East Jerusalem YMCA

Employment and Vocational Training

Introduction

The East Jerusalem YMCA (EJY) is the largest youth organization working in the West Bank and Gaza. Established in 1948, EJY provides vital educational, recreational and employment opportunities to more than 50,000 Palestinian youth and families each year. Over 65 percent of the Palestinian population is under the age of 22. Seventy percent of these young people are living at or below the poverty line. One of the greatest challenges facing the region is the high unemployment rate, which currently exceeds 50 percent in most cities due to the country's political and economic situation. This problem is particularly daunting for youth and young graduates who lack the skills and contacts to obtain and/or create regular employment.

Actions and Achievements

EJY responded to these challenges by creating innovative vocational training, job placement and small enterprise development programs to help young men and women develop their skills and find employment. Founded in 1952, the YMCA Vocational Training Center (VTC) in Jericho teaches specialized courses in woodwork, metalwork, electrical maintenance and auto mechanics. In 1996, the VTC opened its doors to women, aiming to empower them by providing training in electrical maintenance and graphic design. To date, the VTC has graduated more than 11,000 young women and men.

The Training within Industry (TWI) program, managed by EJY's Extension Services Unit (ESU), places vocational school, industrial school and polytechnic institute graduates into apprenticeships in the private sector for three to six months in order to develop their skills for the local markets. The TWI program has placed more than 11,000 young people in private sector jobs since 1992. Over 65 percent find permanent employment as a result of the placement.

The Small Enterprise Development program (SED) strengthens local businesses through loans and business management training. The EJY team has developed specialized expertise in assisting small businesses in the mechanical and industrial trade sectors. The YMCA has provided loans up to $15,000 to more than 6,000 small businesses since 1992. The loan repayment rate exceeds 96 percent. Evaluations have found that the average loan recipient improved income by an average of 50 percent.

In December 2008 YMCA ESU program was awarded the "Arab Creativity Award" by the Arab Thought Foundation in the field of Economic Inspiration and Creativeness in the Arab World. The award recognizes the YMCA's innovative efforts to stimulate self-sustaining job opportunities and employment.

Partnerships and Strategic Alliances

The East Jerusalem YMCA youth employment programs have received support from a wide range of international partners over the past 15 years. These include the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Government of the Netherlands, the Arab Bank, CODA International, the Arab Thought Foundation, Y Care International (UK YMCAs), YMCA of Norway, YMCA of Sweden and YMCA of the USA.

In an area deeply affected by conflict, income generation is critical to family and community stability. “I used to sell hot corn in the streets to support my wife and nine children. The YMCA helped me start a business to increase my income. I am now settled in my grocery store and feel that life has smiled on me. Thanking the YMCA is not enough for the great job they are doing for poor people regardless of their religion or their sex.”

- Ali Ahmad Boujeh, Business Owner, Program Participant, East Jerusalem YMCA

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