote the learning approach, providing personal counseling, professional counseling and self-care to participants wishing to improve their living conditions. According to the center's survey on the extent to which participants benefit from the meetings and neighborhoods implemented, 80% of the participants expressed their opinion that they had developed a better understanding of their personal skills, interests and needs, with 46 trainees (20 males, 26 females) participated in these neighbourhoods.

## Opportunities

- All activities were implemented via the Zoom application because of the Covid19 pandemic, which trained Atfaluna staff to use social media platforms.
- Implementing projects that support lifelong learning.
- The existence of the Community Center for Adult Education has provided the opportunity to participate by persons with and without disabilities within the inclusive approach.
- The presence of a number of teachers with hearing disabilities who have been trained and taught in advance intensive training courses on graphics, editing and computer skills. Their skills and abilities have been invested in the photography, manufacture and editing of educational videos and psychological support materials through the formation of a committee of these teachers who work as a qualified, cooperative and highly qualified team, which has had an impact and effectiveness in facilitating the educational process electronically and displaying the content of educational materials visually supported by sign language and achieving inclusiveness and attracting the attention of students It helps them easily understand the goals along with their families.
- Attending a conference and train on modern devices and network with bodies and companies of interest to Atfaluna and its beneficiaries.
- Investing relations and networks with companies in the interest of Atfaluna in terms of delivering the service.

## Challenges and difficulties ASDC faced in 2020

- The spread of Covid19 pandemic, the closure of life walks and complex actions that hinder the implementation of activities
- The difficulty of finding employment spaces for persons with disabilities who have completed vocational training courses in Atfaluna because of their inability to recognize

the abilities of persons with disabilities and their lack of awareness of the inclusive approach.

- Parents of school students were unable to provide educational expenses for their children and transportation fees because most parents suffered from severe poverty.
- Lack of awareness of school staff about the inclusive development approach and child protection and the rooting of unsatisfied practices towards children.
- Instability of the general situation in the Gaza Strip due to continued restrictions on crossings, shrinking sources of external financing and economic isolation from the outside world
- The inability to provide some raw materials for manufacturing in the artisanal production section due to the closure of the crossings and the refusal of the Israeli side to enter the required materials.

## Success Stories

### Mohammed Zaqout



**“I love my school. Everyone here understands me, loves me and helps me” expressed Mohamed.**

**Mohamed is a child who suffered from several health problems since his birth; delayed growth, mobility, mental and hearing disabilities, as well as heart and stomach problems. He was on the edge of life!**

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The parents were his savior and the only source of hope for him. They never gave up on their child. They insisted that there was a possibility for him to survive. Many surgeries, diagnoses and shocks were in between. After 10 years of a very long treatment journey, Mohamed was able to walk and to move around independently. and his mental abilities developed within the normal level.

In 2018 Mohamed visited the Atfaluna School for the first time, after undergoing cognitive testing and at the age of 12, he was enrolled in grade one. The Atfaluna School team immediately introduced an individual educational plan for the young boy to support his speech, writing and reading skills and to teach him sign language for communication purposes. Mohammed also received psychological support as he was included in extracurricular activities including library activities, narration, representation, story drawing and many other activities that were implemented by Atfaluna school.

At first, "Mohamed" was apprehensive, his parents were monitoring their son's experience closely, keeping a close eye on his development. The school members worked on motivating Mohamed and involving his parents in his education approach. The parents were also enrolled in several courses in sign language and psychological support to facilitate their communication with Mohamed.

As the months went by, "Mohammed" became a very active student in the school and he created many friendships with his schoolmates. He became energetic and optimistic as if he had found himself.

Mohamed proved that he can succeed, laugh, make friends, and live his life to the fullest. He has successfully finished grades one and two and is now enrolled in grade three.

"Thank God Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children exists, which certainly was a great shelter for our son and for many other children like him." Mohamed's mother expressed.

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## Haya Qusa



**“I can! My disability does not limit my creativity.” says Haya Abdel-Hakam Qusa.**

**Haya, a young woman of 21 years old. After she had graduated from high school, she had a Photoshop course, and then she joined the university to study creative technology. During her life exploring journey, Haya faced several difficulties in expressing her dreams and passion, she didn’t know where to start from and how to make her ambitions achievable. She joined the freelance training course implemented by Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, and this was her turning point.**

**Despite the difficulties she faces; as a young woman with hearing impairment, she was able to fulfill her passion. Haya could communicate with the clients, negotiate, convince and impress them with her ideas. She was able to improve her designing and editing skills to be such a creative designer.**

**Haya made a good progress during her training on freelance platforms and enjoyed the experience greatly. During the training, Haya significantly got 4 jobs, the income of one of them was 100\$.**

**After the training was completed, Haya received several opportunities at designing creative advertisements for companies and institutions, which enhanced her confidence and strengthened her knowledge and experience in the field.**

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**Haya continues to face some difficulties in communicating with her clients on freelance platforms, however, with a little help from her mother, communication becomes easier and more enjoyable.**

**The freelance training course represents a sparkle of hope for a better quality of life for Haya, and other deaf youth with disabilities in the Gaza Strip with more achievements and opportunities awaiting.**