



## SUCCESS STORY

### Youth Clubs Foster Activism in Ouzai Neighborhood



USAID/Lebanon

The soccer club in Ouzai gave many of its members their first opportunity to play on a formal team. The team is now competing against teams from other areas.

***“The most inspiring thing is to see students discover new talents and their potential, together with their new friends from other schools.”***

***—Randa Ajami, project manager and Youth Committee member***

**May 2009** – For years, Beirut’s southern suburbs have been plagued by violence and poverty. It is a landscape that provides few recreational activities for youth. Yet in the neighborhood of Ouzai, a project being run by the newly created Youth Committee (YC) is giving young people an opportunity to explore their talents and learn the basics of civic education.

The Ouzai YC has formed seven clubs focusing on a variety of interests, including folk dance, painting, the Internet, life skills, theater, soccer, and basketball. The clubs, which are headed by teachers from Shoreline Academy, have attracted 300 members (ages 15 to 18) from the neighborhood and are growing in popularity.

With support from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the YC used an innovative curriculum—produced by Jouzour, a local nongovernmental organization—to integrate concepts of citizenship, conflict resolution, teamwork, and nonviolence into school course work and link the concepts to club activities.

The youth of Ouzai have responded positively to the new opportunities for expression. “My painting shows people carrying rocks to build democracy,” explained Rayan, a member of the painting club. Hassan, a school dropout and theater club member, said, “I joined the club to meet new friends and do something other than sit at home. We’re working on a play about resolving problems in daily life.” Youssef from the life skills club added, “We learned to think deeply about many issues like communication and what criteria we must consider when choosing a [political] candidate.”

The clubs have collaborated to organize public activities, including a Mother’s Day folk dance performance, a cleanup campaign, and a tree-planting project. The YC has also branched out to other communities, organizing soccer and basketball games with teams from other regions. Some club members took part in an arts exhibition with youth from the southern village of Nabatiyeh, where they shared their paintings and poems and discussed democracy and civic activism.

In a parallel activity, the YC hosted community lectures on important social topics for parents and other residents. Sensing new possibilities, a group of parents decided to revive Shoreline Academy’s parent committee and surveyed community members for input on future activities.