

# annual report 2017



**unrwa**  
usa national committee

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## **unrwa usa's mission**

we aim to promote a life of dignity and human development for palestine refugees by informing the american public about unrwa's work and generating support for its programs in the gaza strip, the west bank (including east jerusalem), syria, lebanon, and jordan.

**we are dedicated to  
showing palestine refugees  
that americans care**



# letter from our leaders

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Dear friends,

2017 marked 50 years of occupation, 10 years of blockade, and nearly 70 years since the Nakba.

Even more concerning, this year we faced the challenges that followed the 2016 presidential election and the corresponding shifts in US refugee and humanitarian policy. But with this uncertainty, came the vital, steadfast, and positive role of the American public in supporting UNRWA and of ensuring that Palestine refugees voices continued to be heard and prioritized.

This year, thanks to our community of supporters, UNRWA USA contributed to \$2.1 million worth of programs for refugees in the Middle East, including food assistance and shelter repair in Gaza, specialized services and safe spaces for refugees with disabilities, mental health counselors for traumatized children in Gaza, and dozens of scholarships awarded to refugee scholars who now have a chance to achieve their fullest potential.

In spite of the political change that we faced in 2017, Americans stepped up and sent the powerful message to Palestine refugees that we have not forgotten about their rights, humanity, and dignity. We're proud of what we've accomplished in 2017 and look forward to what we can achieve together in 2018!

**With immense gratitude,**



**Abby Smardon**  
Executive Director



**Amb.(ret.) Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.**  
Board Chair

# 2017 impact

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**we prioritize funding some of  
unrwa's most at-risk and highest  
impact services and programs**



**spotlight on some of this  
year's achievements**



**5,694** refugee families  
provided with food  
assistance



**42** mental health  
counselors' salaries  
funded



**67** university scholarships  
funded



**129** shelters repaired





# mental health in gaza

**42 unrwa counselors'  
salaries covered  
benefiting 4,135 girls  
and boys**

Due to a decade of blockade, three traumatic Israeli military assaults, and little to no freedom of movement, every child in the Gaza Strip age 10 or older has witnessed death, destruction, and displacement. In order to help refugee children and families cope with the traumas they are forced to endure, the UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) provides counseling and psychosocial support.

Through American support in 2017, \$696,144 was contributed to CMHP to provide the equivalent of 42 counselors for one year. These counselors led 12,159 individual counseling sessions for 2,170 girls and boys; 1,324 group sessions for 1,965 girls and boys; awareness raising sessions with parents and teachers; and sessions with students that covered life skills like positive thinking and conflict resolution.





# moving for mental health: gaza 5k + other events

With multiple events across the United States, the Gaza 5K walk/run - UNRWA USA's signature event - has attracted thousands of walkers, runners, and hundreds of volunteers to move for mental health, raising more than \$1,000,000 since the inaugural 2012 event.

In 2017, proceeds supported the UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme. Beyond fundraising, the buzz generated around the Gaza 5K helped educate a wider American audience about UNRWA and the conditions for Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip.

Other active ways Americans supported CMHP included [climbing mountains](#), [running marathons](#), hosting events, and through the 'Gifts for Refugees' campaign.



# food assistance in gaza

**5,694 refugee families  
provided with unrwa  
food assistance**

Due to food insecurity caused by the blockade's de-development of Gaza's once thriving economy, nearly one million of the 1.3 million Palestine refugee population there rely on UNRWA food assistance. That number was just 80,000 in the year 2000.

During the month of Ramadan, Americans responded to the great humanitarian need by providing food assistance to 5,694 refugee families (over 27,100 individuals).







Through the year-end campaign, supporters gave symbolic 'gifts for refugees,' donations to provide food, fuel, clean water, and education to Palestine refugees in Syria and the oPt who continue to face war, illegal occupation, displacement, and systematic oppression.

Thanks to American individual support in 2017, 1,602 people in Syria received UNRWA cash assistance for winterization needs such as heating materials, and 682 refugees received support for emergency assistance, including food and non-food items.

emergency services  
in syria + the occupied  
palestinian territory (oPt)

# cooking for a cause

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In the January 2017 episode of Fox's MasterChef Celebrity Showdown, where celebrity competitors are put to the test in the kitchen, Kal Penn competed against fellow actor Cheryl Hines. He ultimately won the competition with his Gordon Ramsay and Christina Tosi-approved tacos and dedicated his \$25,000 winnings to UNRWA USA, to support UNRWA's emergency services.

Penn said, "in hopes that the new year will bring peace and prosperity around the world, I thought it was important to choose an organization that directly helps those facing impossible hardships, especially refugees. Much of our own media attention is focused away from the human stories of children and families who are suffering due to displacement against the rule of international law, terrorism, and violence from so many sides, so having the chance to cook for UNRWA USA on MasterChef seemed like the right thing to do."

I'm thrilled to be helping UNRWA do its critical work in Gaza and Syria. They're a lifeline for so many families that have been struggling for decades to meet their basic needs and achieve their rights.

- Kal Penn, actor, comedian, former civil servant and MasterChef Celebrity Showdown winner





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This campaign is to preserve life. It is to feed families and keep them warm through the winter. It is to send children to school and to send university students to college. This is an integral part of keeping that society thriving and alive.

- @amalthepoet, encouraging her followers to provide gifts for refugees

# instagram influencers

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Six inspiring Instagram influencers partnered with UNRWA USA as part of the 'Gifts for Refugees' campaign to generate awareness around the needs facing Palestine refugees and encourage their online communities to do the same.

Collectively, they raised thousands of dollars that contributed to UNRWA's emergency services for Palestine refugees, while educating their followers on the humanitarian situation refugees face in the Middle East.

# unrwa university scholarships

**funding the future of 67 scholars**

Higher education provides a pathway to economic and social stability for Palestine refugees; however, the cost of a university education is prohibitive for many refugee students whose families live on less than \$3 a day.

That's where generous UNRWA USA supporters come in. For the 2016-17 school year, sponsors collectively funded 67 scholars!

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Meet [Sadeel](#) (right, class leader and aspiring doctor), [Moath](#) (current UNRWA USA scholarship recipient), and [Dr. Musa](#) (retired gyn-oncologist and past-UNRWA scholarship recipient). They serve as a testament to the challenges Palestine refugees face and overcome through education and UNRWA scholarships.





# funding the future

Actor, producer, and advocate Mark Ruffalo shared his support for the [Funding the Future](#) campaign by sharing the inspirational stories of refugee scholars via social media and encouraging his followers to donate to provide scholarships for Palestine refugees through UNRWA USA.

In addition to celebrity support, US-based UNRWA alumni are some of the most vocal supporters of the value of an UNRWA education, with first hand experience of its importance in opening opportunities. Alumni did everything from hosting fundraising events to [running marathons](#) to raise funds for refugee scholarships.



# fuel crisis in gaza



**supplying 195,916  
liters of fuel to  
275 unrw schools  
and 22 unrw  
health centers for  
refugees**

In mid-April 2017, Gaza's sole power plant, which provided about a third of Gaza's electricity was forced to shut down following a dispute over the payment of fuel. Despite some fuel purchased from Egypt, residents of Gaza only receive 4-6 hours of electricity each day, affecting all aspects of life. Due to insufficient power, essential health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene systems have suffered.

In partnership with the Moriah Fund, UNRWA USA provided thousands of liters of fuel, positively impacting basic services and improving humanitarian conditions in UNRWA schools and health centers in Gaza.

A young boy with dark hair and a serious expression is leaning against a weathered, grey stone wall. He is wearing a dark grey t-shirt with the 'KANGOL' logo and light-colored cargo pants. To his left is a large, heavily rusted metal door. The background wall shows signs of significant damage and decay.

# shelter repair in gaza

**129 shelters  
repaired, benefiting  
approximately 645  
refugees**

In partnership with the Firedoll Foundation and Zakat Foundation of America, UNRWA provided cash assistance for 7 families with major shelter damage and 122 families with minor shelter damage to make repairs following the 2014 Israeli military assault.

These repairs transformed families' shelters into safe, habitable, and dignified living spaces. In addition to direct beneficiaries, the program provided short-term engineering and construction jobs for refugees.

# rehabilitation centre for the visually impaired in gaza (rcvi)

**empowering 502 students with special needs**

For over 50 years, UNRWA has supported the blind and visually impaired children in Gaza in order to help them live to their fullest potential.

RCVI provides them with specialized education, key life skills, and social and psychological support.

Thanks to two generous UNRWA USA supporters, 502 RCVI students in Gaza were provided with the specialized assistance needed to support their learning and development.

Additionally, the salaries of 32 UNRWA teachers (refugees themselves) were paid for a year.





# outdoor playground for persons with disabilities in the west bank

**providing a safe space for over 200 refugees in arroub refugee camp**



In 2017, one American singlehandedly allowed UNRWA to create a safe space for all persons with disabilities, including children, in Arroub refugee camp to play and improve their mental and physical well-being.

This fun and colorful outdoor playground is now enjoyed by more than 200 persons with disabilities.

# computer lab in jordan

## refurbishing a computer lab for unrwa's nazzal school in jordan

Thanks to a donation from a charitable donor, UNRWA refurbished and equipped the Nazzal elementary girls and boys' school's computer lab with 10 new computers and a 58 inch LCD screen, along with new furniture. This new lab provides 1,164 young girls and boys with better tools and conditions to learn and grow.



# our people

## staff

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### abby smardon

executive director

### laila mokhiber

director of  
communications

lena abdelhamid  
medhini kumar  
nada el-eryan  
nusayba hammad  
ruben kahvedjian  
sarah gayoso

## board members

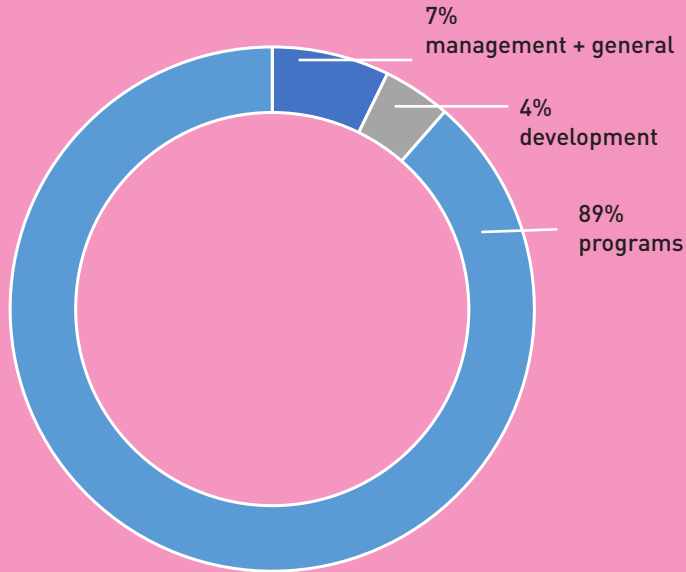
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ambassador (ret.) philip c. wilcox, jr., board chair  
elias aburdene  
karen abuzayd, former unrwa commissioner-general  
leila hilal  
elizabeth kucinich  
ambassador (ret.) richard w. murphy  
maggie mitchell salem  
george salem



# our finances

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## allocation of expenses

In 2017, UNRWA USA's program to expense ratio was 89%, meaning out of every dollar, 89 cents went to Palestine refugees in need.

UNRWA USA has received a platinum rating, the highest level of recognition offered by Guidestar.

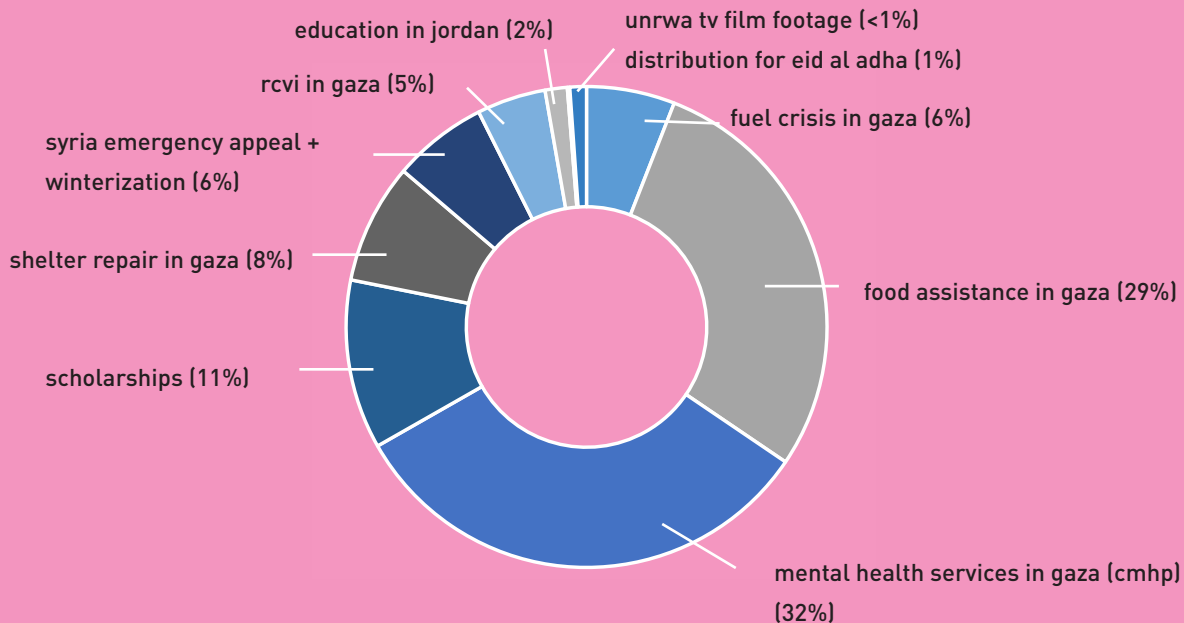
[2017 form 990](#)



# our finances

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## program allocation



showing palestine refugees  
that americans care



unrwa  
usa national committee

unrwa usa national committee  
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