

Youth Fundraising Drive Brings "Smile of Hope" to Kids with Cancer

She's just two years old, but Lamis has already faced more hardship than most adults. After being diagnosed with leukemia before her first birthday, she's spent only brief periods of time outside the West Bank hospital where she receives treatment. Meanwhile, Lamis's parents Atef and Sana have done everything possible to help their little girl—from leaving their home in the northern Nablus region, to spending endless nights at the faraway hospital, to seeking treatment in neighboring Jordan.

With only two cancer centers in the entire West Bank—and no specialized facilities for children—it's not surprising that Lamis' family has sought help outside the country. But the high price of care in Jordan led to a quick return to the overcrowded National Hospital back in Palestine; a stuffy, packed old building that often runs out of medicine and other basic supplies. "Lamis needs us by her side," explains mother Sana, "but in Palestine this means that we need to spend the night at the hospital, since the security situation doesn't allow us to travel home at night. We have another small child at home who needs us too; how can we be asked to decide between Lamis's treatment and our other responsibilities?"

Clearly, it hasn't been easy. According to Dibeh Shoubash, a nurse at the National Hospital, the lack of regional clinics means that the number of patients seeking treatment far from home is more than the hospital can accommodate. Chemotherapy medication is running low. Donated blood is almost gone.

Thankfully, there's a glimmer of hope—or to be more precise, there's a smile: Throughout the month of August, the Palestinian National Youth Corps' "Smile of Hope" campaign is raising funds and awareness across the West Bank, for the benefit of children with cancer. Managed entirely by youth, the campaign aims to collect enough money to fund the first dedicated pediatric cancer care center in Palestine. "Smile of Hope" grew out of visits to children like Lamis: After two university-age volunteers got tired of "just making the rounds" among young cancer patients in different local hospitals—and decided that something concrete needed to be done—they sprang into action and developed the nation-wide campaign. With funding support from the U.S.-Palestinian partnership, and through the efforts of thousands of young volunteers, this idea has now become a reality—kicking off with a massive launch ceremony in Bethlehem at the end of July.

The hundreds of youth leaders and local scouts who attended the opening ceremony sent a clear message to their peers in the hospital: We care about you, and we'll do everything in our power to help. The ceremony was also attended by the Palestinian Ministers of Youth and Health, as well as key Palestinian Authority dignitaries and representatives of USAID. For Lamis and her family, watching the event coverage live on national TV, the launch was a bright spot on a landscape that's usually grim. "This campaign could give our child the chance to get better treatment under improved conditions," said father Atef. "It really could be the first step to a full recovery and a long life".



The youth-led "Smile of Hope" campaign aims to help young cancer patients like Lamis, age 2.

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This Month In Brief

Youth Leaders Welcome U.S. Senator John Kerry to Ramallah

It's not every day that a U.S. presidential candidate comes to Ramallah, but this summer has been a welcome exception: Between visits by current White House contenders John McCain and Barack Obama, former Oval Office hopeful John Kerry honored the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership team with a visit to the project's Intel Computer Clubhouse. During his hour-long tour, he met National Youth Corps members who are working with Clubhouse staff to bring Internet access into smaller youth clubs across the West Bank, as part of the Partnership's activities. Among these youth were a group of six leaders who had recently traveled to the U.S. on a Partnership-sponsored Youth Exchange. "We received such a warm welcome in America," recalled exchange participant Yazan al-Nabulsi, "I never thought we'd have the chance to return the favor! But I'm happy that we can give important decision-makers like Senator Kerry the chance to see our achievements with their own eyes". Meanwhile, inside the Clubhouse, Kerry also had the chance to meet with Palestinian Minister of Youth and Sport Tahani Abu Daqqa, who emphasized the important role the Partnership has played in creating positive opportunities for youth across the West Bank. Senator Kerry responded encouragingly: "Putting youth first is the key to building a healthy Palestinian society," he told the Minister and assembled youth guests. Replying on behalf of the youth, exchange leader Mohammad Kilany agreed: "If you give us the resources to develop our skills, like this Intel Clubhouse and the other U.S.-Palestinian Partnership facilities, we will build on that foundation and create projects that benefit thousands of youth and communities".

Watch a video of Senator Kerry's visit here: www.uspalestinianpartnership.org

Monthly Snapshot: August 2008

- 550 youth volunteers launch the "Smile of Hope" cancer fundraising campaign, with support from the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership.
- More than 400 youth leaders prepare to host the Ministry of Youth's International Youth Day ceremony in Ramallah.
- 6 youth interns graduate from the first National Youth Media Center training program; one-third are hired immediately to work in local TV stations.

Youth Need Opportunities—At Home!

By Neda Abuhamdiah, National Youth Corps Volunteer

When my good friend Sameh got a tourist visa to travel to the United States, he didn't hesitate to pack his bags and bid farewell to his family and friends. And who could blame him? Going to the U.S. will give him access to job opportunities we don't have here at home in the West Bank. Sameh's story is typical of many Palestinian youth today. More and more young people with tough political and economic situations are choosing to migrate in order to secure a better life for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, as more educated young people leave Palestine, the situation just gets worse for those of us who are left behind.

We need our youth to stay here! We need our youth to use their education and fresh ideas to build a stronger society. If they leave, who will be left to lead Palestine in the coming years? We cannot afford to lose our youth. Opportunities need to be created so that people stay, and awareness must be raised about the dangers that migration presents to Palestinian communities. The Youth Development Resource Centers created by the Ministry of Youth are a good start: They're a great place for young people to get training, build skills, and start building a future locally. Although it's difficult to create opportunities that can compete with the draw of migration, with more centers like these we can harness the energy of our youth and keep them close to home, before it's too late.

Profile of a Youth Leader: Marwa Al Doudeh

When Marwa Al Doudeh makes up her mind, nothing can get in her way: Even after her family and friends told her that nobody would be interested in donating money for cancer care, she still persisted with her idea of a nation-wide fundraising campaign. "I'm stubborn," The 22-year-old Al-Doudeh admits, "but in this case, that's not such a bad thing".

Recently, Marwa and fellow National Youth Corps volunteers celebrated the fruits of their hard work at the launch ceremony for the "Smile of Hope" cancer campaign they created themselves, under the auspices of the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership. For Marwa, getting the campaign off the ground was the proudest moment of her life: "When the donation boxes were being distributed at the launch, it finally hit me that my dream had become a reality. I knew then that the effort we've invested in helping these children hasn't been wasted." Now comes the hard work: Collecting enough money to fund a cancer care center. "We can do it," Al-Doudeh says with her trademark stubborn smile.

A Closer Look: TV Internships Give Youth New Skills, Job Opportunities

TV journalism graduates like Shadi Zama'rah have a lot to show and tell to the world; they just need a little help with the details. Daily life in the West Bank is packed full of story ideas, but even the most gifted journalist needs good resources and contacts to bring these stories to life. Luckily, graduates like Shadi, a 24-year-old from Hebron, now have the chance to get the skills and opportunities they need to succeed, through a new media training program at the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership's National Youth Media Center in Ramallah.

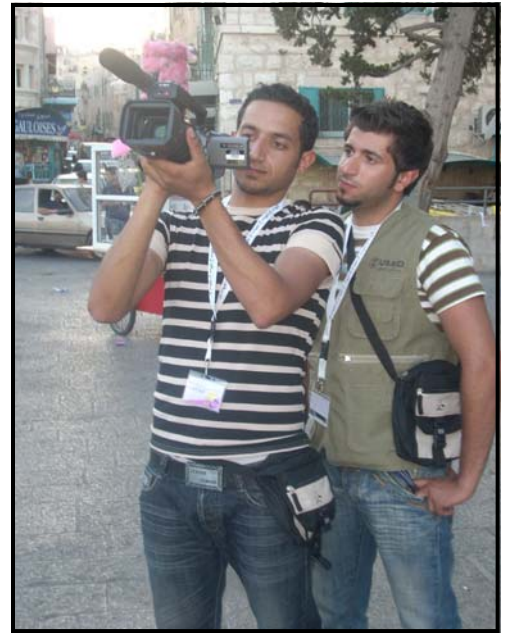
In June, the Partnership launched its first cycle of media training for six new journalism grads, in partnership with local TV station "Watan". Right from the start, Media Center Coordinator Munia Dweik has been excited about the course and its potential impact on the youth: "New media graduates generally have no practical experience," she explains. "This is the Number One problem they face. Now, by giving them basic training in the Center, and then putting them right inside the TV networks on a daily basis, we're helping them overcome that barrier—and ideally opening the door to jobs".

A month into the course, and Shadi Zama'rah is already putting his new skills to good use: He and his colleagues are busy covering the launch of their fellow youth leaders' "Smile of Hope" campaign for children with cancer. Shadi's own footage will be aired directly on Watan's national news program. "I can't tell you how proud I am to be part of the group of journalists covering the event," Shadi relates. "It's an amazing feeling to actually be out there filming something that will be able to reach people around the West Bank."

By the time they finish their training in late August, Shadi and his fellow interns will have written, directed, and produced four investigative journalism reports for broadcast on the Watan channel. The youth do everything, from storyboarding, to interviews, to studio editing. For Khaled Khaseeb, a 24-year-old senior in the Radio and Television program at Birzeit University, this type of experience is invaluable. "Projects in University don't give you the exposure to real deadlines. Here we have to do work under pressure—just like in the actual TV world."

And since the "TV world" is a big and varied place, the Center makes sure that trainees are ready for a wide range of job possibilities. Tariq Koussa, age 18, from Nablus, hopes to specialize in editing and graphic design after he finishes the course. "I love turning raw footage into a hard-hitting TV segment...you know, something that really makes people think. This course is perfect because the scope of training is not limited to one or two areas...we cover the entire field of TV, editing included".

As the course draws to a close, good news comes in: Job offers for two of the interns at Watan TV. "This is exactly the outcome we had hoped for," offers coordinator Dweik. "I couldn't be more proud of our youth. They truly deserve these jobs". The next step? Build on this success by scaling up the program into more locations. In the Fall, the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership aims to offer similar courses in its four new Youth Development Resource Centers. Says Dweik: "I want to see this success multiplied ten times over. Let's get 20 youth working in local TV. Then we move to the radio stations and the newspapers too!"



TV interns Shadi Zama'rah and Khaled Khaseeb get ready to film on location in Bethlehem.

The Voice of Youth

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