



LEARNING FOR THE EMPOWERMENT & ADVANCEMENT OF PALESTINIANS

Empowering students to become their own agents of change

Spring 2014

www.leap-program.org

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*Dear
readers,*

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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

or email:

info@leap-program.org

P.6 Support Summer Fun for Palestinian Refugee-Youth & Donate Today!



Dear readers,

We are pleased to share with you our spring newsletter, which highlights only a few important initiatives our volunteers have launched upon returning from their summer teaching experience in SHINE. From our group in SHINE 2013, almost half are returning to continue to foster the bonds they established with their students and colleagues, as well as learn more about the reality of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and those arriving from Syria, so that they may raise awareness and amplify the voices of the refugee communities.

We hope that you take the time to review some of their experiences and stories and feel compelled to donate to LEAP to support our work. Donating will allow us to not only echo the voices of refugees and raise awareness about the Palestinian refugee reality, but it will also allow us to provide educational empowerment projects for youth. It is easy for youth to succumb to the social ills and pressures around them due to the dismal conditions and lack of opportunities for Palestinians in Lebanon. However, through an education, they are able to critically think, which will allow them to make better decisions, as well as increase their chances for employment.

Please consider generously donating to LEAP today and investing in the educational advancement of Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon.

With appreciation & gratitude,

The LEAP Board

LEAP Program News & Announcements

LEAP & BAS Respond to Meet Needs of Palestinian Refugees from Syria

Since the start of the Syria refugee crisis, over 52,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) have sought exile in Lebanon, with most seeking shelter in the existing Palestinian refugee camps. The newly arrived PRS families face similar struggles as those arriving in Lebanon in 1948 and 1967, such as being prohibited from working in over 72 professions, few legal protections, and already overcrowded and under resourced living conditions. Additionally, PRS only receive aid from UNRWA and a handful of local organizations. Unlike Syrian refugees who receive aid from UNHCR and other aid organizations, PRS families are ineligible due to the conflicting agency mandates, which restricts Palestinian refugees to aid from UNRWA. However, efforts have yet to meet the needs of the refugee communities. This was greatly felt during the winter months.

In response to the need for crucial winter supplies such as blankets, clothing, and heaters, LEAP Board members Maryam and Karina, assisted our local partner organization the National Institute for Social Care and Vocational Training (also known as Beit Aftal Assoumoud) in launching a crowdfunding winterization campaign. In one month of fundraising, Beit Aftal was able to raise \$11,431 from 92 generous donors. The funds raised were directly used to purchase the necessary winter supplies and given to the most-in-need families. Soon, they will also be launching a campaign for the summer months since the region in general, and Lebanon in particular will experience a water drought. Aid organizations are preparing for a dry summer and how to best support families during this crisis. Please keep a look out for this campaign!

— Karina G. and Maryam M.

SHINE Volunteers, Erakat Highlight Hope, Challenges Facing Palestinian Refugees

LEAP and NYU Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) hosted an event with human rights attorney and activist Noura Erakat on December 10, 2013 at the Kimmel Center at NYU. LEAP Advisory Board Members, Dima and Shafaq, provided an introduction and overview of the Palestinian refugee reality and the intersection with LEAP's projects: SHINE, ASPIRE and RISE. After the introduction, LEAP volunteers, Aseef (2013), Samantha (2012) and Nour (2012) described their respective experiences volunteering for SHINE. Aseef described employing creative strategies to reach out to the students, including teaching a drama class. Samantha explained more about the UNRWA backdrop as well as the challenges youth face growing up in the refugee camps in Lebanon, in which they are offered limited opportunities to nurture their emotional and intellectual growth. Finally, Nour shared a poignant summary of her personal experience within the overall Palestinian refugee

experience and how Palestinian refugees have preserved their heritage and customs despite 65 years of exile. Moreover, she discussed how the LEAP experienced challenged her ideas of what it means to be a Palestinian refugee.

SJP then introduced Ms. Erakat, a distinguished academic who has written frequently about the Palestinian refugee crisis, who focused her presentation on population trends inside the Palestinian territories. She touched upon the barriers to integration in Lebanon which contributes to the "stateless" nature of Palestinians refugees in Lebanon. She further explained the prohibition on the return of Palestinian refugees due to Israel's desire to "maintain an unnatural demographic balance whereby Jewish population constitutes a majority in Israel." We thank Ms. Erakat for providing such an illuminating discussion; to SJP for welcoming us at NYU; and to the LEAP volunteers for sharing their experiences. This was one of many LEAP report-backs in which volunteers aim to raise awareness about the Palestinian refugee reality in general, but particularly in Lebanon.



Distribution to PRS families in Baalbek

LEAP Volunteers Share Highlights of Their Experiences

Esraa, a Palestinian woman in her early twenties, was my co-teacher in Rashidieh. Her grandparents were natives of the city of Safed (known in Hebrew as Tzfat) and became refugees in Lebanon during the *Nakba*. Her family has lived in the camp ever since.

As part of SHINE, volunteers took a daytrip, along with members of the Rashidieh community, to the border village of Maroun el-Ras, a windswept hilltop marred by barbed wire and patrolled by U.N. peacekeepers. Any thoughts or feelings I might have had paled against the image of Esraa's face as she gazed across and down to the clearly-visible Safed, her estranged hometown, only ten miles to the south.

Later on the bus we discussed the complexity of emotions that arose at the border, and I was inspired to write a song in solidarity with her experience. The lyrics evoke Palestine but are impressionistic enough to speak to anyone's sense of exile. I've been playing the song live around Montreal and using it as an opportunity to educate people about the refugee situation in Lebanon and all the sadness, frustration, and hope that defines it.

... Where the water wells weep
And the lemon trees laugh
Where the whispering wind
Cuts me crisply in half
Where the living and the dead
Bathe together in clay
I will return home someday...

— Jay B., Rashidieh volunteer



Since returning this summer from SHINE, I've been further working with Students for Justice in Palestine by organizing events at my university campus, the University of California Santa Barbara, in order to advance the discussion on Palestine. One way that I did this is by screening the Oscar nominated documentary, *Five Broken Cameras*, followed by a discussion with younger students. This was a great chance to introduce LEAP and discuss ways in which students could provide a meaningful service, while simultaneously learning more about the refugee reality.

Additionally, I've been working with another past LEAP volunteer on organizing a cross country road trip to raise awareness about Palestinian refugees and raise funds to help support LEAP's projects and educational opportunities for youth. This is set to happen in mid-Spring, and though it's in the early stages of development, we're very excited about where the project is going!

— Mone M, Rashidieh volunteer



The SHINE 2013 students created beautiful art that depicted elements of life as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In each camp, students created collective murals in their art class. While both murals are quite different, the students from both Rashidieh and Bourj el-Shemali did an exceptionally creative job in illustrating the issues and topics that were important to them. The Bourj el-Shemali mural depicts systematic restrictions Palestinian refugees face such as not being able to access the hospital, which signifies everything that Palestinians don't have access to in Lebanon from birth till death. A wall, which is supposed to reflect the separation wall in Palestine, the walls around the camps, the walls around their lives, and how walls and fences prevent access from what they need to live in health, dignity, and happiness. A girl studying by a candle is the students' way of depicting the difficulties they face in studying and not always having electricity. The Rashidieh mural depicts elements that evoke thoughts of the students' homelands. While in art class, a student from Rashidieh said, "We miss home", which became a key phrase in conceptualizing the mural. One prominent feature in the mural was the use of roots, which are meant to signify an immovable, manifested connection to land, faith,

and heritage. Icons such as the key, famous Palestinian cartoon figure Handala, an olive tree, structures such as homes, the Dome of The Rock and Al-aqsa mosque were all incorporated into the canvas mural.

The importance of these murals is that they give the students an additional platform to express themselves. While physically travelling is not necessarily an option, creating something that comes from our students and having that piece of art travel, is a great opportunity to amplify their voices. For the duration of May 2014, both murals will be on display throughout the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

I did not plan on doing a photo series of the camps I visited and worked in. However, upon stumbling across an opportunity to submit media related to global social justice and have it published in a university journal, I decided to reflect on the photos I took. The Palestinian struggle for justice, human rights, dignity, and return, supported by UN resolutions 194, 242, and 3236, is the epitome of a global social justice movement and cannot be ignored. Thus the photos became an assemblage of significant imagery. I realized that in the camps, things



could be seen as complementary or paradoxical to each other. Whether it's the abrupt displacement and constricted living conditions built on the freedom and fluidity of the sea, or the fences and walls that represent limitations, making what is dear to us inaccessible; the freedom of water, the warmth of home, the invigorating presence of what makes life worth living, and the vibration we originate from. I titled the photo series, *Eight Letters for "refugees" and the idea of "homeland"*; both of which contain eight letters and also referred to *In The Presence of Absence*, a prose piece written by renowned Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish.

— Julia P., Rashidieh Volunteer



Support Summer Fun for Palestinian Refugee-Youth & Donate Today!



\$46
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*Remember your childhood days
when you went to summer camp?*

*Remember how much fun
you had with your peers
and all the exciting activities
you participated in?*

*Remember how much you
looked forward to reuniting
again with your friends and
experiencing it all over again?*

*And if you never participated in a
summer camp, do you remember
how bored you were
during the summer days and
how much you looked forward
to returning to school?*

Help us bring the same summer experience to **600 Palestinian refugee-youth in the camps of Lebanon this summer!** SHINE (Summer Help In English) offers students a productive and safe space during their summer vacation to strengthen their English language proficiency, while simultaneously exploring various recreational activities.

LEAP has been operating its summer project SHINE, an intensive summer camp in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon, since 2010. Over the past 4 years, we have impacted more than 1,900 youths, over 130 volunteers, and 30 teachers. LEAP recruits volunteers to teach English, as well as lead recreational activities while living and working in the refugee camps. Among the many activities offered include yoga, photography, videography, *Debke* (a Palestinian folkloric dance), theater, social media, poetry, and creative writing. Moreover, students are able to explore new interests, go on field trips that nurture and foster their mental, physical, and social growth at a pivotal stage in their lives, and make lasting friendships with classmates and teachers. In turn, our volunteers learn about the Palestinian refugee reality in general, but particularly in Lebanon. Volunteers and students alike share a mutual learning experience. Upon return to their home communities, volunteers are encouraged to raise awareness about the plight of Palestinian refugees.

Adolescents face a number of social pressures and adult-like responsibilities. SHINE allows them to be children, while also re-inspiring their thirst for knowledge. English is an essential skill because students must take a national exam —administered in English— for promotion to high school. Unfortunately, more than half of all students fail the exam due to lack of proficiency in English. Furthermore, many Palestinian refugee-youths from Syria, who now reside in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, have a lower proficiency than their grade-level, thus preventing them from enrolling in school due to lack of confidence and self-esteem.

LEAP's SHINE project aims to remedy these impediments and advance youth through our intensive and fun summer project, which promises to make students feel more confident, happy, and accomplished. 90% of youths expressed that their English proficiency improved and they felt more confident in English, while 98% indicated that they intend to participate in SHINE again.

Summer Fun for Palestinian Refugee-Youth



17% Raised

Click to donate now



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 www.gofundme.com/summerfunpalyouth