



Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

جمعية صداقة
كامدن أبوديس

*Promoting human rights and respect for
international humanitarian law*

VOLUNTEER IN PALESTINE (Aug 08)

“It was the best thing I have done in my life”

“I expected to be shocked by the Wall. The settlements were more huge and much worse than I could have imagined. The people are great. It is horrible for people there but I felt safe all the time.

It was the best thing I have done in my life and I want to go back again.”

(Volunteer returned in November 2007)



Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association is a charitable trust whose aims are to promote human rights and respect for humanitarian law in the small Palestinian town of Abu Dis in Palestine and in Palestine generally. As part of our work we are making friendship links between Camden and Abu Dis and developing projects in such areas as education, health and youth work.

Please as a first step look at our website www.camdenabudis.net for information about us, about Abu Dis and the comments of some past volunteers.

Camden Abu Friendship Association is not a volunteer bureau. But since a first CADFA member went as a volunteer English teacher to Palestine in 2005 (*see p7) we have discovered that there are many people who would like to go and a number of Abu Dis organisations who would like them to work with them.

We have successfully introduced volunteers to a number of organisations in Abu Dis and we are encouraged by two things – the fact that the volunteers think it is a worthwhile experience, and the fact that people in Abu Dis appreciate the help and we are constantly being asked to find more volunteers.

We can put you in touch with our fellow organisation in Abu Dis who will help with arrangements for work and accommodation. In London, we can put you in touch with returned volunteers who can give you tips on travel to Abu Dis etc.

Usually people are asked to work about 20-25 hours a week

CADFA's responsibilities

As a small organisation whose focus is human rights, we are not able at this stage to become a volunteer agency or to take responsibility for volunteers who go to Abu Dis. It is essential that volunteers understand that and before you go we have to ask you to sign a waiver (see last page).

We however are pleased that you want to work in Abu Dis and we have got people in Abu Dis (the CADFA co-ordinator) and in London who are very willing to help, and if you feel uneasy about anything, please speak to someone.

If you complete your term as a volunteer, we will organise a reference based on the work you have done.

Volunteering in Abu Dis

Work that needs doing

In terms of work in Abu Dis, there is particular interest in English teaching. We have found people interested in being short-term teachers in the Al-Quds University, in schools and community centres of Abu Dis. Dar Assadaqa, a community centre supported by CADFA, has a collection of English-language materials, and there is internet access from Abu Dis which will help you find more.

There are also people volunteering to work in the fields of health and youth work and on a range of community projects. We can put you in touch with past volunteers who will tell you what they did and what it was like for them.

Volunteers

Projects are looking for people who are independent, good at organising themselves, good at working with other people and respectful of different cultures.

People who have training and experience in particular areas are sought after, though many people have useful skills – if in doubt do ask us.

It is really helpful to ongoing projects to have volunteers who can spend a reasonable amount of time – say 3 months (the amount of time people usually get on a visa)– so that classes can run continuously and so you have time to adapt and learn what is happening and start really to be useful before leaving! - If you can do less than that, it is worth talking to us still. In the summer in particular, shorter stays of a month or so can be useful to summer projects.

Expectations – volunteers' responsibilities

Projects need people who will fulfil their commitment, be punctual, serious and committed, as you would be expected to be at a work place in Britain. When you get to Abu Dis, you will be agree a programme with different organisations and you are expected please to keep to it and not to amend it without reference to the CADFA co-ordinator at that end.

You are asked to respect the local culture for example in the way you dress and in your relations with local people. Respectable behaviour will make a difference not only when you are there but also to those who come after you and (if CADFA introduce you) to CADFA as well.

The CADFA co-ordinator in Abu Dis is always willing to help, but please respect his time off with his family.

Preparation

We very much encourage volunteers to visit other parts of Palestine first – to help you understand properly what is happening there. We organise a programme of tours to Palestine and one of these might be useful for you.

Please do read and find out all you can about Palestine before you come. If you haven't done so before, we strongly encourage you to come on one of our organised tours of Palestine.

It is worth looking at articles and information on the CADFA website, at the Olive Co-op notes for travellers, and speaking to people who have been volunteers for CADFA before.

Language

It is not essential to speak Arabic. People learn English as a second language and lots of people like to use it. But we are pleased to find that lots of volunteers

are interested in the Arabic language and many have started to learn it. We can arrange an Arabic teacher for you if you want one.

We have prepared a simple vocabulary list that can help at the beginning. Before you go, you may like to ask us if we are organising an Arabic class as we do have plans to do this. But don't worry if you can't find time – you will manage well with your English.

Costs

Living in Palestine is relatively inexpensive. Your main costs are likely to be

- (1) **The airfare** (which can vary a lot)
- (2) **Our tours of Palestine** currently cost around £450 pounds for a week - we can make it slightly less for volunteers. These tours are not compulsory but we strongly recommend them.
- (3) **Housing** (a CADFA volunteer currently pays 750 NIS a month for a room in the guesthouse - something like 120 pounds a month at the current rate of exchange)
- (4) **Living costs - food etc** - this depends on you. If you budget on 5 pounds a day you should have enough to eat, and other costs depend on what you like to do.
- (5) **Materials for teaching** - see below

Contributions to CADFA's work in Abu Dis including to Dar Assadaqa

Most of our volunteers work some of their time at Dar Assadaqa, which is a community centre we support. However, as you will see, it is fairly poor, and crucially it does not have a photocopier at the moment. Even things like board pens (always disappearing!) are a cost that the co-ordinator there has to worry about.

We would like to ask our volunteers to consider the costs of materials they may use, and to think if possible of ways to bring them, or ways to raise the money to pay for them.

One thing that is very important is that you don't spend money on materials assuming that Dar Assadaqa can pay you back - You would need to agree this with our co-ordinator there BEFORE spending any money. And you need to understand that Dar Assadaqa currently does not have much funding. Thanks!

Perhaps when you know you are going, you would like to talk to friends and colleagues who may be able to give a few pounds that would make a real difference to what you are able to do with students there. Or you might like to organise a fund-raising event of some sort, for example for the Dar Assadaqa photocopier fund.

We would be happy to write a formal letter explaining what you are going to be doing and supporting your request for this money, if it would help.

Practical things

Palestine doesn't have its own currency. Israeli shekels are in use most of the time, though people also use Jordanian dinars and American dollars, and are very good at mental arithmetic from rapid translations! There are ATMs in Jerusalem and in Azariyeh (right next to Abu Dis) so you can draw money out easily.

Electric sockets use two round pins – You may want to take an adaptor with you.

Your mobile phone will be very useful – Take a phone that is unlocked so you can put in a local SIM.

Security

If you are going, it is important that you understand that Palestine is in the middle of a huge political crisis and that life can therefore be unstable and difficult. You should be aware of the security issues there - There are military incursions and numerous difficulties living under a tough occupation.

In general volunteers in Abu Dis do not go near places of conflict. Sometimes visitors to Abu Dis from Britain find it hard to believe how calm it often feels as Abu Dis, in the Jerusalem suburbs, is in general a quieter place than those that you will see on the news. People are on the whole astonishingly helpful and there are many who have told us that they feel safer in Abu Dis than in London. The situation is difficult mainly for the people living there, and not for volunteers, as a British passport gets you through most checkpoints and situations.

But the situation is always changing, and in the current political context, you cannot be promised calm.

Helping CADFA when you are there

We would very much appreciate occasional reports on how you are doing in Abu Dis. If you are happy, we would like to put some of them on the website in our volunteer section, so people who are thinking of becoming volunteers can read them. You will also be working with people from Abu Dis who may have stories that are worth putting on the website – and they may be very pleased to see them there (do check!). Please do send photos, writings, video that could be useful on the CADFA website. And keep in touch with us if you have any concerns.

If you are doing any work that relates to links between Abu Dis and Camden, this is important to CADFA - please keep in touch with the CADFA trustees and make sure they are aware of it. If you are doing any work that relates to links between different organisations in Abu Dis, please do keep in touch with the CADFA co-ordinator who needs to be aware of this too.

Do please contribute your good ideas – we know they will come up!

Remember please that you shouldn't speak formally on behalf of CADFA without referring to a CADFA trustee; if you are asked to, please check with the CADFA trustees. (If you want to talk about your own experiences, of course that is fine)

Coming back to Britain

This can be harder than expected. First of all, people very often fall in love with the place and the people, and typically want to stay longer! Secondly, it can take a while to adjust after living under Occupation – even if you are relatively little affected by it in comparison with the Palestinians, the situation is deeply upsetting. We hope you will keep in touch with us when you return.

We would specially love you to come to some of our meetings and talk about your time there. That would help us and we hope be useful to you.

So far we have put many volunteers in touch with Abu Dis organisations and we continue to do it, not only because people in Abu Dis appreciate it, but because every one of those volunteers has come back enthusiastic about their time there.

CADFA Aug 08

The first CADFA volunteer's story - Volunteer to Teach in Palestine



NATFHE member Gill Kaffash retired in July 2004 after 25 years as a Basic Skills lecturer, 11 at Tower Hamlets College. In November 2005, she started teaching English again – but this time the venue was the town of Abu Dis in Palestine.

A volunteer for 5 weeks at the Al-Quds University and in a community centre, both situated near the Separation Wall that cuts Abu Dis from Jerusalem, she learned lots about the difficulties of Palestinian life under Israeli Occupation and the massive interruption to normal life created by the Separation Wall.

She met friends who could not get to hospital when they were ill, who were cut off by the Wall from the jobs they had had, or from close family members. She saw the disruption to study at the University which has the 8-metre Wall built across its campus. And she had an enthusiastic reception from her students, who were very keen to learn.

Gill has come back keen to find other lecturers who would like to help in their holidays or after retirement. **“More volunteers to help with training or English teaching would be of real practical help. If their experience is like mine, they will have a wonderful time, despite the horrors of the Occupation”.**

GOING AS A VOLUNTEER

If you are interested in being put in touch with an organisation in Abu Dis who might want you to volunteer, please write about yourself on letter or email including answers to these questions ...

- Name
- Address
- Contact details
- Past education, skills, experience, areas of responsibility
- Interests
- Why you would like to volunteer in Abu Dis and what you hope to get out of it
- What you can contribute as a volunteer, including your thoughts on your responsibilities there
- If working with young people, have you had a recent police check?
- Dates you hope to go
- Any other thoughts

Please also sign and date this and return it to CADFA PO Box 34265 London NW5 2PD:

I understand that CADFA is not a volunteer bureau and that if CADFA introduces me to a project in Abu Dis, and if I decide to work for them, the responsibility stays with me; and I agree that CADFA will not have any responsibility for my health and safety while I am there.

Sign

Name

Date:

