

PROJECT CONTACTS:

Hisham Jabi,  
Chief of Party  
[hjabi@edc.org](mailto:hjabi@edc.org)

Fadi Khoury,  
USAID CTO

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## A Ramadan evening of song, food, and new beginnings

Just after midday towards the end of Ramadan, youth volunteers began to gather in the northern West Bank town of Beita to end their day-long fast together at a ground-breaking *iftar*, or Ramadan dinner. Organized for youth by youth, the evening was dedicated to celebrating the difference youth leaders can make in their society.

The preparations for the *iftar* began less than a month before. Amidst the festivities of the International Youth Day parade in Ramallah, the Beita Youth Development Resource Center (YDRC) decided to celebrate the new links made possible by the US-Palestinian Partnership (UPP). In classic Ramadan tradition, the Beita YDRC invited members of the other three youth centers supported by the USAID-funded Ruwwad project, which facilitates the UPP and the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The young members responded enthusiastically. Many of the youth spent hours travelling to Beita from the other centers. First to arrive were the youth from Beit Al Tifil YDRC in southern West Bank, followed by those from the Al Bireh YDRC in the central West Bank. The members of the Jabal Al Nar YDRC took the longest despite being the closest, after being delayed at the Israeli military checkpoint in Huwara, outside Nablus city.

Despite the long journey and their day-long fast, the young people jumped at the chance to do something for the Beita community, and, working together for the first time, cleaned the streets and public spaces at the center of the town.

As dusk approached, the Beita YDRC began buzzing with the energy of the volunteers who were rushing around laying out the *iftar* meal or chatting with members from other centers and visitors from the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In the hubbub of conversations, friendships were being struck and ideas exchanged, proving that geographic and social differences are no barrier to like-minded youth.

The older guests enjoyed the opportunity to watch youth networking in action. "This *iftar* is a chance for the youth and volunteers to meet," observed Bashar Khraiwesh, the executive director of the Beita YDRC, "and for us to solidify the new links with our new partners the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ruwwad project and USAID."

The energy of the youth gathered together that evening held great promise for Mousa Abu Zayd, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports. "The youth will help us realize our goals to help young Palestinians build their skills, make a difference in their local community, and find a job," he said. "We believe that we will be seeing great positive changes over the next few years in these YDRCs and the affiliated clubs."

Music and poetry followed the food. Guests joined in traditional songs, laughed at a group of young comics, and applauded a local folk dance group. When the evening drew to a close, the youth exchanged presents and promises to stay in touch. And, as the buses disappeared into the night, the now-quiet hall still vibrated with the memories of the evening and the shared hopes for the future.



Young folk dancers entertain after the *iftar*.

## This Month In Brief

### Helping youth realize their potential: a new cycle of “30/30” training

Recycling, regeneration, and rehabilitation: the project ideas produced at a recent youth leadership training proved - once again - that, when young people get together, their creativity and ambition are unlimited. “The youth leaders came up with an amazing number of ideas by the end,” recounted Rabab Abu Hijleh, who led the 26 participants during an intensive four days of training in communicating, self-development, and creative thinking.

Held in Ramallah, the training was sponsored by the Youth Development Resource Centers, which are affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and supported by USAID partner, EDC. Over the past year, EDC has reached out to thousands of marginalized and unemployed youth, who show a committed interest in discovering within themselves the means with which to improve their society and to be agents for positive social change. This is the first in a series of youth leadership trainings that will be implemented by EDC.

The young participants were expected to immediately apply the skills they learnt. After teaching them how to develop and implement small-scale projects, Abu Hijleh challenged each trainee to come up with a project idea. “Someone suggested rehabilitating land for farmers to use, another participant wanted to focus on reviving cultural heritage in Jerusalem, while a third proposed recycling paper to help reduce the garbage problem in the West Bank” she said. “We plan to help implement the recycling idea in the coming months.”

The trainees were as enthusiastic as the trainer! “I learnt how to plan and lead a project that will make a difference to other youth and my community,” said Wassim Klabuneh, a participant from Nablus. The chance to network with other youth leaders from all over the West Bank was an added bonus for Klabuneh, who explained, “I was able to develop new contacts and network with the other Youth Resource Centers from other regions.”

### Monthly Snapshot October 2008

- 394 youth collected 120,000 shekels in donations for the “Smile of Hope” campaign, after its launch in three West Bank governorates.
- Over 100 people broke their fast together to mark the new linkages between the four Youth Development Resource Centers.
- 26 more leaders joined the NYC after completing the first cycle of 30/30 Training under the US-Palestinian Partnership.
- 4 ICT coordinators hired to launch MyTec projects at each YDRC.

### Out of the frying pan and into the fire!

By: Anas Hellal, Media Center Intern

Whoops of joy can be heard every summer throughout Palestine, as high school seniors celebrate the end of the Tawjihi secondary exams. Little do they know that they are jumping straight out of the frying pan into an even worse fire! While months of study prepared them for their exams, nothing has prepared them for the most fateful question of all: what to study at university!

“My excitement about passing the Tawjihi vanished when I realized that I had no idea what major I should choose,” said Yasmin, a recent high school graduate. “What made it worse was all the advice I got from family and friends.” Advice rains down on the bewildered students, freezing them into paralyzing indecision: “Go to law school to become a famous lawyer.... No, no, study English like your cousin... Listen to me, and study business.”

The problem is having too many choices after years of no choices at all, explained a first year journalism student at Birzeit University. “High school students have to choose between science or humanities,” he says. “Sometimes students choose to study humanities because they don’t know what else to do. So they pass the Tawjihi but still don’t know what to do.”

Others also point to a lack of support from their schools. “All my school did was organize one quick university trip,” blames Haya, a business student at Birzeit University. The Ministry of Education and schools have a responsibility, students argue, to provide academic counseling to prepare them for choosing a university major. Palestinian universities do not escape criticism. Students complain that universities do not do enough to promote their various departments and then make the registration period so short that students are forced to make a hasty decision, without considering how it fits their interests or career plans.

Too many options without enough guidance are a recipe for anxiety and poor choices. As long as high school graduates emerge blinking from a year of solitary studying into a blizzard of contradicting opinions, our youth will dread registering for their academic majors and long for the familiar trials of their Tawjihi.

## A long history and a promising future - the new Al Bireh YDRC!

Al Bireh Youth Foundation is about to get a whole lot larger. With the support of USAID and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the nearly 70-year old organization is transforming itself into a dynamic and multi-functional hub for youth organizations throughout the central West Bank, under the new name of the Al Bireh Youth Development Resource Center (YDRC).

“The US-Palestinian Partnership (UPP) is offering us a chance to join a team of four youth centers across the West Bank that will link up and serve other, smaller clubs,” said Amjad Al Tawil, the recently-hired executive director of the newly named Al Bireh Youth Development Resource Center. “We will be networking with and providing resource for local clubs, such as Silwad, Na’lin, Safa, ‘Abwein, al Am’ari and other youth sports, cultural and social activities clubs.”



Al Tawil believes that 400-member Al Bireh Youth Organization has much to offer this new initiative because of its decades of experience working with youth. As a Youth Development Resource Center, the organization will have even more to offer the young residents of the central West Bank. Through the UPP project, the center’s facilities be expanded and upgraded. New facilities will be added, a theatre, a media center, meeting and videoconference rooms, and a training room.

These new and improved facilities will enable the center to increase the scope of its existing services that focus on improving employment-related skills of young men and women, through classes in English language, computers, and vocational training. Al Tawil also hopes to use the new resources to encourage youth to turn their energies towards their society by supporting youth-led initiatives to improve their local community.

One factor is critical to the center’s success, argues Al Tawil: the youth themselves. “While the launching of the Youth Development Resource Center is exciting, the most important thing is its ability to make a difference now and in the future,” he said. “And this depends on the youth that we train to take on responsibilities.” As a result, he explains, the center’s main focus is on providing youth with a central role in the center’s administration and ensuring that they benefit from our training programs so that they can – in turn – benefit their communities.

### The Voice of Youth

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Education Development Center (EDC) Inc.

P.O. Box 3866 Al-Bireh

Ramallah, West Bank

Tel: +970 2 242 3541

[www.ruwwad.org](http://www.ruwwad.org)



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