

[Thank You: Women's Centre for Legal Assistance and Counseling \(WCLAC\) »](#)

By [Gender at Work Media](#) / October 30, 2015 / [0 Comments](#)
by Joanne Sandler

Gender at Work is privileged to provide facilitation and consulting services to support organizational change strategies that strengthen gender equality and women's rights. Organizations we engage with can be trade unions, women's human rights organizations and networks, private and public foundations, multilateral organizations or academic institutions. These organizations operate in distinct environments: in war, under occupation or in more stable countries; in large crowded cities, remote villages or idyllic towns; in national contexts or global contexts.

Whatever processes we support, we understand that we have the unique opportunity to interact with these organizations for relatively brief and hopefully meaningful engagements. We often work with the leadership and staff of these organizations at times of opportunity or crisis. For us, it always expands our learning; for the staff and leadership of these organizations, it can be a make or break moment, a time for reflection and re-calibration, made up of processes and events that we collectively design; but these must fit within the everyday necessities of running their organizations and coalescing around their strategic vision and goals.

That is why we've started this "Thank You Note" series of blogposts. We are fortunate to co-create with wide-ranging social justice leaders and appreciate the tough choices they face when they choose to pause, plan, reflect and re-group. We learn enormously as we support and bear witness. We prepare trip reports, donor reports, and analytical pieces. These "Thank You Note" blogs are different; they are an opportunity to offer a simple testimony to the creativity, courage and commitment that we so regularly see in leaders for social justice. Their work underpins our hopes and convictions that a better world is possible.

A THANK YOU NOTE



Thank You: Women's Centre for Legal Assistance and Counseling (WCLAC) Ramallah, Palestine - May 2015

Our deep appreciation goes to the leadership and staff of WCLAC (and to the FLOW Fund/Netherlands that supported us) for our work with you over the past year. Together, we experimented with merging the Gender at Work Analytical Framework and the Emergent Learning Framework to articulate powerful learning questions; we designed a stakeholder survey to gather feedback from WCLAC's clients, beneficiaries, partners/donors and staff; and we facilitated a learning workshop for all staff as a way of building shared vision and leadership to underpin WCLAC's new Strategic Plan.

We started working with WCLAC in March, 2014. We knew a bit about its groundbreaking work, providing strategic litigation, counseling and shelter services to survivors of domestic violence and other forms of women's human rights abuse. We knew that it was vocal and fearless in drawing attention to the impact of the Israeli Occupation on women's lives and in advocating tirelessly for increased respect for women's rights in Palestine. We began a conversation with the leadership team – Maha, Berni, Amal and Samar - about supporting their work on strategic evaluation and learning. Aruna and Joanne traveled to WCLAC's offices in Ramallah in May 2014 - and met up with Gender at Work Associate Nisreen Alami - for a 3-day workshop to develop framing questions. With WCLAC staff, we decided that a good way to explore the questions they were asking - and to gather feedback to assess their current Strategic Plan and prepare for the next one - would be to do a stakeholder survey of their clients, beneficiaries, donors/partners, and staff over the next 6 months.

Then, Maha Abu Dhayyeh, WCLAC's founder and leader, died tragically from cancer in January 2015. Maha's leadership and work advanced so many important Palestinian women's rights issues and losing her - for WCLAC, for Palestine, and for women's rights work globally - was a huge blow. The organization mourned. And, in keeping with Maha's spirit and tenacity, staff did not pause in providing the critical litigation, counseling and shelter support that is in such high demand. We carried on with our plans to support WCLAC to administer a survey and prepare its next strategic plan. Gender at Work Associate, Tanya Beer, guided and supported the survey design, administration and analysis from Washington, D.C. from September 2014 to June 2015. Consultants and staff from WCLAC worked together to gather data using a variety of methods. Long-time WCLAC consultant, Margo Okazawa Rey, joined us in guiding the data collection and in analyzing results.

From May 21 to 23, Margo, Joanne and Gender at Work Board Member, Idelisse Malave, traveled to Ramallah to work with the entire WCLAC staff, including every team in the organization. We were guided in preparations by the leadership team with Acting Director, Sawsan Zaher and Berni, Amal and Samar. We found an organization in the throes of a difficult transition; with the loss of Maha came insecurities, divisions and questions.

We traveled to Ramallah to present the findings of the stakeholder survey and facilitate an organization-wide discussion. The workshop focused on how to build the

feedback from clients, beneficiaries, partners and staff into WCLAC's vision and strategic directions for the coming 5 years. And we hoped to support them to re-experience a shared voice and vision in the midst of the profound grief that Maha's death has left.

It helped enormously that the survey results showed, without doubt, WCLAC is providing a widely valued and highly relevant series of initiatives, programs and services for its stakeholders. Beneficiaries and clients, in particular, were overwhelmingly positive and grateful for the professionalism, the accessibility, and the timeliness of WCLAC's support. References were made continuously to WCLAC as a pioneer, as a fearless voice, and as a leader for women's human rights. The recognition that their collective impact has been so profound had a lightening effect. As we worked through the findings and undertook a variety of participatory exercises engaging everyone, we felt the spirit in the room lift, we heard increasing amounts of laughter, and we saw more and more people engage. By the end of the two days, one of the staff members noted, "This is the first time, since Maha died, that it feels something like the old WCLAC."

WCLAC's leadership has now finalized the next strategic plan and staff continues to pioneer relevant and cutting edge advocacy and initiatives to advance women's human rights. They are an organization with a deep culture of leading and learning. We have been deeply fortunate to work with them and hope to continue to involve them in Gender at Work initiatives as we move forward together.