

## Charushila, Palestine Project, November 2013

*Charushila is an architectural charity, which works with artists and young people using reclaimed materials on projects for the community. Charushila works using collaborative design, so the actual design exercise was carried out on the site.*

We were asked to transform two disused spaces into useful spaces. The larger one (an irregular space of about 230 sq. metres, 4 metres below road level) had been used as a dumping ground for all kinds of things while the smaller one (about 30 sq. metres) lay next to a busy roundabout. We had about 200 volunteers from ages 4 to 44.

This was not a usual community project- the land lay close to an illegal Israeli settlement, there were no recycling facilities and funds available were very scarce. A Crowdfunding exercise delivered some funding for the project while agreements about payments in kind and support were agreed. On site, the local municipality supplied paints, transport and clearing equipment. The local community and shops helped out and also supplied food for the volunteers. Charushila delivered workshops at the local refugee camp (Al Amara/ UNHCR) and at the AMIDEAST, an US based NGO. RIWAQ- an architectural conservation body, also provided some assistance as did the 'Environmental students group' from BirZeit University.

The final designs and details emerged from the workshops and dialogues. Planters, shade and seating made from reclaimed tyres and bottles emerged in the cleared spaces, used creatively in a land of scarce resources. The volunteers painted the walls making murals and slogans. Locally available plants and herbs supplied by the council, were planted by the volunteers. Later a local artist, painted the outside walls in a workshop for children. The Council have revived a well that used to feed the space. Both open spaces provided much needed relief in the hectic and fearful atmosphere, especially for children who had no space to play before. The Revivers of the Land of Palestine have gone on to do many other similar projects without further assistance, which is the most powerful indicator of a successful community project.

