



DIANNE SCHEPERS  
**THE LIFE-CHANGING  
 POWER OF PURE FELT**

“PURE FELT – THE ART OF EMPOWERMENT”, A SWISS CHARITY ASSOCIATION  
 ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERING WOMEN AND YOUTH IN JORDAN AND SOUTH AFRICA

Pure Felt is a nonprofit art-impact organisation that trains, empowers and creates jobs for unemployed, low-privileged youth and women in Jordan and South Africa. We do this through CSR felt art installations and by supporting micro business owners in gaining a livelihood by creating felt design products. The Pure Felt programme increases the employability chances for youth and empowers women with the resources to rise above poverty, transform their families and communities forever.

The roads in Fefa, a remote, rural, small village in the poorest area of Jordan close to the Dead Sea, are dusty; the buildings are small, and built with cheap materials and concrete, with electricity wires hanging loosely and connecting 2 neighbouring houses. The houses are, or at least look, permanently unfinished, and are unpainted. The people are poor. The kids are playful and curious and the people warm-hearted - their smiles are huge. There is very little in Fefa and the extreme unemployment rate casts its shadow on the spirit and opportunities of the people. Yet their hearts are big, and the community

is strong.

Hikmat (62), a widow without children and without education, has been living in Fefa her entire life. This is her home. Hikmat loves the fields. She used to raise her family's cattle in her youth, and took care of her household when her husband was still alive. Regretfully, they never had any children. Hikmat had no source of income until she joined Pure Felt.

It is 6am. The sounds of the awakening village surround Hikmat and are making her happy: a crying child, bleating goats in the distance, murmuring neighbours, a car passing, the smell of kurkuma coffee from the neighbour's porch. Full of energy, Hikmat gets up and prepares to go to work, to the Pure Felt studio which has become the most important mission in her daily life, and that of 15 of her friends and family members. Pure Felt rented a studio for the Pure Felt Jordan project in Fefa, and it was painted pink by the women, who also built a protective fence, planted trees and created an outdoor kitchen. In April 2017, the studio was festively opened by one of the members of the Jordanian Royal Family in the presence of other prominent

people including, of course, the mayor of the village, who fully welcomes and supports the initiative. Hikmat welcomed the princess with a spontaneous, cheerful dance when, only a year before, she was suffering from depression.

Pure Felt taught the women to use the wool of their local Awassi sheep, one of the oldest breeds in the world, in a different way. They learned how to dye it with natural plants, roots and herbs, and to felt the wool into objects completely new to them. The women include their age-old spinning and weaving with goat hair (which is used to create the nomad tents) in some of the products, and are also taught basic maths and project management skills. Pure Felt designs the majority of the art works and felt objects, and teaches the ladies how to prepare and colour the wools, and how to transform the art works and products into pieces of felt mastery. Educational visits are organised for that purpose, and local instructors are given training to offer weekly remote support sessions to ensure that all hurdles are tackled and problems are solved.



Together with an additional felting team of 10 at the Princess Taghrid Institute in Amman ([www.pti-jo.com](http://www.pti-jo.com)), the women create large felt art works commissioned by banks, large corporations and architects. In addition to this, they produce interior design and decorative products. In 2018, Pure Felt intends to add a product range of 'consolation' felt products which offer comfort when one loses a dear one or a pet. The Princess Taghrid Institute provides vocational training, internships and a warm home to orphan girls from the age of 18 who have to leave the governmental orphanages at that age, despite having no place to go to. Pure Felt could not have found a better partner in executing its empowerment mission.

In November 2017, during the Amman Design Week, Pure Felt Jordan exhibited 15 artworks that had been commissioned by large Jordanian banks and corporations: these were displayed throughout the entire ground floor of the prominent National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman. The results of almost a year of training and work were celebrated, and shown to the commissioning organisations and the world. All the women from Fefa took

the long journey to Amman - some of them visiting the capital for the first time in their lives - to be lauded by visitors and the press. Together with the participants of the Pure Felt Jordan programme in Amman, they received a certificate of successful completion of the programme from the hands of H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Ali, who is also the Chair of the Museum and a well-known contemporary artist.

The Pure Felt Jordan studio has become Fefa's centre of creation, creativity and training, and provides new purpose in the lives of 15 women and their families. The women who work at the studio receive great respect, and their work is changing the lives of the women and their extended families. The women are proud that they can feed their families and, in the event of having an unemployed or absent husband, pay the bills, and give their grandchildren a gift or pay for their schoolbooks.

Hikmat smiles: She starts another day at the studio on the porch together with 15 co-workers and a freshly brewed kurkuma coffee, cooked on a gas burner in a big, black, iron kettle. She is going to make beautiful felt objects with her friends. She is proud

to be part of this project. She is making a living. She has found a new purpose in her life. Hikmat looks forward to another day at the little studio she has co-created. Now it's time for coffee. She shines.

In 2018, Pure Felt hopes that, with the help of supporters, it can also offer its participants financial and digital literacy modules, and coaching programmes. The aim is to also bring banking opportunities to the women through new blockchain technologies, and to include a programme in the refugee camps. Furthermore, expansion of the Pure Felt concept to Rustenburg in South Africa is on the agenda, to continue the impact of Pure Felt's previous projects in South Africa.

Your support, commissions and purchases enable the Pure Felt empowerment cycle to continue, and gives you a window into seeing the impact of this for one person.

#### CONTACT DETAILS

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#### FOR QUESTIONS OR COMMISSIONS

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