



Living Behind the Headlines

Silwan, situated on the outskirts of the Old City of Jerusalem is linked to the ancient city's holy sites. It is located on the ancient ruins of the earliest known civilizations in the Jerusalem area, making it a vital center of archeological exploration.

Silwan is a perfect example of the complexity of Jerusalem, a site that intensifies the debate and conflict over the city.

Yet, underlying that conflict are the day-to-day struggles of Silwan residents.

The neighborhood of Silwan is home to 70,000 Arab residents who struggle to exercise their rights and receive services due them.

The Jerusalem Foundation identified the Silwan neighborhood as one in need, with an overarching goal to empower Arab residents and build capacity among their leaders to improve basic services, from garbage collection to well baby clinics. With the support of donors in Switzerland and Canada, and in particular, the Dear Foundation, change is coming to Silwan.



Due to narrow roadways, garbage trucks cannot pass and strewn garbage has become a public health hazard, particularly when workers dump construction waste to avoid dumping fees. Silwan leaders, with the assistance of the Jerusalem Intercultural Center (JICC), started a grassroots campaign to increase awareness about the problem within the municipality. Their efforts paid off - the municipality recently agreed to strategically place additional dumpsters and to increase weekly pickups.

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With respect to health care, well-baby clinics have been sorely lacking in Silwan. Long known to modern medicine as critical to early detection of developmental delays and basic infancy care, children in Silwan have no well-baby clinic. There are conflicting claims about the creation of the clinic. The municipality asserts that a clinic was made available but was closed due to insufficient usage. Residents contend that the clinic was inaccessible and did not have convenient hours. Either way, residents currently have no clinic.

Silwan residents, with the help of the JICC, are now more empowered because they understand the vagaries of the municipality's often lengthy process in creating and funding a well baby clinic. And they understand their critical role in bringing this issue to

the forefront to secure what they rightfully deserve in their community. As of this writing, the Ministry of Health approved the opening of a well-baby clinic in Silwan.

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And, there is the decades-old problem of day laborers, teenagers from throughout the Jerusalem area who cart wares at the Mahane Yehuda market instead of books. These children lack schooling, social activities, hot meals and a proper framework for children their age. This year, the Handcart Children program provided children with enrichment and social activities, integrating them with Silwan youth and returning them to their childhood. A small group of these children also received special assistance with their studies, enabling them to improve their academic standing for entry to junior high school. Coordinators visit the children's homes and schools to ensure academic improvement and to attend to the overall well being of the family.

And, art has come to Silwan. Children can attend art workshops run by the Barbur Gallery, with the help of the Bezalel Academy of the Arts.

Grassroots community organizing skills are critical to improving the lives of Silwan residents and we will continue to work hard to empower them and assist them in securing equal access to services enjoyed by the rest of the city.

