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Happy New Year!

Hello and a happy new year to all our friends and supporters.

This is our January newsletter, and we hope you'll enjoy exploring what we at ULYP has been working on lately. In this issue you can find out about some of our current programs, as well as student success stories and our volunteer spotlight.

Best wishes for a healthy, happy and united 2014,

The ULYP Team

KEY: Knowledge Empowers the Youth

As part of Bank Audi's pilot CSR program, members of staff are giving up their time to volunteer at several Lebanese NGOs, helping in their offices, on their programs, or wherever needed.

Several employees chose to volunteer with ULYP, and together we developed a new program allowing their skills and expertise to shape the sessions offered, and benefit the participants. ULYP involved students aged 16 to 18 who are studying at vocational schools. These students are often unaware of the career opportunities available to them, how to look for jobs and how to

go about applying for them. As they prepare to leave school and embark on their careers, without guidance from their families or schools the prospect of entering work is daunting.

After doing team-building and ice-breaking activities in order for the students from two different schools to get to know each other, the first session was given by ULYP and focused on human rights and conflict resolution, looking at different types of conflict including at school and at home. The following four sessions were given by Bank Audi's employees, and followed their particular interests and specialties. This included: banking, including looking at different types of banks, what goes on in banks and what does Bank Audi offer; careers, including work ethics, CV writing and interviewing role plays; photography, including a brief history of cameras, digital photography and how to set up a great picture; and finally internet etiquette, including correct use of social media, having a proper email address, and how to effectively use google to search.

The program was interesting and varied, and proved to be enjoyable, instructive and beneficial for both the participants and the volunteers. The students reported that they loved every session and found the program really eye-opening. They truly appreciated having professionals talking to them and sharing with them their advice and knowledge. ULYP sincerely hope that the partnership with Bank Audi can continue and grow over the coming years.



Project RARE: Rights and Responsibilities Empowerment

In December ULYP started the new program *RARE*, targeting underprivileged Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese students studying at vocational schools. These young people have not managed to complete their regular school education, but enroll in vocational schools as they all share a determination to learn new skills and develop themselves in order to get the best jobs they can.

The new program builds on another ULYP program, *Back to Basics*, which focuses on career preparedness including CV writing and interview skills, self presentation, career mapping and financial literacy. We have combined this with human and child rights understanding and awareness, peace building and conflict resolution to create *RARE*. These added components are important for all marginalized youth in Lebanon who live in isolated, often conflicting communities, and are at special risk of abuses to their human rights. By instructing the youth in their rights, how to advocate for them and what to do when they witness rights abuse, we hope to help prevent such abuses.

So far three day-long sessions have been held for 60 students from two different schools. In the latest session the participants undertook a CV and cover letter writing workshop, discussed effective communication, developed their leadership skills and sat in the 'hot seat' doing practice job interviews. Now that the students are comfortable with each other, and with expressing their opinions in front of one another, the next session will focus on the key themes of human rights understanding, and conflict transformation.

ULYP is hugely grateful to the continuing support of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives who are funding this program.



Hekayat: Sharing stories, Sharing culture



"In life we all need support. We have our internal drive, and need external support to keep us motivated, feeling appreciated, remind us that we are doing well and should persevere."

This was the idea behind ULYP's latest project, in collaboration with the American Community School, 'Hekayat'. Hekayat means 'story' or 'tale' in Arabic, and over 2 days in November 2013, 25 displaced Syrian young people met with 25 ACS students for a day of team-building, cultural understanding, and documentation of their lives and stories. We at ULYP think it is essential that the Syrian youth have the opportunity to tell their stories and receive support in their lives, and by all accounts the day proved a great success in achieving these aims.

The activities took place at our campus in Dibbeyeh. A morning of team-building and ice-breaking activities was followed by lunch, and the actual interviewing began in the afternoon. The participants left feeling engaged, inspired, and with a greater sense of mutual understanding. The second day allowed the opportunity for the students to meet again and share more stories, and a subsequent meeting day is planned for 2014.

ULYP is very grateful to the American Community School for their help, participation and funding in this project, and we hope we can repeat it again in 2014!

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UNITE LEBANON YOUTH

MOMs: Rekindling a love for education

ULYP is very grateful to the Royal Norwegian Embassy for its funding of three modules of our MOMs program.

Although the prospect of being 'back in education' was daunting at first, the women who completed MOMs in December said they really enjoyed the experience and were very grateful for the opportunities given to them. As many of the women had studied English for only one year at school they were especially keen to work on their language skills, which they showed with their growing enthusiasm and desire to participate and speak up in class.



In general the women showed a marked increase in confidence, an improvement in their English skills by one level, and many were for the first time able to use internet sites such as Facebook and Skype to contact relatives abroad and back in Syria. The women also benefited from lectures given by visiting experts on a variety of topics such as nutrition, First Aid, and how to effectively organize their homes now that they are refugees and living under very reduced circumstances.

We have already started the next module of MOMs, and are enjoying getting to know another group of women.

'You allowed us to express our feelings and talk and didn't say "sshhhhh"'

ULYP is very excited to continue its partnership with United Palestinian Appeal (UPA) who is partially funding a second module of SAWA (Strengthening Amity With the Arts) this year.

Between October and December 2013, 25 disadvantaged Palestinian children joined with 25 underprivileged Lebanese children to take part in a varied arts program. The children focused on theatre including making their own short improvised pieces, and interpreting classic fairy tales. The children did many individual and group art pieces based around the theme of community, and took part in arts and crafts activities including making decorative jars, picture frames and flowers. The children enjoyed team building and problem solving games, which helped them to develop social skills such as team work, cooperation, perseverance and problem solving.

On the last day of SAWA, the teachers held an evaluation session where children were asked questions about the program, and were encouraged to answer freely and discuss. Children said they liked SAWA because: 'we don't have such activities at school'; 'ULYP listens to us'; 'now I have new friends who don't go to my school'; 'we can solve our problems in a better way that ULYP taught us'.

The children also said that now they knew about recycling they wouldn't throw everything away. Many of the children agreed that they would have liked to do more drama and music, and some wanted to be able to play football – ULYP has taken their comments into consideration and will reflect this in the upcoming module of SAWA.



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Meeting ULYP: A priceless experience

Time passed like an arrow in Lebanon. In the half year since I arrived, I have experienced and learned things that I will never forget, and which I will benefit from for a lifetime. Many beautiful moments will come to my mind when I recall my time in Lebanon, and among them, working with ULYP is one of the best.

As a graduate student of Middle Eastern Studies, I have studied a lot about the history, politics and society of the region, but never have I learned so much about the Middle East than since I arrived in Beirut in June 2013. The war in Syria has intensified the sectarian conflicts in Lebanon; walking on the street in Hamra, one can see handicapped Syrian children and women everywhere. Though I was amazed by Lebanon's gorgeous landscapes, fascinated by the mountains and coastlines, wandering through the neighborhoods in Beirut also brought me sorrow and regret. Beirut is a small city, but the huge disparity between the rich and the poor areas here has struck me.

And then I met ULYP. I still remember the first time I stepped into the office in the summer. It is a small place, but cozy and friendly. I was invited to lunch in their conference room, where I met the founder, Madame Melek, the director, Nicole, and all the other friends that I would be working with. That was the beginning of my time with ULYP, a great moment when everyone in the organization sat together around the table, like a big family.



I was introduced to ULYP's different programs and went to the campus in Dibbiyeh where they are held. Working with the Lebanese and refugee youth was the greatest time I had with ULYP: teaching English to Syrian women in the MOMs program, playing and drawing pictures with Palestinian children in SAWA, talking to students with my broken Arabic and listening to their worries and ambitions... They told me about their dreams to study at universities abroad, and their hope to change the future of their communities and of Lebanon. I was deeply touched by the aspirations of these young souls, encouraged by their bravery to overcome hardship and to meet the challenges of life. I feel that I am learning from them; their language, their society, but moreover, their spirit to fight for their dreams.

A student success story: Ahmad Theibich



Ahmad Theibich was one of ULYP's first ever students. He wanted to study nursing but did not have the means to pay the high fees. ULYP matched him with a full scholarship generously given by Rima Hourani to study at LAU.

My name is Ahmad Theibich and I am 21 years old. First of all I want to thank ULYP and Madame Melek for everything they did for me, studying at LAU was one of the greatest things that happened to me.

I was introduced to ULYP in 2010 and with their help, I had the chance to study nursing at the Lebanese American University. Unfortunately, I could not be a part of any volunteer activities or help out at ULYP because I had to study very hard and do clinical rotations in several hospitals. After graduating I got a job and right now I am working at the University Medical Center-Rizk Hospital as a Registered Nurse, everything is going really well. For my future, I want to travel to the United states in order to apply for a Master's in Nursing.

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Playing Football in Qatar

My name is Bilal el Assadi and I am studying mechanical engineering at Texas A&M University in Qatar, where I have a scholarship from the Qatar Foundation. I have just started my 2nd semester. The first semester was really special and we all (the Palestinian students sponsored by ULYP), got to enjoy our time and scored really high grades.

I have a large friendship group, mostly Palestinians coming from Lebanon. We often stay together and help each other through the class process. One of the most important events that we have participated in is the "HBKU Football World Cup Tournament". We participated in the competition as the "Palestinian team", and most of us knew how to play well – we were determined to win this championship! Our team was made up of ten players: six main players playing on-court (of which I was one) and four substitutes. Out of these ten, there were four ULYP students, including myself. I was the only freshmen among them. The others were two sophomore students from Texas A&M: Hassan Moussa, studying mechanical engineering, and Abdul Salam, studying petroleum engineering, who played as goal keeper. The fourth ULYP player was Abd el-Karim Khattab, who is studying business administration at Carnegie Mellon University. We didn't win the whole competition, although we won a couple of matches. Our performance was good but not enough to bring us victory. The thing we enjoyed most about the tournament was playing together and acting as one unit to improve our team skills. I'd like to mention that I have a lot of thoughts and ambitions for my life. When I was a kid, I wanted to be a football player. But after growing up, I decided to keep football as a hobby and a beneficial sport, and to put all my efforts into education.



Now, I dream of becoming a successful engineer who can innovate and create to serve my community and my people. Also, I would like to thank Mrs. Melek and the ULYP office members for helping me to choose the right place for me to get the knowledge I need to accomplish my dreams.

Upcoming activities

Our next newsletter will be issued in March 2014 and here are some of the activities you can look forward to reading about:

- The launching of our new Skills4Life project: We have joined forces with Welfare Association and INJAZ-Lebanon in a new exciting European Union funded project. Stay tuned for more info!
- The launching of our new sports campaign
- Updates on our MOMs, SAWA, HAPPY and RARE programs



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