



SUCCESS STORY

Youth Remake Park as Multiuse Civic Space



Youth and children play in the newly restored community park in Hermel.

“I learned that members can have their own freedom of opinion. You’re not supposed to vote until you are 21 in Lebanon, but in this NGO and project, I’m 18 and can vote.”

— Fahma, a member of the youth committee that planned and designed the park renovation

December 2008 – Traditional Lebanese towns are often laid-out with a *Minshiyeh*—a shared place where the entire community can come together for recreation and cultural events. The village of Hermel in northern Beqaa has one of these spaces.

So when a group of civic-minded youths wanted to do something for their community, they thought of restoring the town’s picturesque *Minshiyeh*. And with support from the Office of Transition Initiatives, local NGO Development Culture and Giving (DCG) assisted the youths to redesign and reinvigorate the park.

The project trained nearly 70 young people in community activism, democracy, and project management. Armed with this knowledge, a youth committee now plans park events such as sports competitions, environmental campaigns, and cultural exhibitions. The youths also oversee maintenance of the park, which has a playground, a volleyball/basketball court, a soccer field, and vendor kiosks.

“I want to be involved in other projects after the success of this project,” said 19-year-old committee member Mohammed. “I feel qualified to help in other community development.” He explains that the democratic ideas they were exposed to during the training are alive at the committee’s weekly meetings, which recently saw officer elections. “I have had freedom to design and discuss, and to have my ideas taken into consideration,” he said.

The project director said that the park provides the “only breathing room” in town and is especially appreciated by residents who can’t afford to travel. DCG has secured written assurances that the *Minshiyeh* will remain free of political paraphernalia and activities. The assurances were critical to project success, as most social and cultural opportunities in the region are tied to dominant political forces.

“This spot brings together so many people...it is very secure and safe,” said 18-year-old Fahma, the park’s sports coordinator. He said the sports and recreational events have been well received by the community, and noted a recent children’s play that drew hundreds of families. Fahma is also excited that girls are playing on the volleyball team, which offers the only opportunity for girls to participate in organized sports in Hermel.