



Learning for the  
Empowerment and  
Advancement of  
Palestinians

Summer 2012

WWW.LEAPSUMMERPROGRAM.ORG

Vol.II, No.1

**P.2** Note from the founders of  
The LEAP Program

**P.4** Creative writings, photographs,  
& artworks by SHINE 2012 students

**P.8** LEAP volunteers share highlights  
of their teaching experiences



**Lebanon 2012**



*Mural by students from Shatila Camp*



### **About the LEAP Program**

LEAP is an educational empowerment program for Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon. LEAP is dedicated to nurturing the intellectual and creative growth of its students and encouraging them to become their own agents of change through education.

LEAP is a grassroots volunteer program and our work and efforts can only be achieved through the generosity of our supporters and donors. We are actively fundraising to help support both our short-term and long-term initiatives. Please consider donating today and help us empower Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon!

For more information, please visit:

[www.leapsummerprogram.org](http://www.leapsummerprogram.org)

or email:

[info@leapsummerprogram.org](mailto:info@leapsummerprogram.org)



*Mural by students from Rashidieh Camp*

## Note from the Founders

As we carefully tip-toed through the alleyways of Bourj el Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, dodging water puddles from below and low electricity lines from above, trekking behind our colleague Fadia from Beit Atfal Assumoud, and searching for apartments to house LEAP's 55 volunteers, we were greeted countless times by parents and students from past years. Along the way, one mother stopped to inquire whether the Summer Help IN English (SHINE) project, which is run through a partnership between LEAP and Beit Atfal Assumoud, would be offered again this summer since her son really benefited from it. Fadia confirmed that SHINE was to begin in only a few weeks and urged her son to immediately register since we were close to capacity. "*Ya3teekom el yafeya*," she graciously thanked us for our efforts.

As we continued along our path and visited two other apartments, we were greeted by many familiar faces. School had just been dismissed, and many of our students from the prior year were returning home. Our ninth-graders had just finished sitting for the national Brevet exam, which is required for promotion to high school and administered in English. It is **this** exam that determines whether a child will be able to continue his or her conventional education or not.

At the turn of an alleyway by the senior citizen home in Bourj, we were suddenly greeted by Ahmed, an enthusiastic and heartwarming student. Ahmed was often found hanging out with two of our most mischievous students, who, not surprisingly, were also our volunteers' favorites; by the end of last summer, they had become our most transformed students. Their penchant for misbehavior was really a call for attention and love; their apathetic attitudes were signs of pain; and their rough exteriors reflected the vulnerability they hoped to mask. However, by developing trust and friendship, we were able to break through those exterior walls and re-ignite their thirst for knowledge and learning.

Ahmed was taken aback by our unexpected reunion. We had been in touch over the year via Facebook; and now, we coincidentally met again around the corner from his home. When we asked how his exam went, he said, "*Alhamdulillah (thank God)*," but looked down immediately to break eye contact. From his reaction, we could tell that it did not go so well. In hopes of comforting him we said, "*God willing, you will do well*," still, the silence that followed spoke volumes of the reality we knew was soon to come.

If only Ahmed had been given more opportunities and support earlier in his educational path, perhaps he might have had a fair chance at passing and continuing his education. Will Ahmed continue to obtain vocational training? Will he work with aluminum, glass, or as an electrician or mechanic? Will he be unable to find a job and get lost in the tempting social ills surrounding him that might help him forget—even temporarily—the misery and struggles he faces, as many youth in impoverished communities with limited opportunities so often become consumed with? Only grim questions remain about Ahmed's future, for which possible answers seem to be severely limited opportunities.

LEAP was established in hopes of reconciling this gap—to be a stepping stone between a child's dreams and his or her future. English proficiency is crucial to students' educational and economic empowerment. LEAP is an educational enrichment program dedicated to nurturing the intellectual and creative growth of Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon, so they may become agents of change. We aim to provide students with the necessary critical thinking and analytical skills to make important, fundamental decisions in their lives, so that even if they do not pursue their education through conventional means, they will be able to make informed decisions, and use their sound judgment in every facet of their lives.

While LEAP is focused on English language instruction for our students, it is simultaneously a mutual learning experience for our volunteers. Working and living in the refugee camps brings volunteers closer to the Palestinian community, so they may have a better understanding of Palestinian refugees in general, but particularly in Lebanon. This project's impact is felt by our students and volunteers alike; hearing volunteer feedback and receiving testimonials, such as the one below, is heartening and affirms that our mission is being met. Volunteers are compelled, upon returning to their home communities, to raise awareness about the plight of Palestinian refugees as well as share their experiences—many even feel compelled to return for another year!



*"No words can do this life-altering experience justice. I don't want to say that LEAP changed me or anyone else; rather, it awakened in all of us something deeper—something that is inside all of us to begin with, but is often difficult to find. It is the feeling that we, as people, can be a part of something much bigger than ourselves and that we are capable of inciting a positive change, however small. The Palestinian refugee crisis is a humanitarian disaster that needs immediate global attention and aid, and LEAP is working to shine a desperately needed spotlight on this issue in Lebanon. Besides being among the most passionate and inspirational people I have yet to meet in my life, this experience gave me renewed hope... And that in and of itself is one of the greatest blessings of all. I am positive that my fellow LEAP'ers and I will continue to be adamant advocates for Palestinian rights and take this journey with us for the rest of our lives."*

— Alia G., Bourj el Barajneh Volunteer

On to our fourth year, LEAP has grown tremendously. Starting with 7 volunteers and reaching 150 students, LEAP has grown to over 55 volunteers and reached over 800 students. As a grassroots volunteer-run organization, we hold true to our commitment to the right-to-education for Palestinian refugee-youth, and hold dear international conventions and rights for refugees—intended to safeguard their freedom and dignity.

(Continued on next page...)



(Continued from previous page.)

We have grown and learned many lessons over the years, and intend to continue expanding our work in order to provide much needed educational services and opportunities. LEAP originally began as a summer program, but now we are expanding to a year-long program. Recognizing the crucial need for consistent and continued, year-long English assistance to further support students like Ahmed, we are aiming to implement the After-School Program in Remedial English (ASPIRE) this year.

Each year brings the overwhelming challenge to achieve our fundraising goal, particularly with the need to implement Project ASPIRE. We believe that you will help us reach that goal! As conscientious supporters of LEAP, we know that you cherish the right-to-education for Palestinian refugee-youth, and understand its importance for empowerment and advancement. So again, we are relying on you to help us implement our important educational initiatives and make available much needed opportunities. Any contribution, no matter how small, will go a long way in helping to empower Palestinian refugee-youth like Ahmed—so that they can have increased access to opportunities and choices in life, and seize their most valuable of rights: dignity.

Please support us in this mission.

*Fatema & Maryam Zohny*  
Founders

*"LEAP is a community of individuals that share a commitment to providing children the opportunity to laugh, be inquisitive, grow and love [life]. By nurturing the glow of our adorable students, we ensure a warmer, brighter future for all of us."*

—Yeou-Shiuh H., LEAP Volunteer for Summer 2011 & 2012

### ~ MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY ~

I wish to make a charitable contribution to support LEAP's initiatives in the amount of: \$50 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$300 \_\_\_  
Other amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the "WESPAC Foundation" and kindly indicate "LEAP Program" in the reference line.

WESPAC Foundation  
52 North Broadway  
White Plains, NY 10603

Online donations accepted via LEAP website

[WWW.LEAPSUMMERPROGRAM.ORG](http://WWW.LEAPSUMMERPROGRAM.ORG)

*The WESPAC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization and the fiscal sponsor of the LEAP Program.*



*Thank  
You!*



On behalf of the LEAP Program, we are thankful to everyone who helped us implement this year's educational projects. We are heartened by how warmly we were received by the communities in which we carry out our work, touched by the commitment of our phenomenal volunteers, forever grateful to our coordinators and colleagues at Beit Atfal Assumoud, inspired by our students who

taught us so much, and most importantly, humbled by our supporters who allow us to carry out this important work, which we hold dear to our hearts. Among those we would specifically like to thank are Mr. Kassem Aina and Ms. Fatima Khaizaran from Beit Atfal Assumoud as well as all of the BAS area Directors: Jamileh, Zaher, Abu Wasim and Mahmoud, as well as their respective staff. Nada Khader and Jennifer Loewenstein for their endless support. Al-Awda NY, the Carol Chomsky Memorial Fund, the Cultures of Resistance Foundation Network, and Art for Impact for their institutional support.



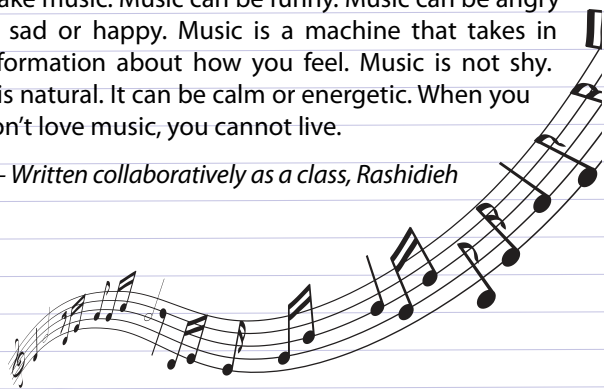
# Artworks, Photographs, and Creative Writings by SHINE 2012 Students

## Music

Music is beautiful. Music is art. When I listen to music I feel that I am not in my body. Artists produce music. It is about feelings and dreams. There are different types of music like hip-hop, rock, and opera.

Music comes from all over the world. Even animals make music. Music can be funny. Music can be angry or sad or happy. Music is a machine that takes in information about how you feel. Music is not shy. It is natural. It can be calm or energetic. When you don't love music, you cannot live.

— Written collaboratively as a class, Rashidieh



Artwork by  
Amal A.



Artwork by  
Ali S.



## Ramadan

Ramadan is the best time period when a slave gets closer to his God. We are all slaves of God. When fasting, one asks: why should we fast? But the real reason for fasting is to feed the people who don't have money to eat all year long. Ramadan isn't only about fasting alone, but praying as well. In addition, people who fast should read the Quran and give money to people who have little. I like Ramadan a lot because rich people feel with the poor people. During Ramadan this year, we will fast for 16 hours during the day. At the end of the day, I will eat and then go to pray in the mosque. Through the night, I will pray more, spend time with family, and have a lot of fun. I spend a lot of time indoors learning during the thirty days of Ramadan.

— Zeinab and Omar



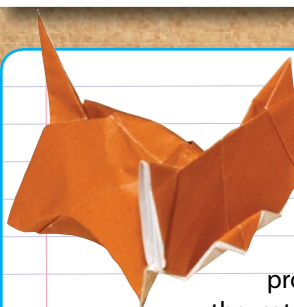
(Photographer: Manar K., Bourj el Shemali Camp)

## Ms. Stephanie's Class

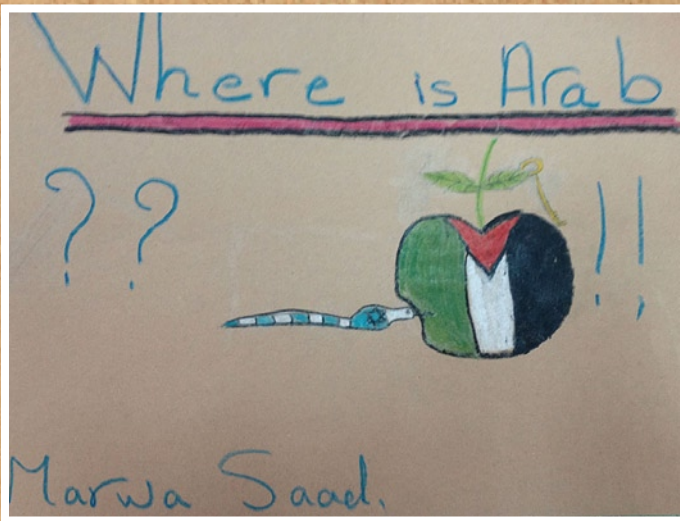
I play basketball with my friends and I learn to be kind. I give my chicken good food and I learn that animals need protein and give protein. I see the cat when she moves through the streets of the camps. The cars move just as fast through the narrow alleys. I help her from danger. I learn from this that you should respect animals and protect them from harm like human beings.

I was born in Tyre. I live in Al Rashidieh camp. I like swimming everyday and I like my school and teachers. I learn a lot from Project SHINE. Ms. Stephanie, my teacher from America, teaches me a lot and I am very happy to be here.

— Malak K.







Artwork by Marwa S.

### **Sea Problem**

On a hot day of summer, my mom and dad went to the sea. We played, ate, and swam together. Suddenly, a boy saw a huge amount of garbage in the sea. I went with my sister and our friends to see and the sea was a disaster. My friends and I decided to carry out a campaign to clean the sea. We put up pictures and slogans around the beach and the streets asking people to kindly keep the beach water and its surroundings clean. We were very happy because the people stopped throwing their garbage in the sea.

— Boushra R.

### **We All Need to Recognize Our Mothers**

This is for the mothers who have sat up all night with sick toddlers in their arms, who have sat in rocking chairs for hours.

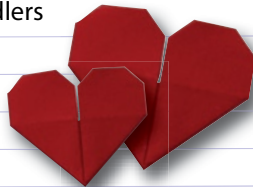
This is for you all, for all of us.

Hang in there. In the end, we can only do the best we can.

Tell them every day that we love them.

Last and not least if we want the heaven, we should make our mothers happy because our God put his paradise below our mother's feet.

— Jana I.



### **Free Palestine**

I feel proud but also sad of being a Palestinian because the Israelis took my country. The country is green and beautiful. The houses are beautiful. They took the ground and trees. They took our country; but one day, we will free Palestine.

— Mostafa S.

### **The Brevet Exam**

My name is Eman Maroud. I am fourteen years old and I am in grade eight. Next year, I will sit for the Brevet exam. I think that it will be a difficult exam that determines if I will continue school. My acquaintances say to me that if I study hard then I will pass, but too many fail. I hope to be an English translator when I grow up, because I always earn the highest marks in the English language courses.

— Eman M.

### **Palestine**

My friend and I were sitting under the tree. I could hear Palestinian songs and I could see the Palestinian *Debke*. I felt happy because I was in Palestine. In my mind, I am always in Palestine.

— Mahmoud H.



(Photographer: Mostafa Ali D., Bourj el Shemali Camp)

### **"My First Love"**

When I was thirteen years old, I experienced my first love. Many people would enter my life and tell me that I should not worry my mind with such things, for I am only a child! Still, this love stays on my mind and will not escape me. This love is love for my homeland: Palestine.

— Raied I.



### **In the Future**

I wish to study so in the future I will be a teacher.  
I wish to go to Siblin (vocational school) and study to  
earn a diploma and teach students to become better  
humans and inspire them to study in the future too.

— Hanan B.

### **A New Lebanon**

We want a new Lebanon;  
a Lebanon we can live in.  
This is not a life;  
this is a bee hive.  
Please help us, please help us.

I just want to come back  
to Palestine do you  
think it's a crime?  
We want electricity  
so we can live well.

I want liberty.  
I really need to have dignity.  
We want a new Lebanon.

— Faten J.

Ruby Bridges is brave because she attended a  
white school although she was black and none of  
the white people wanted her there. She was alone in  
the classroom with her teacher and that did not stop  
her from earning an education. Now, black children  
and white children can go to the same schools in  
the United States since there is no more segregation.  
I wish for Palestinian children to attend schools with  
other children and to put an end to segregation.

— Saied E.



(Photographer: Ali S., Bourj el Shemali Camp)

In July 2012 twenty students were brought together for a photography class as part of the Summer Help In English (SHINE) project implemented by the LEAP Program & Beit Atfal Assumoud in Bourj el Barajneh refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut. They met twice a week, drafted the class goals, and chose to document life in the camp. Their final project was to conduct mini-interviews with their subjects, composing the captions you see paired with the images. The following is a selection from that final project, with the captions drafted by the students from their interviews.







### **"OLD LADY"**

This is Harda. She is sitting in the street in the picture selling produce to make a living. She said life in the camp is good and her dream is to live and be happy.

*(Photographer: Hanna H., Bourj el Barajneh Camp)*



### **"LIFE IN THE CAMP"**

In this picture there is a group of men sitting with each other outside of a coffee shop. They are sharing a Hubble Bubble and talking with each other while the little boys listen. Mohammed, 30, is working, Ali, 22 years, is a painter, Abo Raad, 33 years, works as a carpenter, and Jalal, 20 years, works as a mechanic.

*(Photographer: Karim M., Bourj el Barajneh Camp)*



### **"No RIGHTS"**

This is Ibrahim, he is 45 years old. He received a diploma in electricity but he is now a food seller because as a Palestinian in Lebanon he is forbidden to work other than as a "farmer, a seller or a beggar."

His dream is to leave the Arab world.

*(Photographer: Marwa A., Bourj el Barajneh Camp)*





Looking back on my experience with LEAP I am truly glad that I made the decision to become part of such an amazing organization. In the beginning I felt a lot of apprehension because the language was extremely foreign to me. On the night of my arrival I did not sleep well, and my mind was not at ease with the situation. As the first days progressed, I was being challenged every day.

But everything about these challenges changed when I was introduced to *Debke* and the music. It was something that I could relate to because I am a lover of all music. Everywhere we walked we heard *Debke*. One of my most memorable moments of the whole trip was when I danced on our field trip to the river with our

students. I was able to communicate to them through music, a common part of our lives. I soon developed a reputation in the camp of being an excellent dancer, and the kids always wanted me to dance with them.

My love for *Debke* was also influenced by the relationship I developed with Mahmoud, a resident of Shatila. Whenever we went on a weekend excursion Mahmoud always encouraged us to get up on the bus and dance. He would always look at me and say "Yallah Ryan!" and beckoning me to dance with him. It was these moments that made me feel at ease and connected to residents of the camp. I will always treasure and remember how I was embraced to share my love of music with my students as well as with the other volunteers. Being African-American and visiting Lebanon has definitely inspired me to learn more about my culture and ancestry.

— Ryan W., Shatila Camp Volunteer

## LEAP Program Volunteers Share Highlights of Their Experience

My first time away from home alone, I leave behind my life for one in a Palestinian refugee camp in Tyre, Lebanon—a life I could have easily had by chance. At first, I am terrified of almost everything—the possible violence, living conditions, and fitting in with other LEAP volunteers. It didn't take long to see the comradeship and solidarity of everybody involved—both the volunteers and the refugees. However, no aspect of my experience entered my heart the way the students did. I realized the children were the most morally inspiring, enlightening, and psychologically balancing part of my experience, despite their occasional struggle to cooperate and focus.

My first few days teaching at the Beit Atfal Assumoud Center in Rashidieh Camp, I felt my energy, passion, and hospitality kick-in like a shot of 5-Hour Energy—without the crash. It's the children's hope, smiles, and potential that pushes me to speak a little louder, reiterate my choice of words, and vary my hand gestures and body language. My efforts, in turn, push them to try a little harder. In these moments I forget that most of my beginner level students might not stand a chance at the Brevet exam, which will determine whether or not they are promoted to high school. I am determined to give my students the closest to a scholarly education that their unjust circumstances allow.

My fondest memories occurred in my classes. Every morning before line-up one student, Husain, sang me a song my mother used to sing to me that repeats my name in the chorus. The song speaks of a bird that sends messages to and from Palestine—guaranteeing both sides that one day they will have their country back. From then on, whenever we saw each other, Husain would ask me "Miss Nada, what did the bird say to you this time?"



*Nada K. & her class of children  
in Rashidieh Camp*

On the last day, I did not have the chance to properly say good bye to Husain. I was hugging my girls in a combination of laughter and tears, signing yearbooks, and taking pictures. I heard Husain's voice at the door among the ruckus in my room. I quickly ran to him to say good-bye but he refused. He told me he would see me next year and if anything were to occur, he would just tell the bird to carry the message to me. And just like that, he ran off with his friends and I got lost in a crowd of my students. In the moment, I didn't realize the depth of his words. Later, I realized how much passion, potential, and love are inside all of my students and Palestinian refugee children.

— Nada K., Rashidieh Camp Volunteer





The most defining experience I had as a LEAP volunteer began with a boy named Hadi. By the end of the month, Hadi would transcend into a part of who I am and who I will become.

At the beginning of Ramadan Hadi invited me to his house for an *iftar* dinner. I had no idea what to expect. As Hadi walked me to his home the call to prayer echoed like sunshine off the cement homes. As we arrived at Hadi's home, a table full of food welcomed us onto the balcony. Earlier in the week Hadi had asked me to request a meal, and on the center of the table was the *maklooba* that I had been anticipating for days.

Sharing that *iftar* dinner was the first time I truly understood why I was involved with LEAP. Hadi's parents wanted the same things for him that my family wants for me. They wanted Hadi to have control of his future. One step in gaining this control was through studying English and passing the Brevet exam—a step I was in Tyre to help him achieve. But what Hadi and his family taught me was that the

Brevet wasn't the end goal. Even if Hadi passed the Brevet there would still be many obstacles he would face in gaining control of his livelihood.

On my last day in Bourj el Shemali camp I went to say good-bye to Hadi and his family. Because it was an afternoon during Ramadan food was not the focal point of our gathering. Instead we played a new board game with which Hadi had become obsessed. With each dice role and the diminishing stack of cards on the table, the reality of saying good-bye set in. The game finished and Hadi walked me back through the winding alleys of the camp one last time. I hugged him good-bye one last time. I was crushed by the challenges that this brilliant, funny, and gentle 13-year-old boy would face. Before this night I always thought the E in LEAP, empowerment, represented the empowerment volunteers would give the students through English. However, what I realized through my relationship with Hadi and his family was that LEAP had actually empowered me to be an advocate on behalf of Hadi, his family, and all Palestinians.

— Bentley B., Bourj el Shemali Volunteer

When I first learned about LEAP and its mission I knew that I wanted to be a part of it. However, a full time job, rent, loans, bills, and various other commitments made it nearly impossible to take a month off for the program. Thankfully all the cards fell in my favor, and I soon found myself amongst 55 volunteers in Lebanon wearing our signature blue SHINE T-shirts. And true to what previous volunteers have said, no amount of reading or preparation could have prepared us for our time in Lebanon.

There was literally no time to waste, and sooner than we expected, each volunteer had classrooms full of energetic and enthusiastic children waiting to be inspired and challenged. We had the curriculum, the resources, and the support both from LEAP and the Beit Atfal staff. Ultimately, though, the children were looking up to us. It was our responsibility to develop the classroom chemistry and, given the circumstances, create the best learning environment. True to the title of a poem by my student, Sarah Al-Jawabereh's, *Time is Gold*, our time together was not to be taken for granted. In an effort to make them accountable for their learning experience, I made each student a calendar and placed a sticker on the days they were present in class. It was a small indicator that our days were numbered and so whenever they lost focus, or the heat was overwhelming, or we were all a bit too tired, I directed our attention back to those calendars. At times, that was all we needed to regroup and get back on track.



*Miss Denise's energetic morning class (left to right): Sarah, Asthma, Boushra, Mohammed, Daoud, & Mohammad*

Each morning, the volunteers from camp Rashidieh put on their blue shirts, packed up their bags, and headed out to meet Ahmed and Mohammed, our taxi drivers. But before we took off, someone would make sure to yell, "Does everyone have his/her passport?" At the only entrance to the camp, there is a checkpoint at which the Lebanese army stands powerful and suspicious of every car that enters and exits the camp. As foreigners, we had to hand over our passports and wait until the guards decided it was okay to proceed. Annoyed by this daily routine and irritated by their condescending looks, we waited and witnessed another reminder of Palestinian confinement.

However, once we entered the Beit Atfal Assumoud center and were warmly greeted by Mr. Mahmoud Zeidan and the rest of his staff, any discomfort was brushed away. We had a full day ahead of us, with two classes and an extracurricular activity to lead. As I wrote the 'Do Now' on the board, one of my students, Mohammed Hussein, would walk into my classroom and eagerly ask if there was anything he could do to help. While setting up, we would talk about the day's lesson and he would ask me many of his pondering questions. When it was time to begin the day, we would head to the playground where he joined the rest of his peers. Lined up according to class, we started the day with the Palestinian national anthem. While some students proudly belted out every word and others shyly whispered them, I stood beside my students with a big smile on my face, knowing that my decision to join LEAP was one of the best I have ever made.

— Denise F., Rashidieh Camp Volunteer



# LEAP Program Volunteers Share Highlights of Their Experience (Continued)

"Teacheeer, teacheeer! I go to the river to swim!"

"Teacheeer, teacheeer! How old are you?"

"Teacheeer, teacheeer! Look at my fake tattoo!"

These daily exclamations from my students continue to make me smile months after my participation in Project SHINE. Teaching in the south of Lebanon was the most difficult task I have ever faced. The days were hot, I was nervous about my teaching ability, and my class full of 8–11 year old boys intimidated me.

However, my students were energetic, enthusiastic, and full of love. Their drive to learn pushed me every day. Together, we struggled through grammar exercises, succeeded in writing short memoirs, and clapped for one another as students took turns reading. On Fridays, my students were relentless in pushing me into the shallow, cool waters of the river where we took our field trips. We clapped as our class superstar, Mohammad, showed off his dance moves. At the graduation ceremony in Camp Rashidieh, we strug-



gled with conflicting emotions as we celebrated our collective successes and said our good-byes. An immense feeling of pride swelled inside of me as I called out my students' names and handed them their certificates.

As I look back on my experience with Project SHINE, not only do I remember the many amazing moments with my students but also the friendships I built with my fellow volunteers. I was inspired by their relentless work ethic and grateful for their support and encouragement, even for seemingly simple tasks. Together we supported one another through intense heat, cramped living conditions, and bouts of food poisoning. Together we witnessed the struggle of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Together we will continue to share both our personal experiences and the stories of the Palestinians we met. Participating in Project SHINE has encouraged me to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine everywhere. Thank you to everyone who made this experience possible through your hard work!

— Karina G., Rashidieh Camp Coordinator

My month in Shatila was a life of sweat—literally. The homes and buildings were so close together that air simply had nowhere to go; and without fans, whose helpfulness was subject to severe electricity shortages, my classroom made the sweat roll down my face within minutes of my arrival. The hot sweaty stillness produced by the cement and cinder blocks around us made me realize what we were missing all the more. On the hottest days it was all I could do to keep the kids from melting into chaos—they'd tell me it wasn't fair that they had to sit and study in such an environment. And I, powerless in my classroom without power, had to agree.

And yet alongside the hard work and sweat was another kind of warmth radiating through Shatila: the kind of warmth that evaporates my sweat, cools me down,

and sustains me like the sun. It's the warmth from the students—when they break into a smile, gain confidence speaking in class, wow me with a new vocabulary word, concentrate on an art project, snap an extraordinary photograph, or run up for an unexpected hug.



I learned in graduate school that everything is complicated and political, that to simplify and depoliticize is to do violence to truth. But bathed in this particular warmth, it is clear that while life is inexplicably and impossibly complicated, it can also be quite simple.

To teach children is not to better the world, but to broaden their world and your own. This is the warmth that makes me feel that it was all worth it—even if I haven't quite managed to process what 'it' was.

— Anny G., Shatila Camp Volunteer



Since my plane landed in DC, my life has been a non-stop marathon: catching up with family and friends, unpacking, preparing for work, starting work. As I plan for this year, my mind returns to the children in Shatila. To the lessons they taught me. To the experiences, perspectives, and insights I gained from them.

The one word that I keep coming back to in all of this: *freedom*.

I'll never forget how I felt that early morning as my plane took off from Beirut. It was in that moment that the idea of freedom hit me. Here I was, returning to my own country to pursue my goals, to work in a career that I had chosen for myself, to return to family and friends who I had left for the summer. Yet I was leaving behind these beautiful children who were not allowed to do the same.

Children who dreamed of their home country. Children who knew stories of their homeland only through stories from their parents and grandparents. Children who knew their dreams would never come true unless their situation was resolved by factors out of their control. Children who had so much potential and talent but were stuck, unable to pursue their potential.

What could be more heartbreaking than a human unable to pursue their own potential?

In Lebanon, Palestinians lack many freedoms. They can't work in certain professions, they can't own land. These Palestinian children are filled with dreams and goals just like all children, but are held back by the reality of their lives.

Children like Ali.

He was a classroom's typical nuisance—distracting other students, speaking out of turn, and unable to control his impulses. He randomly sang songs in class. He liked the attention from students and craved it from the adults. His behavior was not out of spite or disrespect, but was a signal of something else.



*With Ali, the student who reminded me why I teach and to never give up on the student who may make you want to give up.*

One day during our one-on-one time, I looked at him and said, "Ali, you are smart, you are the highest level student in our class, do you know that?" He just looked down at his paper. "You let your behavior get in your way. If you change that, you could do so much." I asked him to nod if he understood, and he did. I asked him if he was willing to fix his behavior and show everyone how smart he was. Again, he nodded. We went back into class and for the remainder of that final week he was one of my best behaved students. He just needed an affirmation.

He needed to know that someone believed in him so he could believe in himself.

Don't we all need that?

— Kimberly G., Shatila Camp Volunteer

For more blogposts from Kimberly, visit [www.kgower06.blogspot.com](http://www.kgower06.blogspot.com)



## SHORT FILMS BY SHINE 2012 STUDENTS

### Acre

<http://youtu.be/IXNI21kR-PA>

Acre shows the tragedy of the Palestinian refugee situation in Lebanon through the protagonist Henzallah. Henzallah represents old Palestine and possesses a reverent plight to not accept the tragic situation of dispossession and return back to Palestine. Loosely based off of Naji Ali's cartoon character, Henzallah comes from old Palestine via the sea and stumbles upon the Shatilla refugee camp.



### LEAP at Rashidieh '12

<http://youtu.be/hq6TdeJI9Wg>

Palestinian refugee-youth put together a video showing their daily life in Rashidieh camp, Lebanon.



## Get Involved!

LEAP seeks dynamic, compassionate, and motivated volunteers who enjoy working with young adults; value the right to quality education for all people; have a strong belief in international law with respect to Palestinian refugees; maintain respect and diplomacy in their interactions with people of different backgrounds; and are capable of working under challenging circumstances.

Volunteers must be mature, responsible, able to multitask, maintain a positive and flexible attitude when working in stressful and exhausting environments, be understanding, and a great team-player.

The LEAP Program aims to be a mutual learning and sharing experience for both students and volunteers.

LEAP welcomes the involvement of students, educators and faculty from all academic fields and institutions to get involved in one of the following ways:

- ☐ Project SHINE (Summer Help IN English);
- ☐ Project ASPIRE (After-School Program in Remedial English);
- ☐ Project RISE (Recruitment Initiative for Scholarship Enrollment);
- ☐ LEAP Junior Board Committee Volunteers: LEAP is currently accepting applications for board positions to help in our year-long outreach and fundraising initiatives.

To get involved with LEAP and volunteer in one of our educational projects or help us carry out our year-long work, please contact us at [info@leapsummerprogram.org](mailto:info@leapsummerprogram.org).

## LEAP News & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### SHINE 2011 IMAGE CHOSEN FOR POETRY COLLECTION

The image of a child standing at the end of a narrow alley in Shatila camp, captured by a student in the SHINE 2011 photography class, has been selected as the cover for the forthcoming poetry collection, *The Only Thing That Matters* by Kim Jensen (Syracuse University Press, Spring 2013). The brief poems in this collection ask questions about love, grief, struggle, and the need for compassion in the face of pain and injustice. Kim Jensen is a poet, author, activist, and teacher whose books include *The Woman I Left Behind* and *Bread Alone*. In 2011, she volunteered with LEAP in Shatila and Bourj el Barajneh.

### SHINE 2012 PHOTOS TO UNVEIL AT DC-PFAF

Images captured by SHINE 2012 photography class students from Bourj el Barajneh, Bourj el Shemali, Rashidieh, and Shatila camps will be featured at this year's DC Palestinian Film and Arts Festival (DC-PFAF). Visit [dcpfaf.org](http://dcpfaf.org) for more information about the Festival.

