



Learning for the Empowerment and Advancement of Palestinians

Winter 2012

Vol. I, No. 2



(Photo from the Bourjel Barajneh photography club)

REFUGEES

The Palestinian refugee issue is the **largest** and **longest-lasting** refugee crises in the world. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, in comparison to refugees in other Arab countries, are almost entirely dependent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) as their main relief and major employer due to the many employment restrictions that hinder them from becoming self-sufficient.

750,000 Palestinians became refugees after being forced into exile during the *Nakba*, catastrophe, from 1947 to 1949.

350,000 Palestinians forced into exile during the Six Day War in 1967.

9 MILLION Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons today.

40 PERCENT of the world's refugees today are Palestinian.

74 PERCENT of today's Palestinian population is refugees.

80 PERCENT of all Palestinian refugees live outside camps operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

4.6 MILLION refugees are registered with UNRWA.

(Source: AMP Nakba Resources)

P.2 Letter from the LEAP Program
Advisory Board

P.4 LEAP 2011 Volunteers Share Their
Experience & Raise Awareness

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

or email:

info@leapsummerprogram.org

LEAP Advisory Board

Lamis J. Deek

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Melek Nimer

Fatema S. Zohny

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Letter from the LEAP Program Advisory Board

Dear Friends of LEAP,

As we reflect on the remarkable successes of the previous year, we would first like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to our supporters who have helped us educate and in turn, empower Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon. A grassroots program such as LEAP can only thrive through the support of people dedicated to the realization of a bright future for all Palestinians.

Over the past two years, LEAP has already made a positive impact on over 600 Palestinian refugee-students and scores of volunteers. In the past year alone we quadrupled our efforts of outreach and impact, and we hope to surpass that in the year ahead. The positive feedback from our students, their families and our community partners inspired us to carry out our program into more camps and develop additional programs.

LEAP is undergoing many changes that are representative of the hard work and persistence of its grassroots-volunteers and committed partners. LEAP will now be working in four camps with double the number of students and volunteers. In addition, we will be expanding the scope of our educational enrichment projects.

LEAP is now comprised of three projects: SHINE, ASPIRE, and RISE.

SHINE is LEAP's Summer Help IN English Project. SHINE is a demanding program that runs for the month of July, in which volunteers live and work in the refugee camps to learn about the plight of Palestinian refugees. Simultaneously, volunteers present daily English instruction and recreational activities for middle school students. Project SHINE supports youth who have limited educational and recreational outlets, giving them a productive and nourishing space during the long days of summer to develop their mental, social and emotional growth during their most formative developmental years.

ASPIRE is LEAP's After School Program in Remedial English Project. Due to the success of our summer program, we have extended it year-round. While UNRWA provides educational courses during the fall and spring semesters, our students can now count on us for after school tutoring to improve English proficiency, as well as building effective study skills, time-management, prioritizing, multi-tasking, and other such skills. ASPIRE will launch in Spring 2012!

RISE is LEAP's Recruitment Initiative for Scholarship Enrollment. LEAP is now building relationships with universities throughout the United States to procure scholarships for our college-bound students. LEAP will assist these students through every stage of the process: from college applications to transitioning into their new lives in the United States. RISE will provide mentors and a support system for students as they pursue their college degrees.

LEAP's primary mission is to provide educational services for refugee-students, but a second prong of our mission is to promote awareness about the plight of the Palestinian refugees in general, but particularly in Lebanon where the situation is especially dire. Volunteers learn firsthand about the *Nakba* and refugee narratives, and share their experiences with others upon their return to their home communities. This newsletter includes some testimonials from our volunteers, describing their efforts to raise awareness in the United States.

Our success is only possible with the generous support of our volunteers and donors. Please consider offering your time as a volunteer through one of our projects, joining a junior board committee, making a generous contribution or organizing a fundraiser to support LEAP and our mission. Our projects can only come to fruition through your generous support!

Education has the potential to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon. We are certain that with your support, we can continue to increase access to opportunities and empower students so they too can realize their dreams.

Thank you for your time and support!

*With gratitude,
The LEAP Board*

Announcements



19 January at Alwan: Frontiers of Dreams and Fears

February 2012: Launch of Project ASPIRE in Shatila and Bourj el Barajneh.

Project SHINE will be in 4 camps in Lebanon this Summer! Two in Beirut and two in Tyre with approximately 50 volunteers! Volunteers accepted on a rolling basis. Apply now!

19 January 2012: Documentary screening of Mai Masri's film, *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, at Alwan for the Arts, 16 Beaver St., 4th floor, New York, NY.

6 February 2012: LEAP Volunteer Reportback at Hunter College.

Volunteers Share Their Experience & Raise Awareness

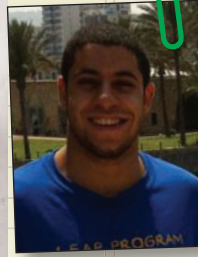


Hira A.

I lived in Bourj el Barajneh refugee camp for four weeks teaching English and leading the theater club. Upon my return from participating in the LEAP SHINE summer program, I gave a presentation at a local community center in my hometown. I prepared a short presentation about Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the struggles

they face, as well as general information about UNRWA and LEAP. I also read a bit of my own personal reflections on my experience. The talk was successful because it generated dialogue about the current situation of Palestinian refugees, among individuals who otherwise would not have much to say on such an important issue. People were clearly affected by what they'd heard, and though many of them are well aware that Palestinian refugees exist, they don't understand the extent of their plight, particularly in Lebanon.

I received some questions when I was finished, and much to my surprise, a member of our community named Ayad asked if he might respond. He went on to say that he was born in Bourj el Barajneh and answered one man's question about why the refugees have so few opportunities. From the expressions on people's faces, I could tell they were taken aback that Ayad, a well-known member of our community, came from the camps of Lebanon. It brought the issue home to everyone. Based on people's engagement and the recurring discussions that have happened since, I am confident this reportback was successful in bringing to light the issue of Palestinian refugees. It is from these kinds of human interactions that people are moved.



Odai A.

This past summer I lived in the Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon where I taught English and the importance of Social Media to middle school children preparing for the national Brevet—an exam that decides their future in education and is administered in English. Upon my return, I gave a report-back presentation to members of the Palestine Children's Relief Club at Rutgers University, a club dedicated to sending medical relief to the children in Palestine and raising awareness of the humanitarian crisis there. I informed them about the plight of Palestinian refugees, particularly in Lebanon, and the unforgettable life-changing experiences I had on this trip. The informational event was successful because students were engaged and asked many questions. Moreover, they were learning about an aspect of the Israel/Palestine issue they had not known much about before. I hope this event will make people remember the refugees that are a direct consequence of the *Nakba* and who consistently suffer everyday and will be moved to make a conscious effort to better the lives of refugees.



Amir F.

My experience with LEAP led me to take action upon my return to the US by volunteering with our partner organization, the Unite Lebanon Youth Project and helping to launch LEAP's Project RISE. ULYP's Bridge scholarship program seeks to secure scholarships for talented Palestinian refugee youth from Lebanon to study at colleges and universities all over the world. Through LEAP's Project RISE, we were able to meet with admissions committees at schools like Tufts, Wellesley and Barnard, we've not only had success in raising awareness, but we've also learned of concrete ways to realize the dream of bringing refugee students from Lebanon to study in the US and achieve their dreams. We are now supporting eleven refugee-applicants applying to seven different schools from Miami to Boston! We've been working closely with our students and helping with college essay drafts, practicing interview skills via Skype, and helping to answer the many questions they have about studying in the US. Going forward, we hope to continue to expand our scholarship program so that more of our bright students will have a real possibility of attending college when they graduate from secondary school in a few short years.

~ MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY ~

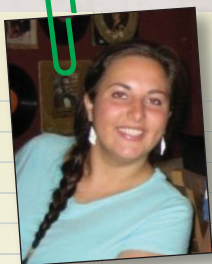
I wish to make a charitable contribution to support LEAP's initiatives in the amount of: \$50 ____ \$100 ____ \$300 ____
Other amount: _____

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

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

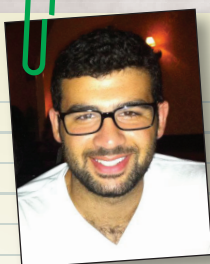


Destiny S.

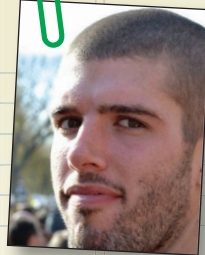
A few days before I left for Lebanon/LEAP, I hosted an event at my mother's church in Texas, speaking about what I would be doing during my volunteer experience. Upon my return, I have been sharing my experience of living and teaching in Bourj el Barajneh with friends, family and people in my community. I think my experiences have been successful in raising awareness about Palestinians and the conditions they face in the refugee camps. I hope that, if anything, people will see a different side or question what they might hear on the news. In addition, I also had an informal report-back at the Intercultural Resource Center (IRC) at Columbia University.

Online media journalism is one of my hobbies, so I wanted to use this medium as a way to "reportback" about my LEAP experience and share what I learned. Therefore, when I returned to the University of Madison-Wisconsin, I thought that doing a show on the radio station for Madison students would be a great way to spread the message of LEAP and share with my fellow classmates what I learned and experienced during my participation in the program. I asked Zeyad and Max, two other LEAP volunteers, to appear on the show and my co-host interviewed the three of us about our experience.

On the show we discussed the living conditions in the camps, our teaching experiences and relationships with the students. Most importantly, we addressed the civil restrictions Palestinians face in Lebanon in all aspects of their lives and the refugee issue in general, but how it is particularly crippling in Lebanon.



Ibrahim B.



Ryan B.

I lived in Bourj el Barajneh and taught English and social media over the course of the summer program. Upon my return, I organized a talk at my local library. The first portion of my presentation was focused on offering a historical perspective. The second part involved me discussing the LEAP program and all it encompasses. In the final part of my presentation I read some selected journal entries from my summer experience. I think that was the most successful part of my presentation because I was able to effectively communicate my immediate emotional reaction to my encounters in the camps.

At the end of my presentation, people approached me and were appreciative of my talk. Most said they were completely unaware of Palestinian refugees, and the Palestinian struggle in general. While I felt I made a small contribution, I still recognize that there is still so much more that needs to be accomplished if we are ever going to achieve equality, justice, and peace.



Kira S.

I was a guest on a radio show twice: once before I left to participate in the SHINE summer program and then again after my return. I lived in Bourj el Barajneh camp and taught English and film. It was interesting listening to the first show when I talked about going and then compare it to my talk when I returned. I've also been raising awareness about refugees through my participation in campus groups and specifically organizing events on refugees, one of the most central aspects of the Israel/Palestine conflict that is overlooked and forgotten. It's important to know that our voice is always strong. At one of my report-backs a Lebanese girl challenged my comments that Palestinians in Lebanon are a repressed community, prevented from living dignified lives. However, I explained to her the camp conditions and their restrictions, which surprised her. Despite her many family visits to Lebanon, she had no idea about the poor legal status of Palestinian refugees. Another thing I have done is talk to my congressman. I am involved with another rights group and we gather as many people as possible on a regular basis to meet with our congressman and discuss US foreign policy in the Middle East. I plan to include the refugee issue in my future meetings.