

The Gift of Stars for Westmoreland Children

There is a valley to the east of Bethlehem, where Ruth and Naomi gleaned fields and where shepherds watched their flocks by night. This area has grown into a small town, now home to the closely knit Palestinian Christian community of Beit Sahour. In the 1990's, Beit Sahour led a creative nonviolent movement for their civil and human rights (watch the documentary [The Wanted 18](#)). It is also where the stars, gifted to our Westmoreland children each year, are lovingly carved from the wood of nearby olive trees.



The stars are created in a beautiful place of refuge called "Al Malath" (meaning sanctuary in Arabic), dedicated to serve Palestinian young adults with cognitive and developmental disabilities (www.malath.ps). Although Palestine ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (CRPD) in 2014 and an increasingly number of services exist for children, holistic care for older youth and adults with disabilities is nearly non-existent.

Established and managed by parents of youth with disabilities, Al Malath offers holistic care from trained therapists who utilize best practices in an atmosphere of care and respect.



The small olivewood factory on the grounds of Al Malath is a main contributor to their operational sustainability, as they receive very limited external funding and families are unable to pay full fees. The factory provides on-site job skills training with the aim of enhancing self-worth and community integration.



These extraordinary youth and their families continue to bear witness to the star that shone bright the night of Jesus' birth, heeding the angels' command to "Fear Not!". Indeed, with a fierce love and deep understanding of God's peace, they embrace life head on.

May Westmoreland children do the same!