



SUCCESS STORY

Youth Develop Independent Voice in Nabatyeh



Members of the Youth Network in Nabatyeh discuss the meaning of independence with a passing truck driver.

“We want to make youth leaders not followers. We live in a society without a youth platform, but as individuals, we want to do something for society.”

—Hussein, 22-year-old employee and former member of the Youth Network in Nabatyeh

Program Manager:
Jennifer Boggs Serfass
E-mail: jboggs@usaid.gov
Tel: (202) 712-1004
Web: www.usaid.gov (keyword: OTI)

November 2008 – A nonpartisan youth group literally stopped traffic on Independence Day in the southern city of Nabatyeh. The youths grabbed the city’s attention with street-side activities that included a “wall magazine” on which passersby were asked to write their personal definitions of true independence. Notably, the group was not acting in conjunction with any political or confessional agenda.

The activists – members of the Youth Network in Nabatyeh, which receives funding from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) – were enthusiastic about having a platform and an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging outside of politically defined structures. “This event is showing [that] independent youth exist and saying ‘here we are,’” said 18-year-old Zaynab.

The Nabatyeh project is challenging the status quo by providing youth with real alternatives to activities and opportunities linked to political alignment. Project director Leila Serhan said the community was hesitant, at first, to embrace the effort, but as positive word-of-mouth reports spread through the city, the project grew quickly – expanding from 20 participants to nearly 70 in four months.

The Youth Network in Nabatyeh brought together youths who had received training through previous donor initiatives, including some funded by OTI, and gave them additional opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Participants attended a series of workshops that addressed the themes of conflict resolution, networking, and community activism. The youths also engaged in role-playing exercises and dialogue sessions, developing skills to help them mobilize support and make a difference in their community. Raghida, a 19-year-old participant, said the project’s activities have exposed her to new issues, increased her confidence and sense of self-awareness, and “helped her find her voice.”

Working in committees, the youths are sharing their interests and engaging the public by hosting film screenings and discussions as well as cultural activities, such as traditional *dabke* dances. In addition, they are looking at ways to ensure group sustainability and are planning a longer term effort to raise funds for a community activity center that will house a mobile theater and provide computer services.