



MEDREGION UPDATE



MedRegion Office, Tunis

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MEPI *Medregion Update* Newsletter is produced by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) MedRegion Office at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia.

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We welcome your comments and suggestions.

MEPI Project Improves Kids' Academic Performance

Read, Write and Play", a project funded by MEPI, is benefiting 150 primary school students in Hebron, West Bank.

Implementing a play-based educational program, MEPI grantee the Children Happiness Center (CHC) is helping elementary school students aged 8 to 13 who suffer from learning difficulties.

The educational program "I Read, Write and Play" is improving



"I participated in this program to develop and build my capacities especially that I have difficulties at learning English language. I have really benefited and learned from this program much. I met new friends and I have learned a lot of skills, including arts and sports. I also enjoyed attending the open days and the theatre shows."



Yassin Zghir

"I so much liked this program because I discovered that I can draw. I also participated in the drama workshops and enjoyed participating in the final theatre show."

educational games, film and theater shows, field trips, Arabic and English language instructions and math lessons.

In coordination with the Center of Developing the Talent of the Future Generation, CHC conducted a two-month drama workshop for a group of 38 pupils.

The purpose was to give children the opportunity to show and hone their



the kids' academic performance and civic participation.

The project's goals are twofold: while helping kids improve their learning skills, it also increases the active participation of university students in their society and fosters their willingness to tackle the needs of their

community.

Thirty university graduates volunteered to take part in the activities of this project by teaching kids in Arabic, English and Mathematics.

The volunteers received training in communication and leadership skills, how to deal with children, how to run activities,

how to address the weak points that children face in learning and how to deal with kids with special needs.

CHC organized a summer camp for the 150 participants. The program of the camp included sessions on drawing, sports, computer lectures, library activities,

talents. CHC produced a magazine entitled "Alwan", which features the activities held as part of this project.

A total of 4000 students and their families participated in the activities of this project. ■

Early Marriage Awareness Caravan in Morocco



Marrying underage girls is an alarming but widespread phenomenon in rural Morocco. To address this issue, MEPI partner the Nour Association for Solidarity with Rural Women (ANSFR) implemented the "Early Marriage Awareness Project" to combat the practice of early marriages among girls under the age of 18. With MEPI support, ANSFR launched a caravan campaign in Beni Mellal, Fquih Ben Saled and Azilalto, in Eastern Morocco to raise awareness among women, parents, teachers, doctors, marriage officiators, judges, village leaders and authorities of women's right to choose their partners, their right to education and their right to refuse arranged marriages.

The caravan went from village to village, targeting those in which the divorce rate among young women is high. The caravan volunteers showed films on the topic of early marriages, disseminated brochures and flyers. The caravan involved local and national authorities to advocate for the protection of women's rights.

Consultants on legal, health and gender issues met the civil society representatives, health practitioners and local counselors to debate the causes of early marriages and reflect on possible solutions. The caravan staff

had meeting sessions with women and girls. Men also attended these sessions and all participants raised questions and issues considered taboo, like divorce. Caravan volunteers interacted with parents, town elders and girls. Young girls were encouraged to pursue education instead of getting married at a very early age.

A hearing session was held where women spoke about their experiences. Participating women shared their firsthand experiences openly with the audience. One lady said, "It is the first time someone listens to me, the first time I can voice my worries and all that I went through, and whatever I can say to you, no one can compensate for the loss of all opportunities life offers."



Woman A: "Aren't you coming to attend the graduation party of our friend?"

Woman B: "I am sorry, I can't come; I am busy with laundry and have to feed the baby. Say hello to everyone."

The local counselor was impressed by the presence of women who came from different villages and said that such an issue needs to be discussed to raise awareness among parents and law enforcement officials, who should contribute to put an end to this phenomenon. ■



U.S. Government Database Registration

By MEPI Grants Unit

MEPI implementers are NOT required to register with the NCAGE and CCR databases, because MEPI recently received a 1-year waiver of a U.S. Government (USG) requirement that all organizations doing business with the USG must register with these databases. However, there is no guarantee that this waiver will be extended in the future. Further, MEPI is the only USG entity which has this waiver; consequently, if an organization wants to do business (receive a grant or contract) with any other office in the USG they will be required to register with these databases.

To prepare for the future we therefore encourage all implementers to begin the NCAGE and CCR registration process. Details can be found at the following links:

English version: <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/tunisia/126725/PDFs/ForeignOrganizationRegistration.pdf>

Arabic version: <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/uae/19452/abudhabimepi/Guide%20to%20foreign%20organization%20registration%20AR.pdf>

As is always true, do not hesitate to contact your GA if you have any questions or concerns. ■

MEPI Helps Children and Youth Find Their Voices



Summer camp

Through its MEPI-funded project “Children Have a Voice”, MEPI partner Voice of Lebanese Women (VLW) is laying a foundation for a culture of civic participation and tolerance among children and youth in Lebanon. For the “Children Have a Voice” project, VLW reached out to 40 kids and youth aged 12-21 of diverse denominational backgrounds and engaged them in a series of training courses and real life applications to establish a model youth municipal council.

VLW selected 20 youth instructors aged 18-21 and 20 assistant instructors aged 12-17. The youth received trainings which enabled them to implement activities during a summer camp. Activities focused on educational and entertainment programs that included basketball, football, ceramics, pottery, theater, languages and math classes.

The training sessions were divided into 8 themes: teamwork, conflict resolution, citizenship, tolerance, stress management, freedom of expression, leadership, environment and the role of the municipality. Young participants stated that they

acquired new skills during these sessions. The variety of activities provided participants with the opportunity to talk freely and exchange ideas with their peers. The training courses came as a preparation phase for a model government Youth Shadow Municipality.

“These themes are essential to the democratic process. Citizens cannot take part in public decision-making if they do not have information background and ideas that help them to express their views in the municipal council,” said the project manager.

In preparation for the election of the youth municipal council, participants elaborated a draft project containing development activities that they presented to the municipal council of Chiah. The municipality was surprised by the high level of awareness of their youth, their insistence on getting their rights and their willingness to work according to their duties as citizens.

The youths have acquired new knowledge and skills in civic action. They have begun to freely express their points of



view and share their knowledge with peers and children, and they have become aware of their rights and duties, including the importance of respecting other cultures and backgrounds.

One participant, Mohamed, shared with us his insights about his participation in the program:

“At the beginning of this project, we were all afraid from each other because of our religious differences. However, with time and through the trainings and activities we had participated in, we discovered that we, youth, are united by the same goals and same ambitions.

During the project, we were able to transmit our experience to 200 children through the summer day camp and we succeeded in dealing with fanaticism and breaking the barrier of fear between us. This experience has taught us the importance of living in peace and accepting the differences of others.

I hope that we will be able to continue our activities this year and reach more young people.”

Another participant, Jennifer Saliba, shared her experience:

“I am most thankful for the center because it gave me the opportunity to participate in MEPI’s project, which built social ties between different sectarian groups beyond the walls of universities and schools.

MEPI’s project created a space for us to meet and break this wall of fear constructed by our society. We all became one, working in one hand for a common purpose, on an equal basis. We started respecting each other and building a common identity. Belonging to the center has helped us install an internal and external peace, but has also awakened in each one the sense of citizenship and belonging to one country, one society. I used to avoid any discussion with Mohammad and Hussein; today they have become my friends. We understood that we have the same ambitions, needs, rights and responsibilities.” ■

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Spotlight on MEPI Alumni

Palestinian MEPI Alumni Network:

On April 20, 2012 around 12 MEPI Alumni attended the Alumni Conference organized by AMIDEAST in Jericho. AMIDEAST launched the Alumni Networking and Community Engagement Program entitled "Work for a Cause, Not for

Government-funded programs, such as MEPI, A-PLUS, YES, Access, Fulbright, Hubert Humphrey, SUSI, IVLP, and others. The program connected former alumni with a younger generation of alumni, who got the chance to network and share experiences.

mentors in 12 groups to develop project proposals that addressed a need in their communities. Soon the winning initiatives will be announced and will receive full funding through this grant.

On March 4th-11th, more than thirty MEPI Alumni from different programs, including APLUS, Student Leaders, and local grantees, participated in a debate training course.

The 17 hours of training included topics such as theoretical background of debate, roles of the speakers, developing critical thinking skills, and building strong arguments.

On March 11, 10 MEPI alumni steering committee members



attended a workshop to learn how to develop the rules and regulations (by-laws) which will guide the MEPI Alumni Network throughout the coming years. During this workshop the MEPI Alumni Steering committee members were able to develop and agree upon the first draft of by-laws.

In addition, the MEPI Alumni Coordinator, Azza Hasan attended the MEPI Alumni

Network Conference March 12th -15th, in Istanbul, Turkey. Azza gave presentations on "Youth Entrepreneurship" and "Election Monitoring in a Sensitive Environment." The conference provided Azza with wider insights, knowledge, and inspiration for expanding the role of the MEPI Alumni Network, not only locally but on a regional level. ■



MEPI Alumni during the session

Applause". The two-day conference targeted 75 student and professional alumni from various U.S.

During the second day, participants from the student alumni were matched with professional alumni

MEPI Medregion Office News

MEPI Welcomes New Staff

Vanessa L. Vidal Castellanos is a Pickering Fellow working at the MEPI MedRegion Office in Tunis this summer. Vanessa will be joining the Foreign Service as a Public Diplomacy officer in September 2012. She spent last summer working in the Operations Center in Washington, D.C. Vanessa holds a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University with a concentration in International Security Studies and Development Economics. She completed her B.A. in Latin American Studies and Romance Languages at Bowdoin College. Vanessa speaks Spanish and French, and hopes to start learning Arabic this summer.



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