

## “Smile of Hope”: Ministry of Youth Launches Campaign to Help Children with Cancer, With Support from EDC's Ruwwad Project

All Hiba Abu Salem needed was a glimpse of the young cancer patients at the Hussein Hospital to know she had to do something to help: Crammed into small rooms with shabby bedding and poor medical equipment, the children looked grim and exhausted. Meanwhile, their parents' faces were etched with worry as overworked doctors rushed by, barely able to stop and comfort family members.

Abu Salem, a 22-year-old social work graduate from Bethlehem, has visited cancer wards in the area since she started college, bringing toys and games to the children on her own initiative. And she isn't alone in believing that the children and their families deserve better care: Reem al Qaisi, a 22-year-old Hebron student, has also been a regular visitor among pediatric cancer patients—part of a growing number of youth who are recognizing the lack of hospital resources, and taking the matter into their own hands. When Qaisi and Salem crossed paths at a recent National Youth Corps training course run by EDC's Ruwwad project, it wasn't long before they hatched a plan to tackle the problem of poor cancer care once and for all: A national awareness and fundraising campaign, centered around the theme of a “Smile of Hope”.



“Smile of Hope” aims to help the hundreds of West Bank children diagnosed with cancer each year.

This month, the young women will help lead hundreds of volunteers from the Ministry of Youth's National Youth Corps and Youth Development Resource Centers to launch “Smile of Hope” in all eleven West Bank regions. Their aim is to mobilize a million Palestinians—almost a third of the country's population—to attend local awareness sessions, make small donations, or volunteer their time at local cancer wards. “If we can get this issue on people's radar,” explains al-Qaisi, “we can really improve the state of cancer care for children. And ideally, through better access to medication and equipment, we can also help cure more cases.”

Fortunately, the youth aren't fighting this battle alone: Throughout the campaign's two-month span, the volunteers will enjoy the support of the newly inaugurated US-Palestinian Partnership—a joint effort between the US government and the Palestinian Authority to improve social and economic conditions in the West Bank. Leading local efforts to support the campaign is the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport, in addition to the ministries of Health and the Interior. EDC's Ruwwad project provides logistical coordination for the nation-wide drive. For the youth leaders, this backing is integral to Smile of Hope's success. “We've worked incredibly hard to get this idea off the ground,” Abu Salem explains, “but without the Palestinian Authority's assistance we wouldn't have the resources to accomplish everything we want to do for the children”. Now the hard work starts: Two months of tireless campaigning and fundraising, along with a nation-wide media blitz. Says al-Qaisi: “It's tough, but with help from the Ministry of Youth and its partners, I know we can do it”.

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## This Month In Brief

### Monthly Snapshot: July 2008

- EDC's Ruwwad project and the Ministries of Youth, Health, and the Interior get ready to launch a national cancer awareness campaign in 11 West Bank regions.
- More than 100 youth leaders make their voices heard at the first general meeting of the new National Youth Corps—a forum to be overseen by the Ministry of Youth.

### National Youth Corps Meeting Unites Young Leaders

For youth in remote West Bank villages, it's easy to feel isolated. Internet access is often limited and travel is restricted by Israeli military checkpoints. That's why the recent general meeting of the new National Youth Corps was so significant: For most of the youth leaders convening in Ramallah to launch the new forum—a movement that's managed by the Ministry of Youth and builds on the former Ruwwad Youth Corps—it was the first time they'd met peers from other parts of the country. The day-long meeting was also their first chance to speak openly and frankly with Ministry representatives—to discuss how the Palestinian Authority, through its new partnership with the U.S. government, can best serve the needs of local young women and men.

In spirited conversations with Walid Atatara, the Ministry's Deputy Director General for Youth, young leaders from all regions of the country asked pointed questions about the Ministry's new plans for youth programming and shared their own visions and goals. For Somoud Abu Radi, a young leader from the rural Tulkarem area, the face-to-face discussions were a key highlight—as was the chance to network with young volunteers from across the West Bank. “The new National Youth Corps will really help us build bridges with other youth leaders in different cities, and enable those of us in rural environments to get better access to new volunteer opportunities. I hope we'll now have the chance to carry out some bigger projects to help our communities—things we weren't able to do before.”



Trust games bring national youth leaders closer together.

### Youth Lending a Helping Hand

By Nardeen Almimi, National Youth Corps Volunteer

Volunteer work is essential for the development of our society in Palestine. Many young people know this already, and they've decided to act to help their communities—by serving others and gaining new skills through projects that make their country a better place. This growing number of youth leaders in our midst is encouraging, but more youth still need to get involved. The level of volunteering is well below what we need to create large positive social change in the West Bank. There are still large numbers of young people who hesitate to roll up their sleeves and get involved because they're more concerned about school or work than about helping out. Others feel that there just aren't enough opportunities offered by local volunteer organizations; why volunteer if you can't find something that's the right fit for you?

While it's true that as youth we have many responsibilities, we should also understand the need to make time for our communities. We have to take initiative to create opportunities, expand volunteer organizations and encourage our friends to join in and lend a helping hand. Not just for our own sake, but for

### Profile of a Youth Leader: Ameed Amayreh

Ameed Amayreh knows better than anyone else that one person's trash can be another's treasure: Through the “Cleaner, Nicer” project he led with other youth from Nablus, Amayreh succeeded both in cleaning up his city and recycling waste into new toys for children.

Amayreh, a 23-year-old lab assistant at Najah University, joined the National Youth Corps' Nablus branch last year. The practical training he received there taught him how to turn creative ideas into tangible projects to improve his community: “If I hadn't learned about project management or logistical planning with the Corps, I don't think I would have had the knowledge to develop this idea of recycling garbage into toys,” he says. “The project probably would have never have come into being”. But now that the environmental campaign has borne fruit, Amayreh has skills and experience that will keep him active as a local change-maker in the Nablus area: “I've learned a lot about leadership and vision. Since things turned out so well, I now have a lot of confidence that I can do more great things for my community in the future.”

## A Closer Look: New Youth Development Resource Centers

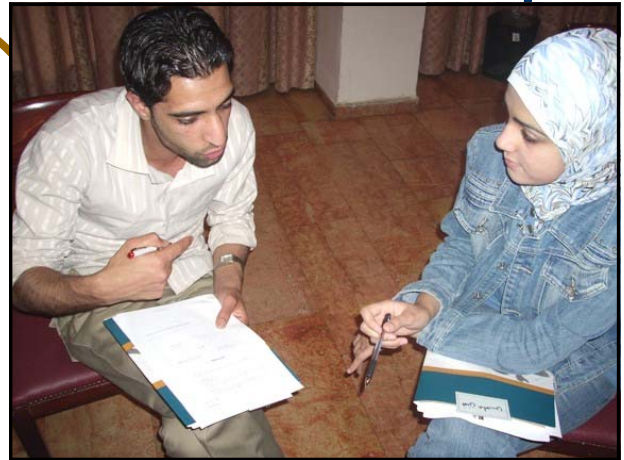
How do you build a new generation of strong leaders? Start by giving them a space where they can learn and grow. This is the philosophy behind four new “Youth Development Resource Centers”, or YDRCs, that Ruwwad is helping to launch in key West Bank cities—in close cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport, with support from USAID. From Hebron in the south to Nablus in the north, the YDRCs will offer recreational activities, computer labs, business training, and counseling services to thousands of young Palestinians.

One area where the YDRCs are poised to make a real difference is Nablus. Hard-hit by years of conflict, there are few places in the city where youth can relax, breathe easier, and interact productively with their peers. Amid the Israeli army raids and curfews, the Jabal al Nar Community Club is an oasis of stability and support for local youth. Established in 2003 by local community leaders, the club has grown from a small drop-in center to a multi-story facility that offers a wide range of youth programs. As the club’s membership keeps rising, space has become a precious commodity.

But now, with the help of the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport, Jabal al-Nar youth are getting room to grow: These partners are transforming the club into a large-scale Youth Development Resource Center—by renovating the facilities, adding new equipment, and rolling out a series of new programs for youth. Fathi Khader, the Ministry of Youth and Sport’s director in Nablus, believes that the new Jabal al-Nar YDRC will have a huge impact of local youth. “Community clubs play a key role in giving youth the tools to become active citizens,” he says. “We strongly feel that these renovations will provide more chances for young people to develop their skills and contribute to their communities.”

The demand for ‘safe spaces’ that offer positive activities for youth is a growing trend across the West Bank, as urban centers get more crowded and public parks and gardens shrink. The Ministry of Youth and USAID’s Ruwwad project hope that the YDRCs will be a key part of the solution to this challenge—but they also want to build on the good work that’s already being done by local youth clubs across the country. In addition to transforming the Beita Club outside of Nablus, the Beit al-Tifl Club in Hebron and the Al Bireh Youth Foundation in the Ramallah area into other regional YDRCs, Ruwwad is also helping the Ministry of Youth to link these “hub” centers with about 80 smaller youth clubs around the West Bank. By building bridges between the main centers and local village clubs, the Ministry hopes to extend its reach into marginalized areas that haven’t had the chance to get high-quality youth programming in the past.

Meanwhile, back at the Jabal al-Nar Club, the Ministry of Youth is already looking to the future: “These renovations don’t just help us meet today’s needs,” explains Shakour Beitar, the engineer overseeing the club’s expansion. “They ensure that the club will have sustainable income to support programs in the long term: We’re turning the club’s old building into a multi-purpose meeting room. People from the community will be able to rent this facility, and then the club can use the income to fund activities for the youth.” A self-sufficient model that strengthens communities: This is the YDRC way.



Young leaders at the Jabal an-Nar Center plan new program activities.

### **RUWWAD Report**

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