



RUWWAD Report

Youth Volunteers for Community Assistance

أخبار رواد

Monthly News – April 2008

Ruwwad Youth Capture Rich Cultural Heritage in First-Ever DVD

“A young woman appears in a traditional embroidered dress, balancing a clay pot on her head as she strolls through the olive orchard on her way to the community well”. Dreamlike memories of traditional village life are an important part of every Palestinian’s heritage, but increasingly they’re becoming just that: Memories. Thankfully, a group of Ruwwad youth leaders is working to change this reality. This month, a team of five friends will release the *Turath* (or “heritage”) cultural DVD series, through support from Ruwwad: A powerful project that seeks to revive and preserve the culture of their grandparents’ generation.

Over a period of six months, the group of five youth leaders visited almost every region of the West Bank to rediscover traditional Palestinian culture, and to compile information about old traditions on the DVD, which will be distributed across the West Bank and ideally in international markets as well. Explaining why the group decided on this particular project, team member Fakher Abu Mukho gave an impassioned response: “The need to safeguard our traditions is what pushed us to start this whole adventure--especially after we received a great deal of encouragement and support from Ruwwad. We really felt that if we don’t preserve our culture for the future generations, these ways of life will simply not survive.”

The resulting DVD, to be released this month in West Bank cities, showcases traditional Palestinian folklore in all its richness: Music clips, interactive videos, and easy-to-understand text welcome viewers into a universe of beautiful clothing, exotic musical instruments, wedding songs, and the traditional ‘dabke’ folk dance. The choice of medium was an easy one: “A DVD is really the only way of capturing all the magic of our culture,” explained team member Diana al-Zeer. “You can’t feel the emotions that come with each song and dance if you just read about them on paper”. Added fellow leader Shadi al-Ghoul: “We also wanted to appeal to our peers, to youth. Everyone rents DVDs already, so we figured that this would be an easy way to get them hooked!” The goal of attracting youth also impacted the design of the DVD, which, according to Abu Mukho, was created using vibrant colors that reflect a youthful spirit, but are still in keeping with traditional Palestinian culture. Equally important are English translations of all information on the DVD: the group hopes that this will help their work reach young viewers around the world.

The ‘Turath’ group will officially launch their DVD in an upcoming ceremony later this month, but they’re already excited about the impact they hope it will have on youth across the West Bank and Gaza. “To see young people wearing traditional costumes on the DVD might be a shock at first,” says al-Ghoul, “but I think someone who’s 15 or 20 years old will ultimately say ‘hey, that’s cool’...and then they might go out and learn more about how these dresses are actually made. If our DVD helps youth become proud of their culture, then we’ve succeeded. If it motivates them to take up an old tradition, like folk-dancing, and have their friends join in, then we’ve *really* made an impact with our work”.



A Ruwwad Youth Leader models traditional Palestinian dress on the “Turath” cultural DVD.

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This Month In Brief

'By Youth, For Youth': Ruwwad Leaders Train Peers

This month, young leaders in Ruwwad's national Youth Corps take on a new role: that of peer trainer. In keeping with Ruwwad's pledge to provide leadership skill-building "by youth, for youth", these young men and women have accepted the challenge of training their peers on the same skills they've learned themselves, in past Ruwwad courses. As these first-time "leadership coaches" get ready to instruct twenty-five new trainees on the basics of teamwork, decision-making, and effective communication, the excitement is palpable. "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a bit nervous," admits Fares Sabaneh, a 25-year-old first-time trainer from Jenin in the Northern West Bank. But his passion for leadership coaching outweighs his initial jitters.

"A few months ago I was just one of the participants in this course. Now I'm in charge," Sabaneh adds. "I never thought I'd have it in me to do this, but it's really amazing. I'm discovering that I do have courage after all...and there's a lot of knowledge I want to share with others". This type of active youth empowerment is exactly what Ruwwad hopes to achieve across the West Bank, on a large scale: "In two years' time, we want to see over 500 young people trained and active in their communities," explains Ruwwad Youth Development Specialist Sana Abu Bakr, "and we want to do it in a way that's 100% youth focused: If you come to any Ruwwad training course or activity, the oldest person in the room is still under 30. This is a shock to many Palestinians, who are so accustomed to believing that knowledge and wisdom can only come from 'adults'. Sabaneh is quick to add: "Of course we respect our elders completely—but we want them to respect us too. That's what peer training is all about: Showing the rest of our community that we, as youth, are able to take charge in a positive way".

First Person: Reflections on Youth Leadership

By Manar Zaitawe, Ruwwad Youth Volunteer

"As a Ruwwad youth leader, I believe in two things: Great leaders are those who are creative and seize unique opportunities—but at the same time, a leader can be found anywhere, in any place: At university, in a village, on a sports team, or at a youth club. Leadership doesn't have to be limited to those who come from privilege or power."

"I think that youth leadership skills can be developed in a variety of ways, whether through parental guidance, learning-by-doing in your own community, or gaining knowledge in a formal place of learning. But I do feel strongly that parents play a major role in developing leadership qualities in their children: Parents teach their kids to take responsibility for their actions and to respect the views of others. Parents also help children learn how to cooperate, take criticism and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Parents help their kids get involved in clubs and activities to increase their skills and self-confidence. Still, at the end of the day, we youth need to be accountable for ourselves. No matter how well our parents prepare us, it's up to us to put their leadership lessons into action".

Monthly Snapshot: April 2008

- 25 new youth leaders begin basic Ruwwad Youth Corps leadership training.
- 6 Ruwwad youth ambassadors travel to 3 US cities to promote Palestinian youth service-learning.
- 32 youth complete training and community volunteer projects, in cooperation with partner organization PCD3.

Ruwwad Youth Leader Profile: Mohammed Kilany

For Mohammed Kilany, a 25-year-old leader in the Ruwwad Youth Corps, it's hard to conceal the sense of pride that comes with outstanding achievement. In the Winter of 2008, Kilany, a telecommunications employee from the village of Ya'bad in the northern West Bank, was chosen to represent Ruwwad at the National Youth Leadership Conference in the U.S. An exemplary youth leader, Kilany became involved with Ruwwad as a participant in its monthly youth leadership training course. But his interest in community problem-solving took off quickly from there: Soon after he finished his training, Kilany helped plan and deliver a breast cancer screening campaign that reached hundreds of women in the West Bank, and helped save the lives of several women who were found to have cancer—but were treated in time. His experience leading the campaign convinced Kilany that youth can make a tangible difference in society. "I believe that youth are the symbol of change in any community and the source of its power and development."



A Closer Look: Ruwwad and Local NGO “PCD3” Give Youth Tools to Create Local Change

With a little support, youth like Amal Diaf Allah can create tangible change in their communities; this was the lesson that emerged from a four-month joint effort between Ruwwad and the Palestinian Center for Development, Dialogue and Democracy (PCD3). Amal, a university student and an active member of the Beitunia Youth Center in the Ramallah area, was one of 32 trainees who took part in the Youth Centers Development Project run by Ruwwad and its partner—a new initiative that trained local youth club members to help their communities solve key problems. Thanks to Amal’s hard work, she was also part of a winning team that got support and coaching to carry out a local aid project—the first step in what Ruwwad and PCD3 hope will be a paradigm shift in local communities, away from adult-centered decision making and toward youth empowerment.



The lighter side of youth leadership training.

The four-month project was basic by nature, but strongly focused on real results: First, youth were chosen from 15 youth clubs in the Ramallah area to take part in training courses on a variety of topics, including proposal writing, fundraising and community-based decision-making. Then, participants were then encouraged to put these skills to use, by coming up with ideas for local projects they could put into place within their own communities.

As with all Ruwwad activities, there was an element of healthy competition involved in this process: A mini “business plan contest” was held to choose two winning projects from the ten concepts proposed by youth from local clubs. Diaf Allah’s Beitunia Club initiative, which focused on helping disabled children in the Ramallah area, placed first in the competition. A group from the village of Khirbet Abu Falah took second prize with its plan for a ground-breaking computer training course. Both of the winning concepts will now come to life in upcoming months—implemented by young volunteers with support from Ruwwad.



Helping children with Down’s Syndrome and other disabilities: A focus of the winning team’s project.

Sahar Misleh, Project Director for PCD3 and the driving force behind the training program, praised the youth for their outside-the-box thinking; she also noted the program’s positive impact on the young leaders involved. “When they returned to their clubs [after the training courses], these youth had far greater self-confidence than I’ve ever seen them have before. This really became clear when they started working on the project for disabled children: The youth have never had the chance to be in charge of anything...let alone run a drive to help the disabled”. Misleh credits the young leaders for this successful outcome, but she also cites the dedication and professionalism of the course instructors, who were chosen carefully for their expertise and teaching style, as a key ingredient in the mix.

For her part, Diaf Allah feels that the project’s major strength lies in its ability to influence more people than just the core group of participating youth: As young volunteers are trained they can, in turn, pass their new skills on to others in their community. “When I go home to my own neighborhood,” she explains, “everyone notices the change in me. They see that I don’t wait for problems to solve themselves; I jump right



in there and fix them. And now I see other girls—the younger ones and some my age—taking the same approach too”. Misleh agrees that the Youth Centers Development Project is having a positive ‘snowball effect’ in local communities. She estimates that the knowledge and information provided in the training courses has “trickled down” to over 600 individuals—family members, peers, or fellow project implementers who learn from the trainees in their midst. While the young participants have clearly benefited from being involved with the initiative, it’s clear that their communities are reaping the rewards as well. Through the Youth Centers Development Project, hard-hit towns and villages in the West Bank have become a little less marginalized and a lot more vibrant, thanks to the youth leaders in their midst.

“This experience has impacted me on a professional level, but also on a very personal level,” Diaf Allah reflected as she headed off to meet her team for a planning session. “I have new skills that I can hopefully take into the workplace, but I’m also looking at the world in a new way. I think this is what true leadership is: The ability to see the world around you and believe that you can actually change it for the better. That’s a hard attitude to have in the West Bank, but this project has shown us that it really is possible”.

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