

# Deeds Rather Than Words

## Bank of Palestine Engages with People with Disabilities

Courtesy of Bank of Palestine

conscious decision not merely to abide by the law but to increase to 6 percent the quota of hiring staff with disabilities, in a step that reflects the amount of care and respect that we have for this segment of the population.

Throughout our lives, we constantly look for role models who are an inspiration to others, whether locally or abroad, among the Palestinian diaspora and global figures. The world was and still is inspired by international figures who have overcome their physical disabilities and become a source of revelation for millions. Stephen Hawking, a renowned English scientist, is one whose prominence in the arena of theoretical physics ranks him as number one in this field globally. His secrets are first his determination, then his support system of family and friends, and, equally important, the professional support and respect he has received from foundations, institutions,



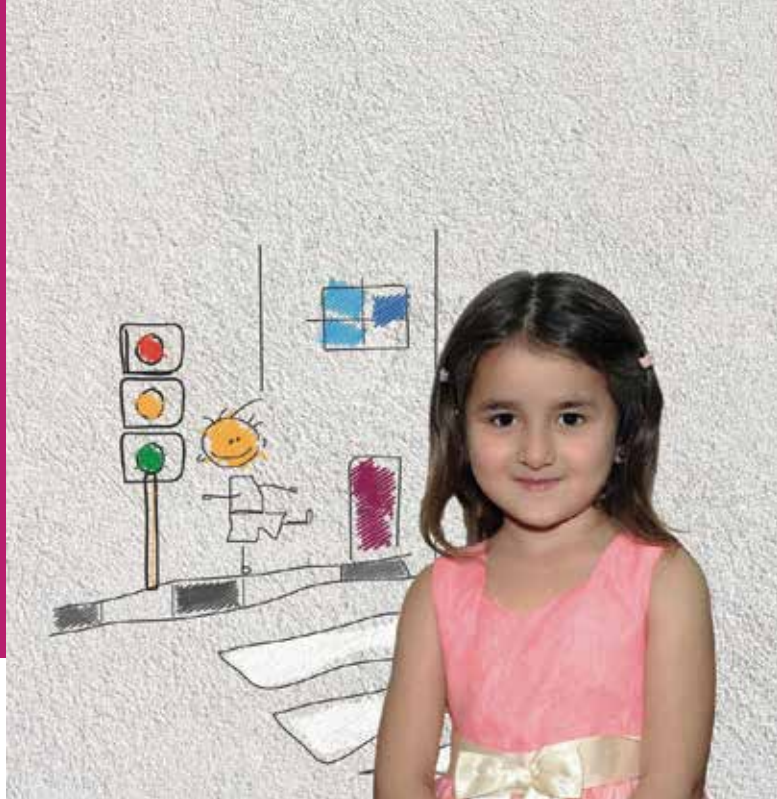
The first National Bank

and academic entities. Such a holistic support system is vital in order for people with disabilities to overcome their physical impediment and join active life in society. In Palestine, family support is available, personal determination is there, but what is missing is outright institutional support among the various spectrums of

As we wake up every morning and head to work, most of us do not come to experience the world of people with disabilities. Few of us deal with them on a daily basis, whether in our surrounding environment, our workspace, or other places. For most of us, daily interaction with people with disabilities happens in rare places and moments. Only when a person with a disability requests that we take action or when a special calendar date brings the cause of people with disabilities to our attention do we become touched emotionally and possibly engage in their cause for that day – but we fail to truly experience their world on a regular basis. At Bank of Palestine, we believe that the best place to interact with people with disabilities is the workplace: here, we meet on a daily basis with all people, including those with a disability. This experience is bound to be a human interaction that provides enrichment for both; it inspires the employee with a disability and humbles the employee without such impairment. While we salute the labor law that requires institutions to strive to ensure that 5 percent of their staff consists of people with disabilities, the bank has made a



Islam Hanafieh at work at the Compliance Department.



*Images from the "I Want to Hear" campaign, implemented in partnership with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, which aims to buy 1,000 hearing aids for people with hearing impairments.*

professional entities. This support from entities, corporations, or foundations should not be confined to financial aid in terms of grants and donations; it has to be elevated strategically to provide accessibility to the workplace in "the physical sense," in job-placement criteria, and most importantly, in ensuring proper inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce with training and cross-training of their peers.

Islam Hanafiyyeh (24 years old), from Ramallah, is an Al-Quds Open University graduate with an intriguing story. Islam was an outstanding student and received first place among those who took the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's employment tests in the Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorate. Nevertheless, he was rejected due to his health conditions. He cannot stand or walk, and he is a wheelchair user. He was severely disappointed as a result of this rejection. His father

later showed him a Bank of Palestine newspaper announcement about employment opportunities specifically targeting people with disabilities. Islam was quick to complete the job application and excelled in all the bank's tests, allowing him to have a new beginning for his career. Islam currently works in the Compliance Department, supervising important files and receiving strong support from his supervisors who continue to admire his abilities and potential. "I am extremely happy to work at Bank of Palestine. I have many friends who work at local banks, but I am the happiest among them," says Islam. He added, "I see that the bank is not only a banking and financial institution that serves its customers; in fact, it is a national institution that provides continuous contributions for the benefit of all Palestinian people. The bank has helped to shape the person I am today

and has also empowered me in all areas, including social and personal aspects."

The bank introduced specialized training programs, especially in sign language, for its staff in order to facilitate communication with customers who have hearing impairments. In addition, community partnerships and social investment programs were forged, also geared towards programs that address disabilities. As part of the bank's social responsibility, through which 6 percent of its annual profit is contributed to many sectors in the community, the bank launched the "I Want to Hear" campaign – in partnership with the Palestine Red Crescent Society – which aims to buy 1,000 hearing aids for people with hearing impairments. The bank has also sponsored various sports activities for people with physical disabilities, including a basketball game

in which teams of people with physical disabilities took part from various parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Despite our drive to assume responsibility and ensure real interaction with people with disabilities on a daily basis inside and outside the bank, we feel that we have underachieved and need to do more. Although no one entity can create the full change, every initiative and action of every entity matters. We stand ready to augment our current programs, increase the hiring and training efforts, and sustain this as not a mere practice but as an integral part of the value system at all levels of bank management. In a few years, we should not write an article to this effect, we should publish our metrics on impact achieved in working with and catering to people with disabilities and continue to drive these metrics upward year after year.