

## .....Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

### Arab Evangelical School, Hebron

#### How it all started

The Arab Evangelical School and Home was founded in 1954, by twin sisters Ada and Ida Stoltzfus, who were American missionaries. They were working with economic refugees – people who had lost their land as the new nation of Israel was being created from Palestinian territory. Through this work, they came across many needy children and this led to the establishment of a boarding school, originally named the Mennonite Orphanage for Boys.

The school aims to provide the highest standard of academic and social schooling to all its students. Priority admission is given to boarding students and those from poor families. The school teaches its pupils according to its motto, which is taken from Proverbs 22 verse 6: *Teach a child to choose the right path and when he is older he will remain upon it.* The Directors, Gregg and Rawda Doolittle, and most of the staff are Christian, whilst the majority of the pupils are from Muslim families.

#### Key facts

Founded: 1954

Location: Hebron, West Bank

First Grant from BibleLands: 1978

BibleLands' Grant: £59,484 p.a.



*Some of the students during assembly*

The city of Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem, was once the capital of Israel. King David ruled from this town before moving the capital to Jerusalem. It is a very ancient city, with the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca and Leah in its great mosque.

The city is sacred both to Muslims and Jews and unfortunately violent clashes are not uncommon. Basic supplies such as electricity and water are often cut off, and some of the teachers and pupils have found it difficult – at times impossible – to get to the school; especially the many teachers who live in Bethlehem, a mostly Christian town.

Unemployment in the area is high, and many of the pupils' families are unable to pay the full school fees. The school seeks to prioritise the poor, operating a scale of fees, offering a boarding facility free of charge, and providing an expanding bus service to spare parents the cost of transporting their children to the school from the surrounding villages.

## Current Activities:

*The School:* This primary school has around 300 students, aged between 4 and 12 years. The children follow the Palestinian government's curriculum, with a special emphasis on music and literature, and they learn English from an early age.

The school has set up a deaf unit, with kit part-funded by BibleLands. The unit is growing due to the high demand locally, and seeks to identify hearing-impaired children early and reintegrate them into mainstream classes after a year or two.

Most of the students come from very poor homes and from families affected by sickness, bereavement or the ongoing tensions in the area. They receive a good education – the key to future employment. The school is very popular, and has a good reputation in the local area.

There are Christian assemblies every day and each Christmas the pupils take part in a Nativity play, to which many visitors come.

*The Home:* There are about 20 boarders at the school, who are all boys. These children are unable to live with their families for a variety of reasons, but they return home to visit their parents at weekends, and also return home for the Christmas, Easter and summer holidays. The boys help out with chores such as washing up, laying the tables or helping to carry fruit and vegetables back from the market to the school.

## The Future:

The school recently purchased some land in Hebron, on which they plan to construct a new school building. Their current premises is rented and having a building of their own is a long-held dream. Land has also been bought in Bethlehem, with plans afoot to build a secondary school.

The deaf unit meets a real need in the area, and offers great opportunity for development, particularly if good teachers can be found and retained.

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The effectiveness of a school is seen through its pupils and many students from this school do well in their secondary education and then continue to study at university. Former pupils have even become teachers at the school.

In the course of the Hebron land purchase, the school met with some quite fierce opposition from a local Islamic group. One man's testimony is illustrative of the great work being done here: "I used to be a member, but after seeing my daughter blossom in your class for the hearing-impaired I have decided to leave."

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