



SUCCESS STORY

Palestinian, Lebanese Youth Forge New Friendships



Mosawat

Young women from the Beddawi area learn how to cook traditional Lebanese and Palestinian dishes during an OTI-supported class.

"Next time, I will be a volunteer with Mosawat in any of its activities."

***—Hussein Qoraitem
Mayor of Beddawi***

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October 2008 – A nascent, youth-led organization has helped break down barriers between Lebanese and Palestinian youth near the Beddawi refugee camp in northern Lebanon, challenging stereotypes fueled by a history of tensions. Relations between the two communities worsened after the 2007 battle between the Lebanese Army and Islamic militants in the nearby Naher El Bared camp, contributing to a climate of fear and mistrust.

With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), local NGO Mosawat brought 160 Lebanese and Palestinian youth together for sports competitions, cooking classes, and conflict resolution workshops. The activities facilitated rare interactions between the groups, spurring positive changes in attitudes and behaviors. At first, soccer games were aggressive as players took their animosity toward “the other” to the field; however, as players engaged in dialogue and training, sportsmanship improved and friendships began to form.

For Riham El Qodsi, a 21-year-old Palestinian whose father was killed in the Naher El Bared conflict, cooking with her Lebanese peers helped her move beyond her initial suspicions. Through the workshops and joint activities, the youths educated each other on their cultural traditions, learned about civic responsibility, and formulated community improvement projects. They launched a street-cleaning campaign, painted a mural, and helped organize a festival that drew over 250 people.

Since attending the program, Bashar Khader, an 18-year-old Lebanese, has continued to visit his teammates on his own: “It’s the first time I feel I can go inside Beddawi camp because now I have many friends there.” Echoing this sentiment, Zakariah Awad said, “Before these workshops, I looked at the Palestinians as outlaws who love violence...I discovered I was wrong.”

Mosawat is encouraging the youths to disseminate their message of tolerance to others. In addition, the NGO has been able to build on its OTI-funded activities and leverage additional support, securing a community development grant from the United Nations Development Programme as well as a commitment from the mayor of Beddawi to participate in future initiatives.