



## SUCCESS STORY

### Youth Reclaim Village as Cultural and Tourist Center



USAID/Lebanon

Members of the Yammouneh Cultural Club collect trash during a youth-initiated cleanup campaign.

***“Yammouneh Cultural Club’s center has become a landmark of the village. I attend all of their activities and brought the Austrian and Swiss Ambassadors to the center so they could see what independent youth are doing for our village.”***

***—Talal Shreif, Mayor of Yammouneh***

**October 2009** – In an effort to breathe cultural life back into their community, youth from the remote village of Yammouneh have become passionate community mobilizers. With support from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the young activists, members of the Yammouneh Cultural Club, raised more than \$18,000 from the community to renovate a cultural center.

The village, which is resource poor and had lost its reputation as a hub of cultural and tourist activities, is one of the few politically independent municipalities in the Beqaa, and the fundraising effort represents a considerable leveraging of resources that has transformed the village and the outlook of its residents.

The young club members have drawn their peers, as well as former residents and tourists, back to the village by using the center as a focal point for an array of events, including art exhibits, poetry nights, community dinners, sports competitions, and hiking trips.

“Now my family has a reason to go to Yammouneh every weekend,” said Ali Shreif, a former resident. “We see that the NGO is doing something very special there.”

In addition to providing rare opportunities for cultural engagement, the youth made improvements to their village by partnering with the municipality and enlisting the community. They organized a cleanup campaign to install garbage bins in common areas, remove vegetation near roadways, and collect trash along local waterways.

The group also engaged residents—and their children—in an effort to paint three murals in the village center. The murals promote national unity and efforts to keep the village safe and clean. Twenty-year-old Rami Shreif said, “Working on the mural paintings gave us an opportunity to express ourselves and deliver important messages to people.”

The project taught youth how to conduct a needs assessment, which allowed the group to identify the village’s most urgent needs. The project has spurred the Yammouneh Cultural Club board to begin holding weekly meetings for the first time in its 46-year history. Furthermore, the board has started working with interested youth to address the community’s priority issues.

The youth of Yammouneh are making plans to expand their activities to five nearby villages. They are also preparing to hold a public discussion with the village’s mayor to explore municipal performance.