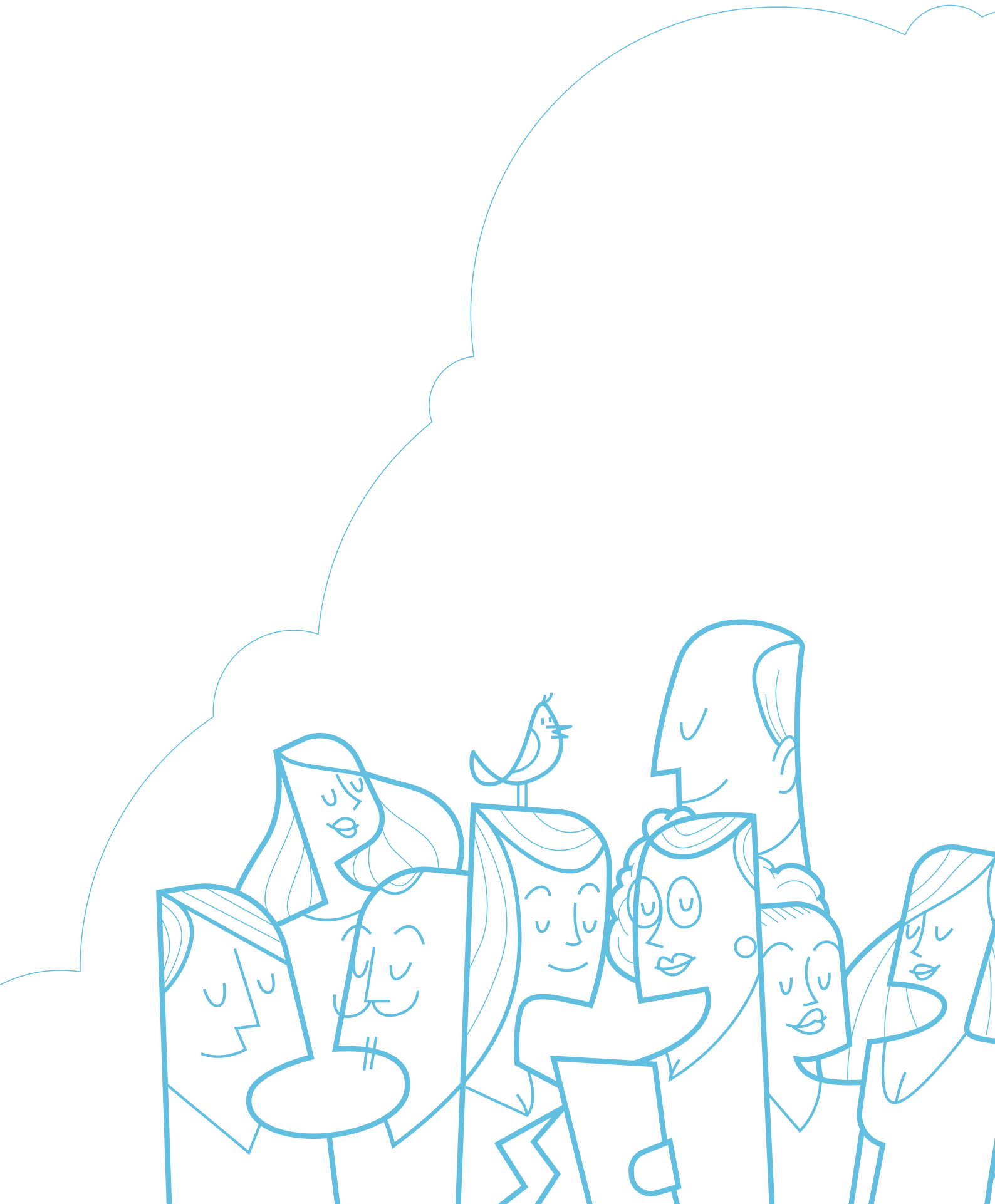


alQaws' Accomplishments *for* 2016

Queer Organizing in Palestine:
Stronger Leadership and Growing Visibility







Dear Friends,

More than ever, we at alQaws are proud to share with you the main highlights and accomplishments from 2016. This year flew by, so this is the perfect opportunity for us to take the time to reflect on the work led by our remarkable activists and dedicated staff, and to share it with you. Yes, we are tired, but the undeniable momentum we have built up over this and prior years has already started to spark our energy and fuel our sense of hope for another dynamic and fulfilling year.

With great optimism for the future, this newsletter enthusiastically marks the end of the first year of our new three-year Strategic Plan. We end this year and embark on the next with a stronger, more diverse leadership, and, across Palestinian society, an increasing visibility of, openness toward, and desire for our work. This year we sustained and developed existing projects, experimented with new strategies that expanded our reach and impact, and directly engaged a vast number of teachers, journalists,

therapists, university students, and civil society organizations in important (and difficult) conversations about sexual and gender diversity in Palestine.

Our work with LGBTQ communities and individuals expanded throughout Palestine to reach new geographical areas, while we maintained our local leadership in other areas. Our grassroots work with both LGBTQ communities and different societal sectors is a dear opportunity for mutual growth and change. It goes without saying that we aim to strengthen our impact and lead change among the target groups we worked directly with over the last year. First and foremost, though, we are committed to building ever more resilient communities, and to staying vigilant to the changes we need to lead inside alQaws in order to grow (and to continue enjoying our work!).

We are proud to share with you some of our 2016 highlights:



Professional Advocacy Group for Palestinian Therapists - from Haifa to Ramallah:

Our Professional Advocacy Group offers a space for Palestinian therapists to focus on the sexual and gender dimensions in therapy. Over the course of group meetings, participants confront their personal attitudes toward sexual and gender diversity, expand their knowledge about these issues, and apply their professional tools toward creating safe spaces for LGBTQ individuals and their families. The therapists also organize various advocacy actions amongst their colleagues, growing an ever-increasing network of counseling professionals who are “friendly” and knowledgeable when it comes to gender and sexual diversity. During 2016, we completed our third year of work with three different therapist’s groups in the Haifa area, engaging **25** therapists total. The group organized two study days (in March of [2015](#) and [2016](#)) in Nazareth for counseling and educational and therapy workers, attended by **150** total participants.

As our Haifa group was closing (a new Haifa group will begin in 2018), alQaws opened its [first](#) therapist’s group in the West Bank, with **23** members from **14** organizations from more than **6** different West Bank locations. To recruit this group, we reached out to more than 45 organizations. We are excited to start this journey with the West Bank group, and look forward to deepening these professional conversations and moving forward to expand safe spaces for LGBTQ individuals and communities.

Educational Trainings - from High Schools to Civil Society Organizations

Our [educational training](#) is an opportunity to open direct and constructive discussions about sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian society—from exploring basic concepts to confronting personal attitudes and societal norms—with Palestinian activists, students, civil society organizations, teachers, and more. This year, our training team provided over **100** training hours to **24** different civil society organizations and professional institutions working with youth and marginalized groups, including a special West Bank public training. Our participants came from diverse communities and cities across Palestine, including: the Galilee, Haifa, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, and more. One of the trainings we organized was our second specialized training (30 hours) for **18** high school teachers in [Shafa’amer](#) in the Galilee. In total, alQaws’ educational trainings directly reached over **170** participants, and indirectly reached thousands of people at different organizations, communities, institutions, and schools.

Engaging with Palestinian University Students

Over the last year, we (for the first time) worked directly with Palestinian students, scholars, and university administrations to open a discussion about local sexual and gender diversity

issues. This initiative intersects with our educational training (above) and our effort to provide community spaces (see below), but it demands its own special emphasis due to the remarkable change we were able to create inside Palestinian student communities and universities.

Not only did alQaws take an active role in sparking conversations on gender and sexual diversity, but a group of passionate students have taken it upon themselves to drive efforts to address these issues inside their own universities, including at Birzeit University, Bethlehem University, alQuds University, Al-Najah University, and with Palestinian students at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University. We feel privileged for the trust that students and universities have put in alQaws' trainings, and we look forward to strengthening these relationships so together we can lead lasting change.

Alkhat - A Safe Address for Queers in Palestine

This year marks [Alkhat](#)- Information and Listening Hotline's sixth year anniversary, making it alQaws longest running, consistently operated support service. Led by a dedicated professional team of 15 volunteers working every Sunday and Wednesday, Alkhat ended this year with another 105 shifts logged. Alkhat's team listened to and supported more than 230 callers via the telephone hotline and online chat platform. To strengthen and support our amazing volunteer team, alQaws' professional staff provided daily assistance and ongoing supervision (one-on-one and team-based), in order to ensure volunteers' professional growth and the

quality of the services we provide. A couple of months ago, we aimed to expand our reach even further by launching a new marketing campaign, including a short [video](#) presenting Alkhat's objectives, target audience, and sample questions frequently asked by callers. The video uses Alkhat volunteers' actual experiences over the past six years. At the same time, we executed a street campaign, distributing complementary [stickers](#) in various public locations. The stickers focused on selected statements from the video and introduced fresh, hip graphic illustrations. Our goal was to expand our outreach beyond social media, so that we have a strong offline presence, as well as to enhance and reinvigorate Alkhat's social media platform online. As yet another sign of our society's progress on gender and sexual diversity issues, this highly visible outreach campaign has been welcomed with great acclaim, having received excellent feedback and engagement on social media and in response to the sticker distribution. In addition, we noted a marked increase in callers to the Alkhat hotline immediately after the campaign's start.

Community Spaces & Youth Platforms Across Palestine

alQaws has never retreated from our commitment to work with diverse LGBTQ communities all across Palestine, even despite colonial borders that fragment our society and present nearly insurmountable obstacles to creating open spaces for this work. Over the last decade, we worked in four main centers: East

Jerusalem, Ramallah, Haifa, and Yaffa. This work necessarily varied in its intensity and sustainability over the last few years due to limited capacity and the ongoing scarcity of resources that affects our whole society. In our new strategic plan, we committed to working equally across these four centers, to developing and sustaining a dynamic and energized leadership, and to expanding our reach to new, even remote, areas. Our monthly youth forums and activist spaces throughout Palestine seek to provide a safe space for local discussions about the lives and experiences of Palestinian LGBTQ youth. The meetings are organized monthly by alQaws' local leadership in these locations.

In 2016, we opened two youth spaces in East Jerusalem and [Yaffa](#) (through the Palestinian students at Tel Aviv University), and operated two activist groups in Haifa and Ramallah. We continue to reach out to youth in other areas, aiming to learn more about different groups' needs and to develop suitable spaces and programs that will strengthen queer individuals and groups in all areas of Palestine.

New Field Research: Attitudes & Trends in Palestinian Media on Sexual & Gender Diversity Issues.

During 2016, we finished and published a two-year [research](#) project titled "*Attitudes & Trends in Palestinian Media on Sexual & Gender Diversity Issues.*" The research explores Palestinian media's attitude in dealing

with sexual and gender issues since 2008, though media monitoring of **15** media outlets and interviews with **20** Palestinian journalists. To communicate the findings and recommendations, we held a series of closed [workshops](#) for Palestinian journalists, reporters, editors, and broadcasters in July 2016. The findings range from the need for educational and language training for journalists, the lack of editorial policy when publishing articles about LGBTQ issues and sexual and gender diversity, the inconsistent language used in different newspapers, and sometimes in the same newspaper, and the media's overall interest in items that bring ratings rather than adhere to professional coverage standards, and more. alQaws' team developed a strategy and work plan for implementing a response to these findings during 2017, as well as designing a new "Local Media Coordinator" position to start in January 2017, which will expand our professional team from 4 to 5 people. This report is the latest publication in alQaws' *Attitudes and Trends* research series, which began with *Attitudes of Palestinian Civil Society on Sexual Rights* (Arabic only), published in autumn 2013. This research was conducted and published with the support of Heinrich Boll's Palestine and Jordan Office.

The Second Sexual & Gender Diversity Academic School

Our [second](#) academic school, "Sexual Politics in the Colonial Context of Palestine," took place September 1-3, 2016, and involved **30** participants,

including activists, academics, and speakers. The now biannual three-day event aims to create a space for diverse viewpoints, ideas, and backgrounds among Palestinian activists and academics. This year's program discussed 4 main topics: (1) sexual and gender politics, including theory, key concepts in sex and gender, and the power relations that shape femininity and masculinity, and regulate different sexual and gender orientations; (2) dialectical relationships between social constructs and the colonial context of Palestine vis-a-vis sexual discourses and activism; (3) how sexual and gender identities are shaped in a colonial context, and how we could redefine these identities in ways that resist patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial powers; and (4) how sexual and gender rights and discourses became mediators of neoliberal policies and colonial practices, and how we could rebuild a local discourse that challenges the rights-based approach.

During the three days, speakers, academic researchers, and activists shared rich presentations on innovative topics, including femininity and masculinity in the colonial context, challenges in local queer organizing, economical reading for sexual politics in Palestine, neo-liberalism and a sexual movement in Palestine, sexual politics in nationalism and the state, and more.

As a continuation of the second academic school, the organizing committee issued a call for papers that aims to build on the schools' success and expand the reach of this experience and discussions. We plan to publish these articles in the spring of 2017. To read our first issue published in 2015, please click [here](#).

Additional Achievements

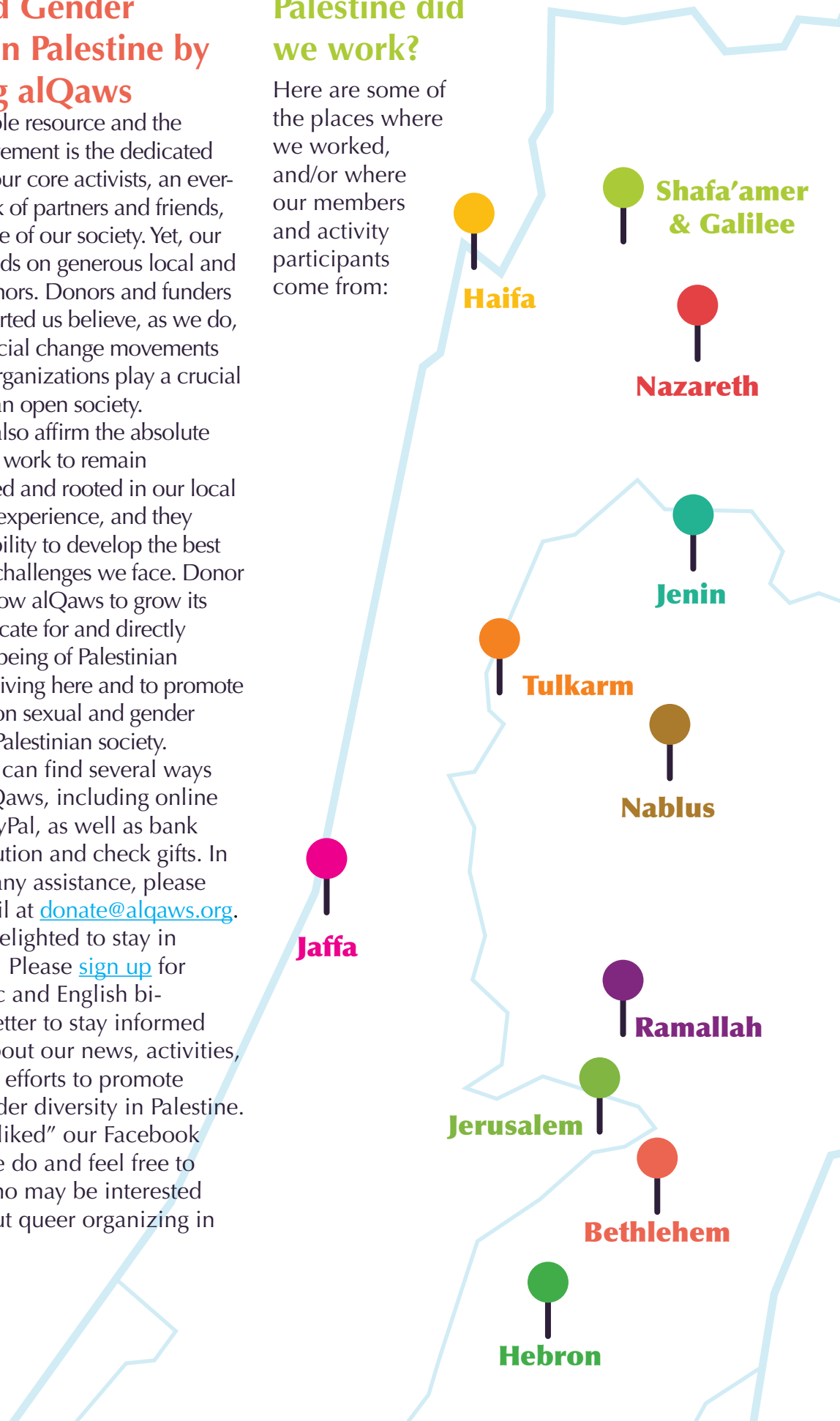
The above activities are only a selection of our highlights from 2016. Alongside these, our activists and team led several other energizing and necessary projects, like our monthly discussion series (held at a public cafe) "Hawamesh," which attracted hundreds in open conversations about sexual and gender diversity issues in Palestine. Our "TransFocus" initiative, which provided one-on-one support for 15 trans folks during the year through support through the health system, with families, and in their personal journey. In addition, we continue to organize our Queer Community Parties, which attracted hundreds of LGBTQs and friends to celebrate sexual and gender diversity in an open and safe space. We networked with tens of organizations across Palestine, started a new video campaign that will launch in spring 2017, and continue building our new community space in the West Bank with new members and activists, including an outreach program in cities across the West Bank. And, finally, we organized two national leadership meetings for alQaws that marked the largest gathering of leadership until now, proving that our effort to build and strengthen our leadership truly is the foundation for sustainable change and impact. We are ready for next year, what about you?

Join the movement for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestine by supporting alQaws

Our most valuable resource and the heart of our movement is the dedicated engagement of our core activists, an ever-growing network of partners and friends, and the resilience of our society. Yet, our work also depends on generous local and international donors. Donors and funders who have supported us believe, as we do, that visionary social change movements and grassroots organizations play a crucial role in creating an open society. Our supporters also affirm the absolute necessity for our work to remain community-based and rooted in our local knowledge and experience, and they believe in our ability to develop the best solutions to the challenges we face. Donor contributions allow alQaws to grow its capacity to advocate for and directly support the wellbeing of Palestinian LGBTQ people living here and to promote open discourse on sexual and gender diversity within Palestinian society. In this [link](#), you can find several ways to donate to alQaws, including online donation via PayPal, as well as bank transfer contribution and check gifts. In case you need any assistance, please send us an email at donate@alqaws.org. We would be delighted to stay in touch with you. Please [sign up](#) for alQaws's Arabic and English bi-monthly newsletter to stay informed and updated about our news, activities, events, and our efforts to promote sexual and gender diversity in Palestine. If you haven't "liked" our Facebook [page](#) yet, please do and feel free to invite others who may be interested in updates about queer organizing in Palestine.

Where in Palestine did we work?

Here are some of the places where we worked, and/or where our members and activity participants come from:



Who did we work with this year?

This year we reached, and directly worked with diverse segments of our society:



200
Therapists & Counselors Trained



80
alQaws Activists and Leadership




150
University/School Staff & Students



600
LGBTQs Joining our Activities



170
Civil Society Organizations' Staff & Activists



230
LGBTQs Calling our Hotline



50
Journalists



القوس

للتعددية الجنسيّة والجندريّة في المجتمع الفلسطينيّ
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