

Al Shurooq School for the Blind was founded by Helen Shehadeh in 1981 with the aim of enabling blind people in Palestine to become self sufficient and productive members of society. The first premises were in Jerusalem, but in 1995 they moved to Bethlehem, allowing beneficiaries from the southern part of the West Bank, unable to enter Jerusalem, to gain access to the society's services and programmes.

The school is affiliated to The National Society for the Visually Handicapped and provides total care and education for children ages from two upwards, who are brought to them. The school is residential and most children go home at the weekends. Some pay a small contribution towards their upkeep, as their families are able, but many are from very poor families or have been abandoned. The focus is on rehabilitation and integration into the local community.

Helen is an elder in the Church of Scotland, St. Andrew's Kirk, in Jerusalem, and over the years has built up great friendships with Scottish pilgrim parties. The many plaques around the new building testify to ongoing partnerships giving Al Shurooq the feel of a little outpost of Scotland in Bethlehem!

In 2009 the school moved into a brand new purpose-built building. Five years of planning, fundraising and building work finally came to fruition. The new building has three floors and can house up to thirty children in five bedrooms each sleeping six. There are classrooms, dining and assembly halls, a Braille Production Room and staff accommodation. This whole project was paid for by public donations and the ongoing work is also totally reliant on the generosity of supporters. Many of the classrooms, braille machines and other equipment has been funded by congregations.

In 2014, a group from Inverleith St Serf's visited the school to learn of the valuable work that it does and it is hoped that a return visit will be made in 2016. To find out more about the school and the valuable work that they do, look up their website, or Facebook page for up to date information.