



# YES

## Alumni Newsletter

AYUSA Consortium

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## Regional Conferences Reunite Alumni

Alumni from selected countries recently participated in two regional conferences that promoted leadership and community service, and also gave the participants a chance to reunite with their fellow alumni from neighboring countries.

The Pakistani and Bangladeshi alumni from the AYUSA YES consortium joined alumni from other programs and consortiums at the South Asian Regional Youth Leadership Conference held on April 15th-18th at the American Center in New Delhi, India and the Vidya Sanskar School in Faridabad, India. The conference was organized by the American Embassy in New Delhi in collaboration with the U.S.

Educational Foundation in India. Conference partners were the Vidya Sanskar School, the nongovernmental organization Haryana and AFS/India. The sixty-four participants included alumni from YES, the Future Leader Exchange program (FLEX) and the South Asia Undergraduate Students



*Pakistan alumni Haider and Masood sing and play with the children at the orphanage in Faridabad India*

Leaders Institute (SAUSLI), and came from regional states including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Muzammil Hussain '05, Mirza Haider Ali '05, Masood-ur-Rehman '06, and Sania Ali Khan '06, represented Pakistan at the conference. Bangladeshi participants were S.M.

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## Host Family Visits Yemen

If anyone had told Kathleen Kain and her daughter Clare four years ago that a trip to Yemen was in their immediate future, they would probably have laughed it off as a joke. However, Yemen was their destination this past June, when they traveled to Aden to visit Ali Hussein Salah '05, their host son and brother.

Ali and the Kains have kept in close contact since he spent the 2004-05 year with them in Houston, Texas as a member of the second cohort of



*Kathleen and Claire Kain, Ali and his younger brother Mohammed toured the sights in Yemen.*

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Regional *continued*

Fahad Bin Kamal '05,  
Masaba Adneen '06,  
Rubaiyat Kamal '06 and  
Maheen Mahjabeen '06.

The conference began on April 16 with welcoming remarks by Mr. Adnan Siddiqui, Counselor for Cultural Affairs from the U.S. Embassy. A video address from Mr. Robert Persiko, Chief, Youth Program's Division at the Department of State, was shown. He highlighted the importance of alumni activities and expressed his best wishes for the success of the conference.

The conference covered several topics, including a panel discussion on Youth and Leadership, as well as workshops on building leadership skills, adaptation, communication and ethics, working in groups, building citizenship through diversity and project preparation and planning. One of the most popular workshop sessions was the planning of community service projects for the participants to implement back home. Participants broke up into country groups to design projects addressing environmental, social and health issues, which they then presented to the entire group.

The workshop sessions were led by various representatives from AFS. Mr. Nalin Kohli, Director of the Vidya Sanskar School who is also a political leader, gave a speech on political issues in India and answered the participants' questions about Indian politics.

One of the highlights of the conference was a visit to a girls' orphanage in Faridabad as a community service activity. The YES scholars organized activities for the girls and engaged them in singing, dancing and games. Everyone enjoyed the activities and felt uplifted by the event.

The conference ended with a lunch in a restaurant in New Delhi which was arranged by the U.S.

Embassy. After lunch, participants were taken sight-seeing and shopping.

The conference provided a unique opportunity for the YES alumni to interact with alumni from different countries and programs, and to learn about other alumni activities being carried out in neighboring countries. This conference also helped participants learn about Indian culture



Participants at the conference with their certificates

and people, and to break down stereotypes some of the participants may have had about each other. Pakistani and Indian students participated together informally in discussions on political, social and economic issues of local and global importance. They had substantial dialogues on democracy, poverty alleviation and the need to have better relationships between India and Pakistan. The Pakistani participants in particular were overwhelmed by the hospitality and enthusiasm of their new Indian friends.

### Workshop in the Desert

A slightly different venue was selected for a workshop/reunion held for Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian alumni from April 12 - 14. Thirty-five participants convened in the majestic desert of Wadi Rum, Jordan, for a two-day workshop designed to assist them in developing an active alumni network. The conference covered topics directly related to their work as an alumni group.

Participants came prepared to camp out in the desert. The sessions were held in tents set up Bedouin-style, and were conducted by Mr. Mahmoud Hishmah, who is a trainer at the Queen Zein Al-Sharaf Institute for Development. The topics of discussion included community service, creativity, team building, volunteerism and proposal writing.

Upon arrival in the evening of April 12, the group attended a welcome dinner and was given instructions for how the workshop would be conducted. After breakfast and an ice breaking activity the following morning, the group was divided in two. While one group attended workshop sessions, the other group participated in activities arranged to provide them with a unique experience in the desert. They took jeep

tours, participated in a treasure hunt and enjoyed a camel ride, the first for most of the participants!

The two groups came together for meals and evening wrap-up sessions to discuss the events of the day. At the conclusion of the conference, the alumni expressed enthusiasm for the event and were eager to begin putting their new skills and knowledge to work.



YES Alumni activities took place in a traditional Bedouin tent. Despite the fact they were in a desert, the temperature in Wadi Rum were still very cold at night!

**Some of the alumni described their experience:**

"I never expected this to be so much fun. I thought it would be boring sessions, but I really enjoyed this conference very much."  
*Haifa Saleh '05, Jordan*

"The idea of staying in tents in the desert had never crossed my mind until the camp in Wadi Rum. There we experienced what it is like to live in an under-populated area with no electricity. It was unique! Now I am enthusiastic to begin alumni projects that build upon the leadership skills that I developed during the conference."  
*Marleen Milhim '06, Israel*

"The conference was a wonderful combination of hands-on activities. We attended a session about the importance of being goal-orientated. The session facilitator taught us how to put together community service activities on a professional level. The camel and Jeep tours were incredible. I cannot believe that we did not get lost being surrounded by all the sand and rocks out here!"  
*Katreen Milhim '06, Israel*

"After almost a year of being apart, it was an awesome idea to gather all of us together again in such an amazing place. We had the chance to meet up with old friends, have an incredible adventure out in the desert, and of course we improved our leadership abilities and skills at the same time. Riding camels was the most amazing part for me along with sleeping in tents in the freezing cold desert temperatures!"  
*Mona Shimi '06, Israel*

"Wadi Rum was not an experience, it was THE EXPERIENCE! Burning hot days, freezing nights, sand all around, even in the bed, and all over our pillows! That was a blast! The workshop sessions also took me for surprise as they got me into this AH-HA moment, that was my wakeup call, to do more leadership work here at home. Now I know that we all can make a difference. And yeah I enjoyed riding SHLOMO -that was our camel's name!"  
*Nadin Qais '06, Israel*



*Camel rides in the desert!*

"I have never thought that living in the desert would be fun. It's amazing to sit around a campfire at night and have conversations with your friends, or see the rain falling in the desert or sleep inside a Bedouin tent. It's really a different life! We all learned how to be a leader, how to have patience, and how to be responsible as a result of this experience."  
*Muna Milhim '06, Israel*

"The YES alumni meeting in Wadi Rum included a plethora of exciting and educational activities. The primary purpose of the meeting was to

emphasize the significance of communal and group work. The entertaining nature of the activities made us realize that community service activities are not only meaningful to our community but something that motivates and interests us as young people. The facilitators helped us to recognize that one can help his or her community in several imaginative ways. Most importantly, they taught us that community service activities aren't insipid in anyway whatsoever. Instead they should be entertaining, delightful and most importantly, relevant to our lives!"  
*Said Zagha '05, West Bank*



*Conference attendees at Wadi Rum*

"The Wadi Rum regional conference experience was awesome! Before the trip I was trying

to organize community service projects but these ideas didn't pan out well. Thanks to the sessions I attended during this conference, I gained the knowledge that I needed to turn my ideas into concrete actions and future projects. In doing so many hands-on activities, I learned the value and importance of teamwork and creativity."  
*Razan Halawa '06, West Bank*

YES students to arrive in the U.S. Kain remembers Ali as a flexible and resilient student. "He worked hard at his studies, and he often shared stories and wisdom from Yemen with our family," she noted. It was those stories, as well as the travel books Ali brought with him from Yemen, that prompted the family to consider visiting the country.

"We liked looking at the pictures of jewelry, architecture and the terraced hillsides," Kain said. "Then Clare's friend gave me a copy of Tim Mackintosh-Smith's *Yemen: The Unknown Arabia*, which I read twice. Finally, Ali sent us a box of honey, necklaces, baskets, the world's best-tasting tuna and frankincense. I was hooked!"

Although the Kains were excited about the trip, their enthusiasm was not universally shared by family and friends. "My husband said he had to stay behind to organize the rescue party," Kain joked. "My sister sent me a book about a dozen tourists who were kidnapped in the Hadramut in early 2000, and two of my friends told me to go if I must, but for mercy's sake, leave my daughter behind. Their concerns brought to mind what Ali had once told me when he was here - his mother was worried that he might get shot because she heard that America was a violent place!"

Ali was very excited upon learning of his host family's decision to visit him in Yemen. "I was so happy to hear that they were coming. It has been two years since I left them, so it was like a dream that became real," he said. Ali wanted to give them a real feel for the country, so he carefully planned their itinerary using a tour guide in Sanaa. In addition, the Kain's had some specific requests for places that they wanted to see.

"Mohammed Shaif of Yamanat Tours escorted us through the suqs in Sana'a, pointed out land formations and local flora and introduced us to qat and ceremonial dancing," Kain said. In Aden, Ali's uncle took on the escorting duties. "We had my uncle driving us all over the places in the south," he noted. "I also took them to my village in Yaffa. We stayed there for three days and had a wonderful time."

This was the first time the two families had met in person. "Ali's mother was very welcoming, and could not do enough for us," Kain said. "I



*Kathleen Kain, left, and her daughter Claire pose for formal photos at the photograph's studio prior to attending a wedding ceremony in Yemen. Ali's mother arranged for a trip to the salon for the intricate henna designs adorning their hands and arms.*

had intended to help her out around the house and for us to cook together, but she treated us like visiting royalty!"

Ali was amazed that, despite the language difficulties, the two families managed to communicate so well. "My dad and my twin sister Mona speak some English, so that worked out very well. My mom and the rest of the family used a lot of body language. My host mom and sister knew a few words in Arabic and that really helped a lot. It was very impressive seeing my host mom having a conversation with my grandma and amazingly understanding each other! However, most of the time I was the interpreter guy."

Kain notes that Ali was a great interpreter, and communication was easy when he was around. But he wasn't always there. "I am proud of one session between Ali's mother and me, in which I managed to glean some family history, such as how long she has been married and the ages of her children," she said.

"However, I was embarrassed at the end of the visit when she was speaking more English phrases than I was speaking Arabic!"

Ali said that he and his family enjoyed having his host mom and sister stay with them. He wishes his host father could have also made the trip. Ali recently became the first Yemeni to win the English Speaking Union's International Speaking Competition in London. A special ceremony was held in Aden and sponsored by UNICEF-Yemen, who also recognized Ali for his work in educating young Yemenis about AIDS. "I was glad that my host family was able to attend the award ceremony for my recent accomplishment in London," he said. "They also visited the AMIDEAST-Aden office and spoke with the YES students who recently departed for the U.S."

Ali, who is currently a senior in high school, is now considering his future plans. He would like to return to the U.S. to continue his studies. He says that the YES program was "an amazing experience" and notes "I wouldn't really have had this achievement without my initial participation in the YES program, which continues to impact its participants throughout their lives". Whatever he does in the future, Ali fully expects to maintain his close relationship with his host family. "As long as my host family could make it all the way to Yemen, I will make it to the U.S. and see them again!"

# YES Alumni Chapter Updates

## Algeria

YES alumnae Naila Kerkebane '06 and Yasmine Drais '06, along with YES coordinator Taous Chabane, attended a forum organized by the Algerian Muslim Scouts on International AIDS Day, December 1st 2006. The forum's focus was to increase AIDS Awareness amongst Algerian youth. The event inspired both Naila and Yasmine to organize AIDS Awareness activities in their own schools. The YES scholars were given a video tape containing a cartoon that explains how AIDS is contracted, how to prevent the spread of the disease and how to properly interact with someone who has HIV or AIDS. Students were also given fliers with talking points about AIDS. These AIDS Awareness fliers and the video were duplicated by Yasmine, Naila and other students and were widely distributed in their local communities and schools. Naila commented that the training will be useful in educating their fellow youth about the dangers of contracting the AIDS virus. "It's incredible how little teenagers in Algeria know about AIDS! Teenagers have a lot of misinformation about the disease. For instance, they believe that you can contract the disease if you kiss someone on their cheek. I am very proud to be a part of an AIDS Awareness campaign. I truly believe that I am doing something highly worthwhile and important for my society. I also plan to organize an event where people living with AIDS can meet with teens and hold an educational discussion about AIDS prevention." The Algerian YES alumni hope to partner with the Algerian Muslim Scouts on other activities in the future including working with orphans and youth.

On April 24th, the alumni organized clothes, school furniture and school bags for the children of Tamanrasset, a city in the Algerian Sahara located 2,000 kilometers away from Algiers. The alumni hope to make the donations drive a regular activity for the children of Tamanrasset. The drive was the brainchild of Adem Chabane, '06. Adem spent one week of his winter break in Tamanrasset, which is classified as a UNESCO world heritage site. The city resembles an open air museum, and Adem was fascinated by both the scenery and the hospitality and generosity of the population. He had the opportunity to meet many people, including two teachers who spoke about the economic challenges faced by many of the students whose parents could not afford to buy their required textbooks due to the high unemployment rate in the region. The teachers noted that many of these students become school drop-outs. Adem was moved by what he saw in these rural villages, and decided to organize his fellow YES alumni to help. He spoke with fellow alums, Naila Kerkebane '06, Yasmine Drais '06 and Mhamed Kouidmi '06 and together they decided to organize a school furniture and clothing drive for the villages. They spread the word amongst their school classmates, their neighbors and family members and gathered items to send to Tamanrasset.



*Naila Kerkebane '06 is interviewed by a local television reporter during International AIDS Day.*

Several alumni and their parents participated in a re-entry meeting for the parents of the 2006-2007 YES students on Thursday, June 14. The Algerian YES alums spoke about their myriad of experiences in the United States and the process of returning home and re-adjusting to life back in Algeria upon the conclusion of the YES program. This activity was very useful for the 2006-2007 YES parents as they were unfamiliar with the challenges of re-entry culture shock.



*Naila Kerkebane '06, Yasmine Drais '06 and Mhamed Kouidmi '06 organize a school furniture and clothing drive for the villages of Tamanrasset.*

The YES Algerian alumni spoke with pride about their newly found independence and other benefits that they gained while studying abroad in the United States. The parents of the alumni reaffirmed their children's high sense of personal responsibility, their maturity and their autonomy since completing the YES program. The alumni also spoke about the challenges of reverse

culture-shock upon returning to Algeria. They advised the parents that their kids would be physically and emotionally different upon returning home. Changes might include different hair and clothing styles and most importantly a different perspective about life! The 2006-2007 YES parents were very happy to have the answers to their questions and concerns and thanked the alumni for their useful and timely advice. The parents of the 2006-2007 students left the meeting feeling better prepared to support the return of their children.

### Bangladesh



Alumni participate in the South Asia Regional Youth Leadership Conference

The alumni have been highly active in a variety of community service projects.

A clothing distribution drive was organized in the Kaligonj, Jhenidah District on January 12 in cooperation with

*Youth Against Hunger*, a Japanese N.G.O. The project's aim was to distribute warm clothes to impoverished villagers in Kaligonj. The alumni supported the project by providing 110 new sweaters for distribution.

YES alumni members recently visited the *International Labor Organization's (ILO)* office in Dhaka. They discussed the possibility of volunteering with the organization and providing English language training for children with the ILO staff. The children they propose to teach are at risk of becoming child laborers; English would be an essential educational skill that would give them better career opportunities for their future.

Nisha Chakma '06, was selected to participate in the 15th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development which was held from April 30th through May 11th at the United Nation's Headquarters in New York City. The participating youth were divided into four discussion groups: Climate Change, Energy, Industrial Development and Air Pollution. Nisha participated in the discussion on air pollution; each group generated a statement and prepared a speech which was presented at the forum.

Alumni S.M. Fahad Bin Kamal '05, Masaba Adneen '06, Rubaiyat Kamal '06 and Maheen Mahjabeen '06 attended a "South Asia Regional Youth Leadership Conference" from April 15th through the 18th in New Delhi, India which

was organized by the American Embassy in New Delhi in collaboration with the U.S. Educational Foundation in India. They actively participated in the discussions during the conference to better collaborate on leadership activities and community service projects.

Roesky Azfir Bakshe '05, Smia Idris Seraj '05, Imran Kayesh '05, Mirza Salma Mishori '06 and Maheen Mahjabeen '06 organized a social event to observe Global Youth Service Day at the Society for the Education of the Intellectually Disabled (SEID) which runs a local school for children with disabilities, on April 21.

The President of the Society, Professor Hamida Khanum, delivered a welcome address in which she encouraged leveraging the support of the local community to help the children become responsible citizens of the country. She thanked the YES Alumni organizers and iEARN for organizing the event.

Following the President's speech, the YES alumni distributed snacks to the participants and children. They also gave away pencils, erasers and sharpeners to the students of the school. It was a very enjoyable function and allowed the YES alumni the opportunity to interact with children in a fun, social environment.

### Gaza

Alumni activity was on hiatus due to the recent, unsettled situation in Gaza, but the Alumni have now begun to meet more frequently and have begun organizing events as a group.



The finer points of futbol (soccer) are discussed at the Al Amal Center

Khaled Shaat '06, Mustafa Zimmo '06, Nidal Al Kafarna '06, and Mazen Issa '05 recently volunteered to work at the Al -Amal Center for orphaned children. The alumni have joined the teachers at the center to assist the kids in different subjects and skills, such as computer applications, English language, and sports activities. The Alumni were given a tour of the center by the Director and some of the children. The Director expressed his hope that the Alumni would work with the center for an extended period. Meeting with the children made an impression on the four volunteers. "Meeting them forced me to thank God for the privileges I have in my life," said Mustafa, as he played soccer and basketball with the kids. "I didn't know such life stories ever existed," Khaled added.

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*Alumnae visit residents at the Wafaa center for the elderly*

Another group of Alumni volunteered to assist at the Wafa Center for the Elderly. Julie Al Tork '06, Nour Abu Hamda '06, Yafa Al Mozayen '06, and Malak Al Borno '05 will be working at the reception area, providing assistance to the residents and helping to entertain them by taking them outside to the garden or playing cards with them. Because many of the residents of the Center are women, the alumnae who volunteered felt a strong connection to the institution. "That's what I will be like in a few years," Julie noted while she escorted the elderly grandmothers out to the garden.

The March 29th flooding disaster in the village of Um Al Nasser on the northern Gaza-Israel borders brought a large number of Alumni to the site to volunteer their services. The village was awash in tens of thousands of gallons of sewage water. The Alumni pitched in to help set up tents for residents whose homes were flooded, and helped entertained the children by playing soccer with them. Helping the residents of the village to cope with their crisis created a sense of solidarity and purpose among the Alumni.

## Iraq

Shko '06 assisted the AMIDEAST Iraq testing staff in Erbil with the administration of the April 12th ITP test at Salahaddin University by working as an exam proctor. Shko is currently one of the most active YES alums; he calls the office every so often to say hello to the staff and to ask if the office needs him to help out with projects. The staff is very grateful for his enthusiasm and help.

Duraïd '06 volunteered to assist on short notice with the State Department sponsored Iraqi Youth Leadership Exchange Program interviews in Baghdad on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Duraïd is a stellar example of a YES alum and our staff greatly benefited from his assistance and insight during the interviews.

## Israel

Sari Shabita '06 recently worked as a head counselor at the 24th Red Star Camp, an annual event in her home town of Tira. Sari has a long tradition with the camp – she began attending the camp when she was four, and has worked as a counselor since she was 14. As head counselor, she supervised the 11 to 14 year-olds campers, as well as four co-counselors. The camp schedule consisted of recreational and educational activities. Sari organized activities such as trivia competitions, and team sports, which allowed the kids to learn to cooperate, use leadership skills and have fun. According to Sari, "Working in the camp wasn't easy. In the three weeks I volunteered, I



*Sari Shabita '05 (on right) with Red Star campers*

was exhausted and didn't get enough sleep, but it was worth it. Seeing the kids learning, meeting new people and having fun was my greatest achievement." Sari has decided to continue her association with the Youth Club that organizes the camp – she plans to teach science and English 2 to 3 hours a week for the remainder of the summer.

Several Alumni participated in the pre-departure orientation for the new YES cohort recently. The Alumni shared their own experiences with the group, and suggested tips for coping with their new environment, in addition to answering questions and concerns.



*Alumni recount their experience at pre-departure orientation*



*Mona Milhim '06 demonstrates the fine art of face painting*

Mona Milhim '06 volunteered at two kindergartens in her hometown of Makker in Galilee: the Al-Nojom and Al-Zohoor kindergartens. She assisted the teachers by cleaning, organizing and decorating the classrooms, reading to the kids and assisting with activities such as making puzzles, playing music and sports. She also helped to set the tables for lunch. "At first I felt that I was not really qualified for working with little kids," Mona said, "but later on I realized that working with them was a nice experience. I had to work hard to challenge myself to find a way to relate to the kids, and to do what they expected of me, and I believe I did a really good job! I gained self-confidence from this experience by doing things that I thought I couldn't. Above all, it felt wonderful to contribute and to see others happy with my contribution."

Mirna Ashkar '07 decided to spend her free time volunteering at the French Hospital in Nazareth. She began by offering 40 hours of service a week, but is now up to 45. She said, "My way of helping is very simple. I feed the patients breakfast and lunch, and assist in the kitchen. Sometimes I turn on the radio and start singing with a very bad voice just to make them smile!" Although Mirna finds it challenging to deal with some of the patients, especially those whose family members do not visit them often, she rises to the occasion. "I believe that I make a change in their lives by loving them and making them smile all the time, and that makes me happy."

## **Jordan**

Several YES alumni visited the Community Development Center (CDC) in Sweileh on July 24 to present donations they had collected for the local community and to learn more about the center and its activities. The CDC was established seven years ago as a field office for the University of Jordan's Sociology Department. It is an active force in bringing much needed social services to the area. Over the past few months, the alumni collected items such as toys, clothing,

books and food. They plan to distribute them to the community on August 1. The CDC thanked the alumni and commended their efforts, expressing a hope that this will be an ongoing group effort. The CDC in turn took the alumni on a tour of the facility. They learned about the various programs the CDC offers the local community, which include English Language exchange, tutoring primary school children, mentoring, social field work, advocacy, and awareness campaigns. The alumni were encouraged to volunteer and participate actively within the community through these different programs.

## **Kuwait**

In what was described by U.S. Ambassador Richard Le Baron as a "great day", YES alumni held a bake sale in the AMIDEAST courtyard in April to raise money for several charity projects. In an attempt to guarantee a successful launch of the event, the YES Alumni members divided up the duties involved. Ahmad Bin Salama '05, Amnah Al-Baghle '06, Ahmad Marafi '06, Bedour Abdulrazzak '05, and Abrar Al-Ostad '05, promoted the bake sale through the distribution and posting of flyers throughout their school communities two weeks prior to the event. They also used the email mass mailing strategy and the text messaging service to pass the word. YES Alumni President Jassim Al-Ghanim '04 was in charge of preparing and distributing invitation cards to VIP guests, including the US Ambassador, the Deputy Chief of Mission, and Public Affairs staff at the US Embassy. One day prior to the event, alumni members Abdullah Marafi '06, Abdullah Al-Mehanna '06, along with the new YES cohort members Ahmad Hachem '08, Ayoub Al-Ayoub '08, Salem Ben Salem '08,



*Ahmad Al-Fodery '07, Nada Bedir '07 and Nisrine Azatour '07 and friends at the National Bank of Kuwait's Cancer Control Center.*

Mohammed Ibrahim '08, and Abdulrahman Al-Houqal '08, helped decorate the tent and set up the tables for the bake sale. The alumni whipped together some delicious treats, from chocolate fudge cakes to banana and chocolate chip muffins, from all-American choc-nut brownies to crispy rice chocolate cups. Some tasty traditional Arabic food items were also on sale alongside some store-bought items which included burgers and pizzas from McDonald's and Pizza Hut. Within four hours, all the goodies had been sold, raising \$1,360. Ambassador Le Baron

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and Deputy Chief of Mission Mathew Tueller were among the many guests and they conveyed to the YES group their cordial greetings and best wishes for a successful outcome for the bake sale event. The Ambassador went on to thank the YES Alumni their outstanding contributions to the local community by undertaking charity work and community service projects. The alumni in turn expressed thanks and their appreciation to the Ambassador and DCM for their kind words and for taking some time out of their busy schedules to attend the event and to make donations. Upon conclusion of the bake sale, Jassim Al-Ghanim '04 thanked the alumni members and scholars for all the efforts they put in making this event a success. New YES cohort student Bedour Abdulrazzak noted, "This activity has definitely helped me in enhancing my communication skills as a team player. I am glad to be a part of the YES Family, and hopefully, I can be an effective member of my community, both in my upcoming experience in the U.S. and when I return to Kuwait upon completing the YES exchange program."

Another successful fundraising event was held for the annual Open Day at the National Bank of Kuwait's Cancer Hospital for Children. YES alumni sold raffle-style donation coupons for 5KD each (approximately \$17) to raise money for hosting the event. The prize was a plasma television, and the group raised \$3,992. The Alumni then organized the Open Day on June 25th with the proceeds. Over sixty-five children attended this event along with their parents and siblings, and the day included performances by a magician and an appearance by Barney the Dinosaur. Games were arranged and prizes were won by the children. The attendees all enjoyed a dinner at the end of the party.



*Amnah Al Baghle '06, Barney the dinosaur, and a new friend at the National Bank of Kuwait's Cancer Control Center.*

The YES Alumni recently befriended a child with a learning disability at the request of her father, who had heard about the work being done by the group on behalf of children in Kuwait. He met with Alumni Coordinator Rasha Zalzala to ask if there was a possibility for his daughter to get to know the YES alumni members, as she has a difficult time making friends due to her disability. The group was excited about helping, and decided to hold a "birthday party" on the 28th of June for the girl to which alumni members and their friends came.



*U.S. Ambassador Richard Le Baron joins alumni at a fundraising bake sale*

They played different games and had cake and other goodies to celebrate the event.

## Lebanon

Alumna Faten Taki '05 was awarded a YES mini-grant of \$250.00 to open a public library for young people between the ages of 3 and 18 in her hometown of Ghazieh, located in southern Lebanon. She was able to obtain a 66 square meter room from the local municipality building thanks to the Mayor of Ghazieh, who gave her this room free of charge. She is currently networking with other organizations to seek additional donations for the library along with books and other resources.

A brainstorming session was held with the Lebanese YES Alumni Council and Regional Coordinators, CAO Ryan Gliha from the US Embassy and Mr. Jared Cohen, of the Department of State's Policy Planning Group responsible for Public Diplomacy in the Muslim World and North Africa. The meeting was an important opportunity for the alumni to engage in an open discussion with a visiting official whose specialty is in youth and the culture of the region. The discussion focused on alumni programming activities and the difficulties and challenges facing the alumni. A few suggestions were put forth to make the work of the alumni more sustainable and meaningful. One idea included a *Teach for Lebanon* project whereby alumni would be granted a scholarship for one year upon graduation from their universities to teach in Lebanese schools. This idea would be modeled on the *Teach for America* program in the United States. The meeting facilitators also made several suggestions on how to render the alumni work more efficient in transferring their knowledge and experiences to their communities.

Several alumni, led by Rayan Abou Khzam '06 and Lara Abou Shakra '06, in coordination with the "Giving Club" of Kfarheem Secondary school, held a special celebration of Mother's Day to honor 75 elderly residents of the Ain Wazein Hospital Home. Alumni, their classmates and teachers took a minibus to the home, carrying with them over 75 packages which contained pajamas, red roses and greeting cards. The roses were donated by a local florist, and a neighborhood clothing store discounted the pajamas for the alumni and their friends, who all donated money to purchase them. The event lasted two hours and the women were thrilled to have a group of young people visiting them and showering them with care and affection. The group was also joined by 300 local high school students and healthcare workers from the home. It was a lesson to all about the value of interacting with the elderly, who are not always given the recognition and care that they deserve.

## Oman

Mossa Al Lawati '06, describes his efforts to organize relief for the victims of Hurricane Gonu:

*Hurricane Gonu was a horrible experience for the people of Oman. The storm pounded the eastern coast of Oman continuously for forty-eight hours, and Omanis were shocked at the level of devastation in the wake of the cyclone, especially in downtown Muscat. Hundreds of people died during the storm; in the aftermath many people were missing and thousands of families whose homes flooded were living in schools for shelter. However, the cyclone could not take away the determination of the Omani people to rebuild Muscat and the eastern coastal cities of Oman. Following the storm, ordinary Omanis were seen cleaning the roads, rebuilding bridges, donating supplies, and distributing relief donations. Watching these scenes of reconstruction, I was inspired to get involved and to help the local community where I live. Once the rains subsided, I organized a group of volunteers to help a friend move out from building, which was flooded. After rescuing our friend, the following morning, we met with a group of volunteers and headed to an area where a relief organization was collecting donations and distributing them through the use of 4x4 trucks. For many people in Oman, access to clean drinking water following the storm was a major problem. Unfortunately, some businessmen in Muscat took advantage of the lack of access to clean drinking water to raise prices on bottled water and were selling bottled water for ten times the normal price. However, other businessmen and shop owners were kind and gave us bottled water they had for free to distribute to those in need. As part of the relief efforts, Al-Iman school helped us to organize a campaign to send water to every person in the rural region, along with basic supplies and financial help. Rural areas were particularly hard hit during the storm. Boshar Sports Complex, located nearby, became a shelter for the refugees and a place to collect and distribute donations. Our group met with more than 800 refugees that day and talked to each one of them to make sure that every family received a financial donation along with basic humanitarian supplies. Our next plan was*

*to reach several of the coastal towns bordering Muscat. The first place we visited was the city of Amrat located just outside Muscat. The journey to Amrat, which normally takes just under twenty minutes, took us seven hours. Our 4x4 trucks reached the city just before midnight. Once we arrived to town, a local man helped us to distribute donations to needy households. I was horrified by the devastation this town had faced, including a collapsed factory where people had been trapped inside. May God bless their families. After Amrat we traveled onto the town of Yitti, and from there on to Wadi Maih and Tiwy, which was completely under water and had to be reached by boats. People were extremely grateful for the financial donations and the water; in some instances we were the first group of volunteers in the country to reach them. Our campaign to bring relief supplies to Muscat and the coastal towns grew in reputation. As word got around, more people joined us to distribute supplies. I am very proud of our amazing efforts and our goal to bring Oman back to life in the wake of the cyclone. I hope Oman will be more beautiful than ever and that we can keep the pride in our beautiful nation alive.*



Mossa Al Lawati '06 joins friends in bringing relief efforts to cyclone-ravaged Omani coastal villages.

Sami Al Asmi '05, graduated from high school this past November, and is now working as a Project Coordinator at the Omani Center for Investment Promotion and Export Development (OCIPED). OCIPED is a government organization that was founded in June, 1996 by royal decree to increase the contributions of the Omani private sector businesses to help foster increased promotion of Omani products for export to foreign countries. Sami credits the YES program with helping to make him effective in his job. "The YES program, and the leadership skills that I developed while on program, helped to prepare me for the workforce. The ability to take initiative, show good judgment, communicate effectively, multi-task, develop good administrative skills and demonstrate flexibility are all important traits workers must have in any job. I have worked hard to improve upon these skills". Sami notes that many his friends wonder how he got the position at OCIPED without a university degree. "I credit that to my bilingual language ability, and the cross-culture experience that I had through the YES program. The job gives me the ability to take the skills that I gained on the YES program to a new level. I plan to enroll in university next year and major in Economics and Political Science."

### Qatar



United States Ambassador to Qatar, Chase Untermeyer, welcomed home 2007 alumni, Mohammed Al-Yahri, Mohammed Hamdouna, Sara Haroon and Mohammed al-Mulla home. Kara Nesimuk, AMIDEAST YES Program coordinator and new 2008 students: Ahmad Abu Yousef, Abdulrahman Al Ansari, and Randa Al-Waheed also attended the event at the US Embassy.

The United States Ambassador to Qatar, Chase Untermeyer, welcomed home Sara Haroon of Amna bint Wahab School, and Mohammed al-Mulla, Mohammed al-Yahri, and Mohammed Hamdouna of Omar bin Al Khattab School in June after the completion of their YES exchange year in the U.S. at the pre-departure orientation for the YES 5 cohort. Before presenting the students with awards recognizing their achievements, Ambassador Untermeyer stated that he was pleased the students had the chance to live in a variety of places in the U.S., particularly small towns that are not often portrayed in American movies and television programs. Mohamed Al Mulla talked about his experiences playing second base on the local high school baseball team, even though he had never played baseball in Qatar. At the end of the season his high school team awarded him the "Most Improved Player" award. Sara Haroon completed the 12th grade and was able to participate in her school's graduation ceremony alongside her American classmates. Ambassador Untermeyer also took time to recognize three students from Omar bin Khattab School who have been selected to participate in the 2007-2008 YES cohort. Omar Murtaja, Ahmad Abu Yousef and Abdulrahman Al Ansari will travel to the United States in August to begin their exchange programs. They were excited to speak with the recently returned alumni, as well as with Fadi Yasin '06, about their experiences as YES students. Mrs. Sarah Al Kuwari, who has been an important part of the YES recruitment effort for the last two years, was also present.

### Tunisia

Several alumni were instrumental in helping with the 2007-2008 YES selection process. Hanen Keskes'06, and Salma Baghdadi'06, participated in the selection in Tunis, while Khaled Menyauoui'05, and Amira Amari '06 assisted with the

selection in Sousse. Alumni also served as resources during an orientation meeting held from March 23-24 to review the placement process as well as the program rules and conditions for this year's grantees. The group included: Azza Baazizi'06, Hanen Keskes'06, Salma Baghdadi'06, Amira Amari'06, Seifeddine Bokri '06, Miriam Labidi '06, Marwen Mishirgui'05, Sabrine Ghammour '06 and Naouress Radhouani '06.

### Yemen

Fifteen Alumni joined one-hundred and fifty high school students who receive English Access Microscholarship grants to observe World Water Day on March 22nd in Aden. The World Water Day program is a UN initiative designed to improve awareness of the role of water resources in the global environment. Each World Water Day is highlighted by a particular theme; this year's theme was "Coping with Water Scarcity." In cooperation with Yemen's Ministry of Water and Environment, the alumni and students spent two hours clearing the shoreline of the wildlife sanctuary of the UN-recognized Aden Marsh. Prior to the clean-up, Dr. Omer Al-Sagheer, the UN's Global Environmental Facility Representative and Yemen's premier ornithologist, met with the students to explain the importance of Aden Marsh to the region's ecology, and the importance of preserving the environment and protecting wildlife. Mr. Hani Nasser Yaseen from the Yemeni Water Authority briefly addressed environmental issues



Omar and Mohamed Al Kaff '06 took part in World Water Day Aden

related to water resources. AMIDEAST Aden helped to organize the event. A representative from the U.S. Embassy and AMIDEAST English language instructors accompanied the group during the activities. Each student was provided with a cap and a tee-shirt. At the conclusion of the activity the participants regrouped at AMIDEAST for a light lunch and engaged in a discussion about their experience. Journalists from the Yemeni Times, Saba News Agency, the 14th of October newspaper, and Aden Broadcasting documented the event.



*Ali Hussein Mohammed Saleh '06, seated fifth from the left, became the first Yemeni to win the international English Speaking Union competition in London.*

YES Alumni again paired with the English Access Microscholarship students on a visit to a local Juvenile Detention Center in Aden on May 10th. The Center, which is maintained by the Ministry of Social Affairs, houses children between the ages of seven and fifteen years of age who have committed minor crimes. When they arrived, the Alumni were introduced to the children, and then spoke with them about their plans for their future, and what they would like to study. The Alumni entertained the children with songs and poetry, after

which everyone went outside for some outdoor activities. They engaged in a clean-up of the yard, planted shrubbery and played football. After the outdoor activities, everyone watched the movie 'A Shark's Tale'. The group enjoyed their visit and looked forward to returning in the future.

Ali Hussein Mohammed Saleh '06 an Alumni on both the English Access Microscholarship program and the YES program, recently won the international prize in the English Speaking Union's International Speaking Competition. Ali traveled

to London in mid-May to participate, and is the first Yemeni to win the competition. The topic of his speech was "Planning for a World with Light Water." The English-Speaking Union is an international educational charity founded in 1918 to promote "international understanding and friendship through the use of the English language." Debates are one of many mechanisms used to encourage greater understanding. The ESU's Yemen branch was established in June of 2004 and is headquartered in Aden.

## ALUMNI MILESTONES

### Lebanon

Several YES scholars from Lebanon are now studying at US colleges and universities. Khaled Diabwas '05 was awarded a full scholarship to Berea College. He will be studying Biology. Hisham Kotaish '04 is attending the University of South Carolina Lancaster, a local community college. His goal is to transfer to the University of South Carolina and obtain a full academic scholarship. He is currently majoring in business finance.

### Yemen

Ahmed Mofadal, '06 will begin his higher education in August 2007 at Montgomery County Community College in Pennsylvania. Mohammed Al Seraji, '05 spent his

summer break from Texas A & M University in Yemen interning at Yemen's first English newspaper, the Yemen Times, as well as at AMIDEAST Sanaa. Radi Al Radi, '04 is studying Chemical Engineering at George Mason University. Eileena Al Hakimi, '04 is studying Business Administration at a state university in Malaysia.

### Qatar

Sara Haroon '07 was accepted at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She will study Cell and Molecular Biology beginning this fall. Sara was awarded a partial scholarship from the University.



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