



# LEARNING FOR THE EMPOWERMENT & ADVANCEMENT OF PALESTINIANS

*Empowering students to become their own agents of change*

Winter 2013

WWW.LEAP-PROGRAM.ORG

Vol.II, No.2

*I was honored to design the logo for LEAP. Since the program addresses Palestinian youth living in Lebanon, a Lebanese Cedar Tree was used for the "A," splashed proudly with the colors of the Palestinian flag. The chalkboard and the books symbolize education. I used the red and the green from the Palestinian flag for the books, and the Nakba key is leaned up against the chalkboard to display the ongoing movement for Palestinians to rightfully return to their land. The main message behind the logo is "education is liberation," both on an individual and a collective basis.*

**Vanessa Chan, freelance visual artist**

**NISSADRAW.S.WORDPRESS.COM**

## **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.Leap-Program.org](http://www.Leap-Program.org)

or email:

[info@leap-program.org](mailto:info@leap-program.org)



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## Dear readers,

On behalf of the LEAP team, we thank you for your generous support. Whether you are new to LEAP or have been with us since our inception in 2010, we are appreciative of your belief in us and our mission. Your contribution allows us to continue our educational projects to empower Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon. LEAP has several new developments for 2013 that we are excited to share with you!

First, LEAP has expanded its board of advisors to handle the operations, management, and coordination of our projects. As we develop new projects, we must also develop our team; thus we now have more talent to continue our work. The team works on a volunteer basis as a labor of love and commitment to refugee rights and youth education for Palestinian refugees. We welcome Karina, Suzanne, Eileen, Lara, Zeyad, and Fatimah and we appreciate the continued support of Dima, Amir, Dayana, and Nasser.

Secondly, have you noticed anything different about the face of LEAP? We have a new and improved website and logo! We hope that the site is more user-friendly, informative, and fun. Moreover, we hope it better reflects all of the hard work we do throughout the year to sustain our educational projects and raise awareness about Palestinian refugees. Also new to our design is the LEAP logo, which was recently re-designed by a fabulous artist. Check out her note.

Third, there are many new components to LEAP Summer Help IN English (SHINE) Project:

- ✍ LEAP is expanding from four camps to a fifth camp this summer, El Buss in Tyre. We are now operating in five of the 12 refugee camps of Lebanon.
- ✍ Project SHINE will expand its services to teachers that service Palestinian youth in the classroom year-round. While volunteers will provide English proficiency training to students, they will also provide English instruction and Best Teacher Practices training to our partner organization, Beit Atfal Assumoud's teachers and staff. This service will have a significant influence on improving students' English proficiency since BAS teachers are with students as early as Kindergarten.
- ✍ Lastly, Project SHINE will also include a community project component in which SHINE volunteers, their colleagues at BAS, and students, will work together to design and implement a community project to improve the community. Some ideas include a dental hygiene awareness project, a nutritional campaign, and a trash/recycling awareness program.

Last but not least, LEAP is proud to announce the launch of a new project named **Projet PARFÉ**, which will offer French assistance to Francophone UN schools for Palestinian refugee students. Read more about this exciting new project pioneered by Amir (Advisory Board member and third-time SHINE volunteer) and Gabriela (volunteer of summer 2011 & 2012), who will be the Project Coordinator for *Projet PARFÉ* this summer.

We hope to bring to fruition our short term goals, as well as lay strong foundations for our long term projects. The new energy, vigor, and efforts from another talented and committed group of LEAP volunteer alumni has further strengthened and broadened our base of support and services. With this newsletter, we draw your attention to our latest developments and ventures that we hope will continue to engage your interest and support.

**Please consider making a donation today.**

(Continues on next page...)



We hope to harness our collective energies toward another year of educational empowerment for our youth in the refugee camps of Lebanon. Every dollar of your generous proceeds go directly to supporting opportunities and services to our deserving youth.

Education is a liberating and invaluable tool. We promise that there is no better gift than providing the gift of education. We hope that you consider supporting us by donating today!

With appreciation and gratitude,

*The LEAP Team*

## LEAP PROGRAM NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### LEAP ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF ACCELERATED FRENCH SUMMER PROGRAM "PROJET PARFÉ"

Following three years of success of its Anglophone projects in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps, LEAP proudly announces the launch of *Projet PARFÉ: Pour l'Apprentissage Rapide du Français en Été* (Project Perfect, for the accelerated learning of French in the summer), a new initiative to serve Palestinian refugee-students who attend UNRWA French schools!

Given that the Lebanese Brevet and Baccalaureate are administered in French as well as English, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency operates four Francophone primary schools throughout Lebanon: Saida, outside Tripoli, and in Sabra.

Similar to their English-learning peers, ninth grade Palestinian students from these schools often have immense difficulty passing the French administered version of the Brevet exam; thus preventing them from promotion to high school.

However, for those students who do manage to pass the Brevet exam in French, there is an extraordinary opportunity to access high quality secondary and even university education! Thanks to the significant engagement of the French Embassy in Beirut, all Palestinian refugee students who pass the Brevet in French are automatically awarded scholarships to attend Lebanese public or private *lycées* (Francophone high schools).

Given the significant incentive offered by the availability of scholarships, passing the Brevet is ever as important for Palestinian students from the four French primary schools. Through its commitment to empowering as many Palestinian refugee-students as possible in Lebanon through, LEAP is launching *Projet PARFÉ*.

The project will bring French proficient volunteers to Beirut to conduct an intensive four-week-long summer project. Similar to LEAP's SHINE project in English, students will have recreational activities such as creative writing, traditional Palestinian dance (*Debke*), art, theater among many others; field trips; as well as the same number of specialized instructional hours by French volunteers.

LEAP aims to increase our students' ability to pass the Brevet exam and thus continue their educational endeavors or pursue other vocational opportunities.

This will be *Projet PARFÉ*'s pilot summer. It will be open to approximately 70 students, studying in grades five through nine, from the Ras al-Ain school in Sabra. Students will attend classes in the afternoons in the Beit Atfal Assumoud community center in the neighboring Shatila camp.

### LEAP PROGRAM & VASSAR COLLEGE STUDENTS COLLABORATE TO DEVELOP EMPOWERING CURRICULUM

We first learned about LEAP and became involved with the organization through the *Education for Peace, Justice and Human Rights* course that we were taking in the Fall 2012 semester. The professor of the course offered several educational projects that students could participate in. The five of us were very excited to learn about the incredible work that the organization was doing and immediately wanted to assist in any way that we could. We felt that working closely with LEAP to help create the SHINE curriculum would be an invaluable learning experience for us, while also contribute to the Program in a meaningful way. Working on the curriculum undoubtedly proved to be an experience that engaged us and allowed us to grow as learners, be critical of our own understanding of the world and be a part of something bigger than ourselves. While the students using the curriculum are a world away from us and we cannot fully understand the institutionalized injustices they face on a daily basis, we tried to be particularly careful to approach this project from a place of humility and tried to ensure that our material is useful, engaging and thorough. We are grateful for the opportunity as we appreciate and utilize the internal solution created by LEAP, by contributing in our small part, to Project SHINE.

*Andrew Lindsay, Hiroe Nakada, Sahara Pradhan, Sophie Wheelock and Stephanie Osei-Sarpong*

*Vassar College, Master in Education students*

**(News and Announcements continues on page 8...)**



# LEAP Program Volunteers Share Their Experiences Raise Awareness



Volunteering for LEAP deepened my understanding of what it means to have a homeland; my own homeland and my general rights were things that I had long taken for granted. I was struck by the openness and resilience of my young students. Their strength and optimism in the face of adversity is something that will always stay with me. Since returning I have shared my experience with friends and family and in a yet unpublished essay.

*Sarah J, Bourj el Shemali, Summer 2012*



When I first joined the LEAP program in 2011, I never anticipated I'd be returning yet again for a third consecutive summer. However, the fulfilling experience that LEAP provides inspired me to carry on and stay involved with the Program. Returning has helped me find out more and more about what life is really like for Palestinian refugees and therefore where our efforts as volunteers can be best placed. One of LEAP's greatest strengths is in the partnerships and collaboration with members of the communities within the camps and I felt that by returning I could build on these relationships to improve the quality of the work we do. Over the years I have also been lucky enough to connect some of my friends back home with the people working in Bourj el Barajneh so that they too can raise awareness of the camps in Lebanon and carry out grassroots work in the region. Being a LEAP volunteer has inspired me to continue in the line of development and grassroots non-profit work as I have seen what a difference the work can make.

And while the summer months fly past in a flurry of experiences and emotions for volunteers, it is during the winter when I think of Bourj el Barajneh more frequently. I think about where I am in the world and where my friends (from the camp) that I joked and worked with only a few months prior are. They are wading knee deep in the flooded streets they are forced to call home. The combination of an old sewage system, which desperately needs replacing, and the narrow alleys that make up the camps, results in annual flooding and sewage problems. Above people's heads too, looms the dangerous tangle of electric wires that claim too many lives every year. It's not because the Palestinian people can't improve these conditions, but because they are not allowed to. That is why LEAP volunteers feel a strong obligation to raise awareness of the urgent needs of the camps, because the people who live there deserve the right to improve their situation, and so far this right is being ignored and denied. We are exposed to so many of the hardships Palestinian refugees face during our time living and working in the refugee camps. And while I always thought the summer months were the worst while living in extreme heat with scarce electricity and water, I am not sure there are good months between the cold and heat.

*Aliya A., Bourj el Barajneh, Summer 2011, 2012  
& returning Summer 2013*





Karina G.

This past summer I volunteered as the Program Coordinator for Rashidieh Camp in Tyre and taught one class of bright and energetic students. At the end of the program this past August I had no doubts about returning to the Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon the following summer. Reflecting on my LEAP experience has made me evaluate my own work as a Palestine solidarity activist and critically analyze why not enough attention is paid to the Palestinian diaspora refugees. Often, the Palestinian refugees outside of Palestine live in the most difficult conditions. In the case of Lebanon, unlike in other countries such as Syria and Jordan, Palestinians do not have the right to work in over 70 professions and lack many other rights. Coupling this knowledge with my Project SHINE experience has made me eager to focus my efforts on empowering the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and raising awareness about their living, social, political, and economic reality.

I am excited for another summer with Project SHINE but before it is once again July, I am looking forward to the hard work ahead with the LEAP advisory board. I am very honored to be part of such a great team and to have the opportunity to work year round for an organization that has been life changing for so many in Lebanon, the U.S. and other areas of the world. I couldn't be happier to receive this position and opportunity to ensure that LEAP succeeds in its efforts in the years to come. I look forward to the hard but rewarding work ahead.

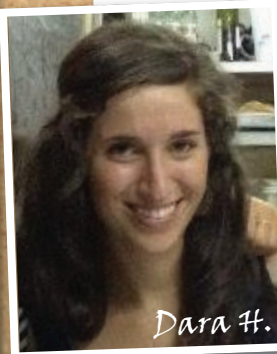
*Karina G., Rashidieh, Summer 2012 & returning Summer 2013*



Dana K.

Months after my time volunteering with the LEAP program, I had the opportunity to report on my experiences and educate NYU students on the conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, as well as the Palestine refugee issue in general. We screened a film on the *Nakba* and then each of the 10 volunteers touched on a specific aspect of our experience such as cultural preservation among the refugee community, issues and challenges youth face, restrictions of movement and the stigmatization of refugees, boundaries and how they affect our youth, volunteer challenges and daily experiences, as well as the classroom environment and educational issues, among many other topics. Throughout the report back, I had learned a great deal from simply hearing my peers sharing their own experiences. I was introduced to occurrences and events I was unaware of. Sharing my experiences with others allowed me to partially fulfill the responsibility I came back home with, which was to extend the voice of the refugees to America by raising awareness about the issue of Palestine refugees. By sharing our experiences, I am hopeful that the audience members felt inspired to support programs like LEAP and are better informed about the issues we discussed, as well as compelled to get involved!

*Dana K., Bourjel Barajneh, Summer 2012 & returning Summer 2013*



Dara H.

In July 2012, I volunteered with LEAP and taught English and Art in Rashidieh Camp. In September 2012, I traveled to Palestine with an artist delegation to paint murals in the West Bank. We painted our last mural at a preschool in Romana, a small village near Jenin. As we were leaving our friend Hussam said, "Please go home and tell your country not to take away our dreams."

LEAP is doing exactly what Hussam asked us to do. This program is helping keep children's dreams alive, by providing them with empowering educational opportunities, and creating safe nourishing spaces for dreams to grow. Whether born in Palestine or in Lebanon, Palestinian children are raised under occupation. Their freedom to dream and explore the world is severely restricted.

LEAP impacted my life in ways I never could have imagined. Thank you Maryam and Fatema for your ceaseless work and commitment to justice, and to all of the amazing volunteers and beautiful children I had the pleasure of learning from, my deepest appreciation.

*Peace and love,*

*Dara H., Rashidieh, Summer 2012*



## LETTER FROM THE PALESTINIAN BORDER

It would feel like if you ate  
Gorged yourself in front of a hungry person.  
But the starving one is the one who cooked the meal,  
Grew the garden,  
Nurtured the abundance  
And then they just took it.  
Ate it from another's plate.  
For 63 years.

This is the border between Palestine and Lebanon  
Between Palestine and us.  
Between you and I.  
This is what the border must look like  
To the thirsty  
To the hungry —  
Dry, cracking Earth where I stand  
Dying, withered weeds  
Trash.  
Zionist wrappers.  
Empty  
Bottles of water  
And then —  
My eyes feast on the overwhelming abundance just over the electric wall —  
Rolling greens.  
Fertile.  
Plentiful  
Life.  
I feel numb.  
I keep staring at the thirsty ground under my blistering feet.  
Looking up and across  
Creates a blocking in my throat.  
She tells me when she was a little girl —  
She wanted to be wealthy  
Wealthy enough  
Just enough  
To buy her village back — she laughs a little.  
I begin to sob so I carry my eyes to the ground again —  
Weeping, parched, blowing plants  
Struggling in the heat.

This time I look straight up.  
Two flags  
Scorched from the unbearable sun  
I remember to wipe my brow.  
I hear the UN soldier behind me.  
Questions.  
Invading the past and present histories.  
Memories.  
And I can stop crying.

Thousands come to see their home—  
A young woman yells in Arabic  
"Palestine do you hear us?"  
"We are here to see you"  
"We are here to see you,"  
"To love you,"  
"To be with you,"  
"To live you,"  
"To live with you,"  
"To live in you again."

Then a little girl —  
Running alongside the fence, happily chanting —  
"Palestine"  
"Palestine"  
"Palestine"  
She has known it her whole life.  
Her grandmother looks up to the sky  
"Ya Rab"  
"My Lord"  
"May we return to Palestine."

*Cynthia L., Bourjel Shemali, Summer 2012 & returning 2013*



# WINDOWS TO REFUGE:

## Images of Camp Life through the Eyes of Palestinian Youth in Lebanon

Throughout the month of July 2012, students participating in LEAP's summer English project were also involved in various extracurricular activities. This exhibit is a sampling of student work from the photography classes in the Rashidieh and Bourj el Shemali camps in Tyre, and the Shatila and Bourj el Barajneh camps in Beirut. The children, ranging in ages from 11–15, were asked to brainstorm what they wanted a US audience to know and see about their lives as refugees and living in a camp.

In Lebanon, there are over 12 UNRWA camps, with an estimated total of 450,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. Half are under the age of 25. Denied most of their political, economic, and social rights, UNRWA estimates that half of all Palestinian teenagers drop out of school. However, their restrictions are not only institutional; many camps are enclosed and surrounded by security forces that implement a strict perimeter.

As you view these photos, you may notice differences in the camps, which surprised even the volunteer teachers that participated in the program. (For example, those in the south described views of the beach to shocked volunteers in Shatila, which is a strictly urban setting.)

Please remember that this exhibit is not about visitors to these camps trying to show you life in a refugee camp; instead, it consists of intentional, choice images, captured by Palestinian children, of spaces and people in their lives — which they now wish to share with you.

*Coordinated by Anny G. and Nour S.*



(PHOTO: BOURJ EL BARAJNEH)



(PHOTO: SHATILA)



(PHOTO: SHATILA)



(PHOTO: RASHIDIEH)



(PHOTO: RASHIDIEH)



(PHOTO: RAJAA M., BOURJ EL SHEMALI)



(PHOTO: SOULEMAN S., BOURJ EL SHEMALI)



(PHOTO: AYA T., BOURJ EL SHEMALI)



~ 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.LEAP-PROGRAM.ORG](http://WWW.LEAP-PROGRAM.ORG)

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

## Get Involved With The LEAP Program!

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@leap-program.org](mailto:info@leap-program.org).

## LEAP PROGRAM NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONT.)

BENEFIT FOR  
**THE CHILDREN OF al NAKBAH**  
**MARCEL KHALIFE**



**APRIL 21**  
**6 PM**  
DINNER & PERFORMANCE  
ALL PROCEEDS DONATED TO THE  
**LEAP PROGRAM FOR PALESTINIAN**  
REFUGEE-YOUTH IN LEBANON

WIDDI HALL  
5602 SIXTH AVENUE & 56TH STREET  
SUNSET PARK, BROOKLYN

Section A \$250 / Table \$2250  
Section B \$150 / Table \$1350  
Section C \$75 / Table \$700  
Student tickets \$50

[marcelkhalify.com](http://marcelkhalify.com)  
[www.leap-program.org](http://www.leap-program.org) | [info@leap-program.org](mailto:info@leap-program.org)

## LEAP BENEFIT DINNER AND PERFORMANCE WITH SPECIAL GUEST MARCEL KHALIFE ON APRIL 21

Distinguished composer, singer, and oud player Marcel Khalife will give a special guest performance on April 21, 2013, 6 p.m., at the LEAP Program Benefit Dinner & Performance for the Children of al Nakbah, in Widdi Hall, Brooklyn, NY.

Marcel Khalife is best known for liberating the oud, an instrument integral to Arabic culture, from its traditionally strict techniques, expanding its musical possibilities, and contributing to its artistic and cultural revival. Over the decades, Khalife's music and his own compositions have signified peace, reconciliation and breaking boundaries. In his quest to renew the vibrancy and significance of the Arabic song, he has based songs on the words of some of the great contemporary Arab poets, particularly the Palestinian poet and journalist Mahmoud Darwish, who eloquently wrote of the exile, struggles, and hopes of the Palestinian people.

Tickets for the Benefit may be purchased online at [www.marcelkhalify.com](http://www.marcelkhalify.com) — group and student discounts are available. All proceeds donated to the LEAP Program for Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon.