



# RUWWAD Report

The Palestinian Youth Empowerment Program

أخبار رواد

Monthly News – March 2008

## Planting the Seeds of Leadership: Ruwwad Helps the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport Launch New Resource Centers

It's no secret that Palestinian youth are eager to give back to their communities. But many aspiring young leaders have a tough time finding chances to build their skills and put them into action. As of this month, though, that situation is changing—thanks to a pioneering new partnership between US-funded projects like Ruwwad, the US private sector, local Palestinian organizations, and the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport. In early March this consortium began working to set up four new Professional Development Resource Centers for youth in the West Bank.

Offering job counseling, leadership training, computer facilities and rec programs, the centers are poised to become hubs for regional youth leadership development. They'll also serve as a much-needed outlet for fun and recreation in areas with few after-school options for local youth. The initiative was launched officially last month, with the signing of an agreement between USAID and the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport. Ruwwad is excited to be one of several USAID partners invited to help launch the initiative.

Local partnerships are the cornerstone of the Resource Center initiative: Although funding support is provided by the US, the Centers themselves will be overseen by the Ministry of Youth, and will take shape within four well-established youth clubs that are already leaders in the field of youth development: The Jabal al-Nar Club in Nablus, the Beita Club in the nearby town of Beita, the Al-Bireh Youth Organization in the Ramallah area, and the Palestinian Child Club in Hebron.

Local NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and youth forums will also play a lead role in the Resource Center roll-out. "Ruwwad is just one member of a very diverse team," explained Ruwwad Program Manager Husam Qaradeh, who is working with partners across the West Bank to make the initiative a success. "The Ministry of Youth is working closely with grassroots organizations and youth clubs in each of the regions where the centers will be launched. As a team, we want to learn from the expertise of others around us, and have local partners lead key parts of the programming at each Center".

A planned youth counseling service, for example, would be delivered together with a local Palestinian youth counseling agency. Young 'club members' at each center will ideally be linked with area businesses and non-profit employers after getting leadership training on-site, for four- to six-month internships. "The idea is that the Resource Centers will become focal points for local youth, giving them the tools they need to succeed in life, and planting the seeds of long-term leadership development," Qaradeh added.



Computer labs are one of many features planned for the Ministry of Youth and Sport's new Resource Centers.

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## This Month In Brief

### Youth Murals Breathe New Life into West Bank Towns

Take a stroll through any West Bank village, and you're likely to find beautiful stone architecture, proud Palestinian flags, and stunning views of the local countryside. Now, across the north of the country, this panorama has one added feature: Impressive murals painted by youth on local buildings, through funding from Ruwwad. Part of a larger "community improvement campaign" organized by Ruwwad partner NGO "Shams", the



Giving school walls a first coat of paint, before the murals take shape.

murals are the end product of a four month long program that trained 100 youth volunteers to become local role models. "Our town is a great place," offered 23 year-old aspiring painter Mohammad al-Ahmad, as he washed off his brush in the central West Bank village of Kufr ad-Dik. "But the murals we created make it even nicer. This shows the community that we, as youth, care about its future: We've painted this garden scene today because that's how we want our town to look in 20 years: Like a beautiful garden". Area residents were duly impressed with the young artists' work: "This is the first time I've seen art presented like this," offered a passer-by in the nearby town of Bruqin as he watched a forest take shape on a school wall. "But I like it. Our young people have made us proud through this work. Now when others ask me whether our youth truly value this village, I know the answer is

### Monthly Snapshot: March 2008

- 100 youth volunteers paint murals and give local town squares a facelift, in a civic engagement drive led by Ruwwad partner NGO "Shams".
- Over 1,400 West Bank residents learn about civic issues through activities led by Ruwwad partner "The Civic Forum Institute" (CFI).
- 360 youth take part in inter-generational dialogue events organized by Ruwwad-funded partner YMCA.

### "Dialogue Between the Generations" Builds Ties Between Young and Old

As the face of Palestinian society becomes increasingly younger, tensions are on the rise between youth under 30, who now make up close to 75% of the population, and the adults around them. But thanks to Ruwwad's support, efforts to bring the two groups together are also growing. This month, partner organization East Jerusalem YMCA launched a series of bridge-building workshops across the West Bank for 360 youth and adults, under the name "Dialogue Between the Generations". In hard-hit cities like Nablus and Hebron—whose violent flare-ups often make world headlines—YMCA staff and youth worked to strengthen positive, peaceful relations between their 18 to 25 year-old peers and the adults in their lives. "Sadly, violence is everywhere in our society," explained Ahmed Abdel Haq, one of the YMCA youth leaders in charge of the workshop series. "We see Israeli soldiers with jeeps any time we travel within the West Bank. We see guns on the streets of our own cities...and youth imitate what they see: Violence has become the main way of solving disputes, especially at the family level. We're hopeful, though, that our work will 'unlearn' some of those bad habits".

### Profile of a Ruwwad Youth Leader: Lawyer Haneen Mayha, Age 25

"I'm a better person today, thanks to my volunteer work with Ruwwad". Words spoken with conviction by Haneen Mayha, a 25 year-old Ramallah-area lawyer who has been an active volunteer with the Ruwwad Youth Corps since mid-2007. After joining the Corps, Mayha, who usually works as a trial lawyer in Ramallah, has filled every second of her spare time with Ruwwad activities. "Volunteering with Ruwwad gives me an excellent opportunity to serve my community, and build my skills in areas like team leadership and decision making." These abilities were put into action when Mayha helped organize the "Erada" breast cancer awareness campaign, a month-long drive that gave 140 women free screenings and health education; it also helped detect cancer among several participants, who were then referred for medical treatment. "Ruwwad does an excellent job of linking me with other youth, and with local communities. As a lawyer I'm in contact with people from all sorts of backgrounds, but I don't have a sense of the real humanitarian crisis that many communities are facing in the West Bank. Ruwwad gets us out there, makes us aware of the challenges, and gives us the tools to create solutions. It's amazing to be part of this positive change."



## A Closer Look: Ruwwad and the Civic Forum Institute – Giving Youth the Tools to Create Change

Who says Palestinian youth can't make a difference? In March, volunteers from the Ruwwad Youth Corps and sub-grantee Civic Forum Institute wrapped up a nine-month campaign which saw 60 youth lead community projects that helped more than 1,400 West Bank residents. Through a mix of intensive workshops and hands-on volunteering, the campaign gave young participants the skills—and the opportunity—to make their local towns and villages better places to live.

The first phase of the campaign, which started in Spring 2007, taught youth volunteers about civic involvement through a series of workshops held in several West Bank locations. These events opened participants' eyes to the "how" and "why" of community engagement and local-level problem solving.



Youth leaders plant trees in a drive to clean up local town squares.



Young volunteers clean a park in the northern West Bank town of Qalqilya.

For Sari Shawahneh, a 23-year-old volunteer from the northern town of Qalqilya, the workshops were invaluable: "These courses showed us how to reach out to the adults around us: How to work with them to identify local challenges, like a lack of good drinking water, and then how to create a solution for this problem". Explained Shawahneh: "It's not enough to just wake up one morning, see a dry well, and then start building a new one. You need to involve everyone who uses this well in the process. You may not know, for example, that the water source gets used more actively in the morning...so there's a need for storage cisterns. If you don't engage the entire community in the planning process, you miss the major details".

After gaining this kind of crucial knowledge, youth had the chance to apply what they had learned in the campaign's second phase. Following a series of town-hall style meetings, where Ruwwad and CFI youth listened to the concerns of their fellow citizens, the young leaders launched a range of community service projects in response: Volunteers cleaned up streets, beautified public spaces, painted murals in schools, and raised awareness about community issues through TV and radio programs.

Jehad Edeli, volunteering in the Nablus area, told visitors to his town how the campaign had helped him create dramatic change in his own backyard: "A group of us had spoken to local community members, and they had told us that it had been ages since the town had been properly cleaned up...They felt that public places weren't a source of pride any more, and that they had fallen into disrepair. "Listening to their needs," continued Edeli, "we decided to organize a massive drive to paint civic murals, clean up local parks, plant trees and sweep the streets and public areas. But we didn't have the money to do this work. Thankfully Ruwwad and CFI came to our aid: They gave us training on project management, and then gave us the resources to get the job done. Now if you look around, you can see schools with a new coat of paint and nice public areas with trees and flowers. Our town has had a massive facelift, and youth were at the forefront of this change".

At the Civic Engagement Campaign's March closing ceremony in



Ramallah, Ruwwad Chief of Party Hisham Jabi praised CFI for its visionary ideas, and lauded Edeli, Shawahneh, and their fellow volunteers for the leadership and initiative they had shown. “People need to understand how rare your efforts are in Palestinian society—and they need to appreciate why this type of campaign must happen more often,” Jabi told assembled guests.

“We are a society that’s dominated by adult voices, and yet young people like yourselves make up almost three-quarters of our population. You have shown us how youth can be leaders and problem-solvers, instead of the source of problems—which is what many Palestinians mistakenly believe”.

CFI Executive Director Aref Jaffal echoed these words in his address to the youth leaders: “A strong civil society is the foundation of any healthy community. Your actions have shown us that you’re serious about taking on these challenges, and about strengthening civic participation in the towns and cities where you live. This gives me great hope for the future of our country”.

The campaign itself may be coming to a close, but the spirit of youth-led civic engagement is only getting stronger among local young men and women. Now that they’ve transformed their own communities, these youth leaders aim to create a wave of social change across the West Bank, by setting up a national network of volunteers to promote grassroots civic engagement. If Jihad Edeli, and Sari Shawahneh have their way, every West Bank town will have new trees in its main square, and every community will be a model of group decision-making among its residents. “How many towns in the

US can say that their youth have made the community a better place to live, without any nudging or prodding by adults?” asks Shawahneh with a grin. “We believe that the whole world will soon be looking to Palestinian youth for inspiration”.

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#### **RUWWAD Report**

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