

Sharek Youth Forum

منتدى شارك الشبابي
Sharek Youth Forum



Biennial Report

2006 - 2007

Foreword: *Sharek in a Transformation Era*

2006 and 2007 were a hectic, but highly successful, two years for Sharek Youth Forum. While we are proud to preserve our identity as a national Palestinian NGO, with a stronghold in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, we remain dedicated to expanding our outreach so as to fulfill our transformation into a leading professional youth development organization. Our success so far is mainly attributed to three main factors; our partnerships with local NGO's which allow Sharek to spread its programs and activities to rural, remote and marginalized areas and beneficiaries; the youth composition of our staff, as they can easily relate to the problems and needs of youth beneficiaries and consequently translate them into development programs; and the attraction of many new donors and continuation of strong relations with our core donor, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

During the past two years Sharek's administrative framework has evolved into a strong management operation in the Ramallah and Gaza City head offices. Despite the geographical, political and economic division of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Sharek has managed to maintain its organizational strength, generally implementing its programs and activities on a national level.

As part of Sharek's drive for professionalism we have continually sought the assistance of expert consultants in the fields of financial management, program development and evaluation during 2006/07. As a result the capacity of Sharek and its core staff have been strengthened immeasurably, leaving us ideally placed to address and solve the issues facing Palestinian youth in the coming years.

Sharek has worked throughout 2006/07, and will be focusing in the years to come, on three core areas of program implementation: A "*Step Forward*" for youth empowerment (with a focus on unemployment and human rights among youth); "*Bridges*" *Youth Enrichment Incubators* for bridging the gap between youth and children through the transfer of knowledge and experience; and lastly "*Partners*" for capacity building of Palestinian youth organizations and the youth sector in general.

It is Sharek's strategy to expand and develop these umbrella programs in depth by exploring untapped areas of potential amongst Palestinian youth and by developing new projects that fall underneath the overall goals of the core programs. Moreover, with the addition of the "*Be the Change: Supporting Youth Initiatives*" project to the *Partners* program and the forging of new alliances with youth organizations through the *Bridges*' "*Homework Centers*" project, Sharek is surely returning back to its roots as a channel for supporting local youth initiatives during their early years of existence.

The Board of Directors.

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I. About Sharek Youth Forum

I.I Who We Are:

Sharek Youth Forum is a youth initiative tackling development issues from a unique perspective. It has the capability to reflect directly, **without the presence of a mediator**, the vision of youth in Palestine. Thus, Sharek Youth Forum is able to focus its work on identifying and serving the key needs and priorities of Palestinian youth on the basis of **peer-to-peer relations**. Its particular know-how and experience, regarding the special situation of youth in Palestine, enables Sharek Youth Forum **to develop youth-friendly strategies** while striving towards sustainable human development. Sharek Youth Form aims to advance and strengthen the youth sector in Palestine by promoting the involvement and self-development of youth in their communities.

Sharek Youth Forum is an **issue-based and staff-led organization** of committed and dynamic young people, whose primary philosophy is anchored in the principle of involving **youth as active participants within civil society**. The organization provides an invaluable forum in Palestine, where youth can gather together to discuss relevant issues and organize themselves for action in order to address the problems of their communities.

It is the view of Sharek Youth Forum that the empowerment of youth through the strengthening of their personal and practical skills and their participation in civil society will provide a vital platform for the development of Palestinian society.

I.II Structure of Sharek Youth Forum:

Sharek Youth Forum was originally launched as an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme/ Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) in 1996. Since its inception, Sharek's aim has been to establish itself as an independent Palestinian organization outside the framework of the UNDP/PAPP. In mid-2004, this process was completed.

Sharek Youth Forum's management headquarters and general activities centre is based in Ramallah in the West Bank. Furthermore, Sharek Youth Forum has established **20 youth centers** throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which have played crucial roles in involving youth in diverse activities and projects in rural and disadvantaged areas. Sharek operates through a de-centralized framework in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which enables it to identify the various priorities of youth in Palestine and tackle particular regional problems, thus working more efficiently and reaching a higher number of beneficiaries.

I.III Sharek's Mission

Sharek Youth Forum, as an initiative committed to youth, focuses on the issue of **active participation** of Palestinian youth and children as a dynamic factor in the political, economic, social and cultural development of Palestinian society. It is the principal philosophy of the organization as expressed in its name '**Sharek**', which means '**participate**' in the Arabic language.

Sharek Youth Forum concentrates its actions primarily on the capacity building of the youth sector in the Palestine, thus facilitating youth to develop the skills they need to address pertinent issues from a bottom-up approach. Moreover, Sharek Youth Forum is striving to accomplish a high level of visibility with respect to youth issues in the Palestine, - a prerequisite for effective and positive change.

Sharek Youth Forum's *mission statement* is:

“To upgrade, promote and develop the youth sector in Palestine so that their empowerment and active participation in community development will create valuable social capital for the development of a future democratic society”.

I. IV Sharek's Objectives:

The organization's *institutional objectives* are centered on the particular needs of youth in Palestine and are summarized below:

- To involve Palestinian youth as active, dynamic and responsible participants in community development
- To encourage volunteerism among youth and to induce the participants to take an active role in the design and implementation of educational, social and cultural projects
- To develop the political, economic, social and cultural capacities of Palestinian youth so that they can tackle youth issues in the most effective manner
- To reduce the high unemployment rate among youth in Palestine and improve their economic prospects
- To enhance the knowledge and experience exchange between Palestinian children and youth
- To improve the coordination and collaboration between Sharek Youth Forum and other regional organizations, especially youth organizations, in order to coordinate projects and activities so as to avoid the duplication and waste of resources
- To assist in the strengthening and development of the management and institutional structure of regional organizations, especially youth organizations
- To enhance expertise and encourage initiatives in the Palestinian youth sector
- To focus on the development of rural and disadvantaged areas by giving Palestinian youth a chance to participate and be involved in the activities of their local communities
- To raise the awareness of the local and international community regarding Palestinian youth issues and their specific needs
- To develop Sharek Youth Forum into a model initiative regarding youth development in Palestine

II. Sharek's Core Programs: *Foundations for Youth empowerment and leadership*

I. A Step Forward - *The Youth Employment Program*

Needs, aims and objectives

The on-going conflict in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and its effects in political, economic and social terms, has created **an environment in which the provision of services crucial for the healthy development of young people is often widely hindered or neglected.** Higher education, as a path to employment, is a prime example of an important social service that is languishing due to internal and external factors. This stagnation in turn limits youth's employment opportunities and their full involvement in the community.

In response to this situation, Sharek Youth Forum created a program called *A Step Forward*, which addresses the specific needs of graduating youth in Palestine. With the assistance of the Sharek regional centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip *A Step Forward* implements various projects that aim to build the capacity and capabilities of young people, thus facilitating their entry into the labor market. In short, *A Step Forward* aims to reduce the high unemployment rate amongst youth in Palestine through capacity building projects and to provide youth with training and skills that are not readily available through the formal education sector.

The *specific objectives* of *A Step Forward* are:

- To facilitate students in the phase after secondary school in the selection of a specialization in higher education
- To bridge the gap between what is taught within specializations at higher educational institutions and the skills demanded by the labor market, which is necessary for the development of the Palestinian economy
- To assist youth in recognizing their rights in society
- To provide graduates and unemployed youth with the opportunity to acquire practical training and work experience in the labor market
- To establish a culture of self-employment and entrepreneurship as a viable means towards poverty reduction and economic empowerment.

These objectives are achieved through the following core components:

- ✚ ***A. Career Counseling and Job Preparation***
- ✚ ***B. Information Technology for Employment***
- ✚ ***C. Training in the Field and Internships***
- ✚ ***D. Academic Counseling for Young Rural Women***
- ✚ ***E. Youth Business Support Unit (YBSU)***

A. Career Counseling and Job Preparation

This component focuses on providing student participants with personal and practical skills relating to their field of study, highlighting the conditions, challenges and opportunities in the labor market through various courses. While preparing students for the labor market, the courses are also designed to encourage freedom of expression, creative thinking and discussion, which constitute a crucial element for youth development.

Throughout 2006/7 eleven Palestinian universities and vocational colleges in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip were involved in identifying and encouraging students to participate in Sharek's program activities. More than 1000 students have benefited from training courses on CV writing, job interviews, labor law, creative thinking and communication, as well as specialized professional workshops and visits to companies and organizations.

Sharek has not been working alone; **over 60 local and international organizations and companies have been cooperating with Sharek Youth Forum.** Some of these partners hosted groups of students for exposure visits to their offices, through which the students obtained a true insight into the workplace and were brought into contact with a broad network of employers. Moreover, experts and young professionals from the field delivered interactive training sessions and workshops, tailored to the specific needs of groups of students according to their academic specialization. Some examples of the topics covered in these workshops were:

- Introduction to the concept of public relations and banking (for business students and graduates)
- Project proposal writing (English students)
- Professional ethics for psychologists and sociologists (psychology students)
- Financial administration and auditing (accounting students)
- Training on administration (finance students)
- Course in electronic archiving (office management)

The external evaluation of this project was testament to its success. Students felt extremely empowered, since they gained highly valuable public speaking, communication, presentation and leadership skills. Their exposure to market needs empowered them by helping them select and direct their energy towards specific

future careers. The project activities also improved the participants' networking and outreach strategies and provided them with basic skills which are usually not offered by the mostly theoretically-oriented university curriculum

Model Court for Law Students

Under *A Step Forward*, Sharek established a Model Court for Law students of the Al-Quds University in Abu Dies. This practical training structure is the first of its kind in Palestine and it is viewed as a unique opportunity for the students to practice their future profession under professional guidance thus empowering them and increasing their chances of entering the challenging Palestinian labor market. Two model court sessions were organized on a weekly basis for an audience of around 50 law students. A group of 25 law students per semester was directly involved in the preparation and implementation of these sessions. Lawyers-to-be would present their cases and plea in defense of their clients, while judges and university professors would observe and give feedback. Also special cases with particular relevance were dealt with, such as those dealing with labor law, women and criminal law.

B. Information Technology for Employment

The international focus on IT based economies increases the necessity of IT diffusion, urging creative service providers such as Sharek to build up the capacities of the youth generation with adequate IT skills. Through its *Information Technology for Employment* project Sharek offers new graduates a set of computer courses, related to the specific IT requirements within their field of study. In general these courses are meant to enhance the students' IT skills for obtaining future employment while at the same time increasing on-the-job productivity once employed.

Throughout 2006/07, almost 1800 youth benefited from different IT courses conducted in Sharek's computer labs in Jenin, Hebron, Nablus, Arrabeh, northern Gaza, and Ramallah. Students with a background in finance or accounting participated in financial spread sheet training courses and the Bisan Accounting Program.

The IT training program was one of the most popular projects under *A Step Forward* and it saw the greatest variety in beneficiaries. In the West Bank, most IT students were also enrolled in other projects such as the 350 youth beneficiaries who were also participants in the *Career Counseling and Job Preparation Project* - these students successfully completed the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) training course.

In the Gaza Strip, students from high schools, nurses, hospital staff, teachers, youth associations, engineers, municipal council candidates and youth volunteers all benefited from specialized IT trainings in Computers for Beginners, Windows, ICDL, Photoshop, Ulead Studio Montage and 3D Studio Max applications.

C. Training in the Field and Internships

Training in the Field was initiated as a separate project throughout the second half of 2006 in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Internships and trainings were provided to a small number of graduates in partner companies and organizations. *Paid training* was provided to around 3000 youth in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in private sector companies and non-governmental organizations for a period of between 3 to 6 months. The most important result was that the selected youth gained a direct insight into the daily work of the host institution and hands-on experience in the field of their study before actually entering the labor market.

Within the project results, 2206 youth had signed contracts with 850 host organizations. 57% of these contracts had been signed with female youth, 40% with male and 3% with youth with special needs. Half of the contracted youth possessed a BA degree, 20% a diploma, 12% a vocational school certificate and 18% had completed high school. Moreover, 58% of the participating youth were from urban areas, 34% from rural areas and 8% from refugee camps. At the end of the year, the number of contracts had reached 2343 in the West Bank and 451 in the Gaza Strip.

The project has been an immense success; almost 10,000 youth (over 3000 in the Gaza Strip and nearly 6500 in the West Bank) and more than 1000 companies and organizations signed up for the program. During this period Sharek produced 18 booklets on the different opportunities in the labor market. The booklets were distributed to youth participating in workshops organized in several West Bank districts. The booklets contained information on CV writing, job interviews, communication skills and labor law. A special study on the theme of graduates and market needs was produced, in cooperation with the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS).

D. Academic Counseling for Young Rural Women

The Academic Counseling and Awareness component of *A Step Forward* started as a pilot project in July 2006 with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). From the beginning the project sought to encourage young women to continue education and make conscious career decisions. The project also aimed at facilitating women's participation in the labor market, thus simultaneously empowering women and advancing society with the addition of a creative, motivated and mobilized female workforce.

The project was directed towards both current female school students and female early school-leavers, through a creative program of awareness-raising on the importance of education and through the provision of career counseling. Rural and disadvantaged villages were specifically targeted as working areas because of the lack of facilities in these regions. Sharek was proud to implement the project in locations such as Al-Abidiyah (Bethlehem), Kufr Al-Deek (Salfeet), Deir Abu D'eef and Shufeh (Tulkarem district), Beit Oula (Hebron) and Madama (Nablus).

This project has so far been very successful and has trained a group of 29 active female youth volunteers. During 2006/07, huge efforts were invested in the preparation of specific manuals and guidebooks for school students, early school-leavers and volunteers. Topics in these publications included: the reality of academic and vocational education in Palestine, the reality of the Palestinian labor market, the right to education, independent decision-making, academic and vocational roles for women, women's rights in Palestinian Arab culture and the reality of women in a rural environment.

Back to School with Six Children

Thinking, admiring, reading her children's books, Nawal Mahameed from the village of Deir Abu Dief south of Jenin is a model example of a rural West Bank woman. After finishing the 9th grade, she got married and had six children. Nevertheless, Nawal was full of hope that she would return to education one day. Looking at the books of her children kept her thinking of what could have happened if she had pursued her education. Nawal re-joined the secondary school in one of the local centers, where she was able to get her high-school diploma despite being out of formal education for over 10 years. Today, even with the many social and economic difficulties that she faces, she is attending Al-Quds Open University where she is studying to become an elementary school teacher.

E. Youth Business Support Unit

Building on Sharek's active involvement in Palestinian society and in response to a call for proposals from the UNDP/PAPP for its Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Program (DEEP), Sharek initiated the Youth Business Support Unit (YBSU) towards the end of 2007. This unit adds a new dimension to the *A Step Forward* program by introducing business establishment and self-employment as a viable alternative to traditional employment opportunities for disadvantaged and impoverished Palestinian youth.

The YBSU aims to reduce poverty among Palestinian families, **focusing on youth as the catalysts for this change**. By supporting families in developing new revenue streams through small business set-ups, the project will significantly contribute to

the reduction of poverty in the beneficiaries' families and will contribute to the overall improvement of their educational, social, health and economic opportunities.

Palestinian youth have long been identified as possessing great potential for entrepreneurship through their creative ideas for small projects and businesses. That said, the lack of collateral and a secure income has prevented many young entrepreneurs from qualifying for micro-credit, thus limiting their opportunities in pursuing their business ventures. Therefore Sharek, through the YBSU, is planning to design an intervention package for these impoverished youth. The YBSU will provide general capacity building trainings for youth, as well as specific entrepreneurship trainings, focusing on business set-ups, management and expansion. An approximate number of 150 grants will be provided to selected business plans with a high potential of success and these youth will be able to obtain business advice and mentoring services from the YBSU incubators in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Regional Cooperation

In October 2007 Sharek Youth Forum, through its Youth Business Support Unit, joined the regional network of business incubators, the **MENAinc** based in Bahrain. The network involves a number of elite organizations in the region working in the fields of entrepreneurship and business development. This participation adds additional strength to Sharek's existing program, and presents further opportunities for Palestinian youth through networking and strategic alliances with other network members.

Building Bridges

II. Bridges – Youth Enrichment Incubators

Needs, aims and objectives

Sharek's *Bridges* program was first piloted in 2005 to support and develop the informal education sector in light of **the restrictions and limitations of formal learning environments in Palestine**. The program is designed to fill the gap in education in Palestine, and establish a space for interaction between youth and children. The program is based on the following four pillars: recreational activities, enrichment activities, homework assistance and IT activities.

The program aims at youth empowerment through a knowledge and experience exchange between children and youth in '**youth enrichment incubators**', focusing on activities related to informal education and extra-curricular activities. The incubators not only connect youth and children, but also form a stable and doubly effective 'bridge' between the "child and youth" sector and the community at large.

Thus, Sharek Youth Forum aims to create a dynamic environment that will facilitate a 'knowledge and experience exchange' in which the academic and social skills of youth and children can be enhanced through their interaction with each other. It is hoped that **Bridges will become a template for community development** in relation to the education sector and that its format could be further used to improve collaboration and interaction between universities and schools in order to fill the gaps in the formal education system.

The *specific objectives* of Bridges are:

- To improve the social and academic situation of Palestinian youth and children
- To improve the IT skills of Palestinian youth and children
- To enhance the collaboration and interaction between universities, schools and Palestinian youth and children

- To establish ‘safety nets’ for youth development in the form of youth enrichment incubators
- To build the capacity of youth by endowing them with responsible tasks in an educational and entertainment environment

It is the belief of Sharek that the participants’ involvement in *Bridges* will help to mitigate the detrimental effects of the conflict on children and youth and contribute to the development of their academic, social and personal skills.

This program serves a broad disadvantaged beneficiary base. Each project targets a different group aged from 8 – 17 who are carefully selected for participating in the projects. Also, youth volunteers who plan and organize the activities with children benefit from the program through training workshops and through sharing experiences with other youth as well as children. All *Bridges* volunteers have been chosen according to their spirit of volunteerism and commitment to community development.

The *Bridges* program encompasses the following 6 components, each one providing a safe and supervised environment for children:

- ✚ **A. *Bridges General Activities (including summer events)***
- ✚ **B. *Homework and Enrichment Centers***
- ✚ **C. *“Shababeek” IT Community Centers for Children and Youth***
- ✚ **D. *Safe Playgrounds for Children***
- ✚ **E. *Sea Camps “Safety First” Project***
- ✚ **F. *“Why Not?” internet exchange***

A. *Bridges General Activities*

Bridges General Activities strive to ameliorate the educational and social milieu of Palestinian youth and children through a wide variety of projects and activities. In this way, *Bridges* provides the opportunity for children to live their childhood while benefiting from their interaction with youth and their peers in a fun and supportive environment.

This project enabled children to meet in a relaxing and supportive environment outside school and their family homes. In addition, the program provides a space for youth volunteers to interact with children and demonstrate their responsibility within an academic and fun environment thereby contributing to the development of their distinctive academic and social skills and furnishing them with a sense of community involvement. Examples of *Bridges General Activities* include: visits for youth groups to Sharek’s Model Court in Abu Dis, and visits to

various shops and local businesses, dentists, factories, banks, supermarkets and local NGOs. Moreover, some volunteer activities, such as the cleaning up of streets and beautification of cities and villages, are carried out as well. **Both youth and children therefore develop a sense of responsibility towards themselves and Palestinian society.**

In 2006, more than 9000 Palestinian children were actively involved in the different *Bridges* activities and in 2007 over 19,500 children participated in a variety of projects. Many of the program components have been implemented throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip in cooperation with local child/youth organizations or municipalities and village councils. This in turn has increasingly strengthened Sharek's presence on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and has created opportunities for expanding *Bridges* both in the geographical sense as well as in the programmatic sense.

B. Homework and Enrichment Centers

Sharek Youth Forum, through its *Homework and Enrichment Centers* project, aims to establish a safe environment for children to carry out their school duties in a secure and encouraging environment while enjoying a variety of recreational activities. Furthermore, Sharek aims to encourage youth to become active participants in their communities by involving them in community-based work. This inclusion is achieved by providing youth with the responsibility of child supervision in the framework of informal education and entertainment. To this end, 26 *Homework and Enrichment Centers* (16 in the West Bank¹ and 10 in the Gaza Strip²) have been established in disadvantaged areas.

The primary objective of the project was **to bring youth and children together in a secure and enriching environment and to provide youth with the responsibility of acting as mentors and role models to marginalized and disadvantaged children.** To achieve this goal the youth volunteers first of all had to be intensively trained.

¹ **Homework and Enrichment Centers in the West Bank:** Esaad Al-Tofouleh and Sharek Center in partnership with Hebron Municipality; Kids Club in partnership with Jericho Municipality; the Palestinian Child Club Kufr Ne` meh, Ramallah; Hamdi Manco Center in partnership with Nablus Municipality; MCRC in the old city of Nablus; Arraba Youth Center in partnership with Arraba Municipality; Kufr Dan Youth Center in partnership with Kufr Dan Village Council; Future Builder Forum, Abu Dis; the Cultural Center for Child Development, Tulkarem; Burj Al Luqluq Association in the old city of Jerusalem; the Cultural Center in Sur Baher village; lajee center in Aida refugee camp; Safeer Association in Asskar refugee camp-nablus; Talfeet women Center-talfeet village, Nablus; Al Yamoon municipality center in partnership with Al yamoon municipality; Jayyous municipality center in partnership with Jayyous municipality.

² **Homework and Enrichment Centers in Gaza Strip:** Al-Mawase Association, Rafah; Rafah Youth Center in partnership with Rafah Municipality; Khan Younis Youth Center in partnership with Khan Younis Municipality; Al-Maghazi Services Club, Al-Maghazi; Afaq Charitable Association, Gaza; Sharek Center, Gaza; Al Ehssan Association, Rafah; Young Scientist Forum, Khan Younis; Holst Cultural center in partnership with Gaza municipality; Affaq Association, Beit Hanoun and Sharek Youth Forum center.

The initial trainings focused on how to deal with children and the various stages of child development and the specific needs of each of these stages. In a more practical way, volunteers were introduced to the different kinds of activities that they would be undertaking with the children. For instance, participants learned how to convey simple computer skills and technological principles to children and how to use computers to carry out scientific experiments.

The right to play and the right to education must be strongly upheld and sustained in order to secure the healthy development of future generations. Sharek Youth Forum has recognized the great opportunities for children and youth with respect to knowledge and experience exchange between these two groups. *The Homework Centres* is a project that builds upon these principles and tackles the problems in the education sector by providing a secure and rich learning environment for children to gain academic and psychosocial assistance according to their specific needs, under the supervision of dedicated and professional youth volunteers. The *Homework Centers* thus develops the abilities and capacities of children and youth to contribute to the development of their communities.

Although the centers provide comfortable study environments which greatly assist children with their schoolwork Sharek has also worked on strengthening the children's social skills, and has provided them with a secure place to enjoy their free time as is their right as children. The project activities are based on the following three stages: **joy and fun activities, enrichment activities and homework assistance**, many of which were implemented with the assistance of local child organizations and councils. Some of the activities are detailed below.

Joy and Fun Activities

The *joy and fun activities* are of utmost importance as they form the foundation on which the subsequent stages are built. Therefore these activities focused on getting to know each other and building trust between youth volunteers and children, as well as amongst children themselves. This was done through group games, arts, sports, watching educational and fun films, practicing music and other recreational activities. Also entertaining evenings were organized in certain places, with musical performances, folklore and theatre. The youth mentors gave the children fun research assignments as well and let them present their findings to the whole group. The *joy and fun activities* allowed the youth mentors to assess the children's behavior and subsequent needs. Social and academic problems were identified and methods designed in order to work in the following stages towards reducing and solving these problems. The latter was done in coordination with some specialists in academic capacity building.

Enrichment Activities

Educational games help convey the different educational and social concepts to children in an enjoyable and entertaining manner. Other enrichment activities also broaden children's awareness of the importance of arts and their right to practice their hobbies. Children enrich their sensory experiences, intellectual competences and life skills by using games based on creative thinking and problem solving. Therefore Sharek's *Homework and Enrichment Centers* have been equipped with all the resources needed for the implementation of these activities, such as different educational games, materials and teacher aids. An important aspect of the enrichment stage was to provide information technology sessions, through computer centers on the sites of program implementation. Children were trained on basic computer skills and applications, mainly for educational purposes. The IT specialist worked on enhancing their creativity and encouraged the children to discover new avenues for education and recreation. Moreover, field visits have played a significant role in enriching the children's knowledge; they have widened the perspectives of children's thinking and awareness of their surroundings.

Homework Assistance

The *Homework Assistance* aspect is the third stage employed in the *Homework and Enrichment Centers* and it is based largely on **development education** methods. By using inclusive techniques so that all participants (including the youth volunteer) can learn and educate themselves, ***Homework Assistance* activities break with the traditional teaching methods of a teacher imparting knowledge to students.** Instead participatory activities and informal learning methods such as drama, role plays and games were used by the volunteers to address different academic problems. The success of these methods lies in the fact that it does not seek to provide children with all information directly, but rather it allows the student to think and experiment through innovative and non-traditional extracurricular activities. The activities were conducted under the supervision of the youth volunteers and were related to the school curriculum and school subjects which children find difficult to understand, such as mathematics, English and Arabic. During the second half of 2006, the provision of homework assistance was a priority of the *Bridges* program, due to the strike in the educational sector.

The mother of **Ibrahim Judeh** said:

"I heard about the *Homework and Enrichment Centers* project through some of my friends, so I visited the center in order to find out more about the project that Ibrahim was about to attend. We suffered a lot with him; we even tried to enroll him in a private school for students with learning disabilities. But after joining the project, there has been a remarkable progress in Ibrahim's personality and academic level, which we noticed through the improvement in his grades and his increased ability to do his homework and his improved self-confidence".

The *"Shababeek" IT Community Centers for Children and Youth* seek to contribute to community development by upgrading children's skills and abilities in the field of computer, internet and information technology and by increasing the awareness of youth to the latest worldwide technological advancements. *"Shababeek"* combines the concepts of the Futurekids and Intel Clubhouse projects³ together into one project tailored to the needs of Palestinian youth. *"Shababeek"* promotes different ways of thinking and enhances the use of IT and computer applications in accessing information for both educational and recreational purposes. Hence, this project provides for curricular and extracurricular activities after school hours in support of the children's academic performance and in a secure environment. Child beneficiaries obtain a chance to learn by doing and experimenting, under the supervision of trained youth mentors.

A total of 10 *Shababeek* centers have been established throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip (7 in the West Bank⁴ and 3 in the Gaza Strip⁵) and over 500 children have participated in *Shababeek* activities since April 2007. The child beneficiaries have been assisted by the volunteers during direct learning hours as well as open sessions where the children could try out the various computer programs. The project has succeeded in improving children's knowledge of and experience in the practical use of IT as exemplified by the stories of Mahmoud and Husam below.

Individual *"Shababeek"* success stories include 11-year old Mahmoud from Arrabeh. He used to know a little bit about computers and MS Word™, but would get bored quickly and then turn to computer games. After his participation in the *Shababeek* project though he is now able to use many MS Office™ programs and applications and he became familiar with Photoshop™ as well. 12-year old Husam from Hebron also benefited to a great extent. He was basically using the computer for games only, while now he has learned to create designs with Photoshop™ and he even created his own website, www.husam.ts4kids.com, on which he posts all his designs!

³ For more information on Futurekids see http://www.futurekids.com/links/about_futurekids.html and on Intel Clubhouse see <http://www.computerclubhouse.org/>

⁴ **Shababeek Centers in the West Bank:**

Esaad Al-Tofouleh in partnership with Hebron municipality; Child Center in partnership with Jericho municipality; Minko Sharek Center in partnership with Nablus municipality; Siraj IT Center in partnership with Salfit municipality; Community Computer Center in partnership with Bidya municipality; Kufr Dan Youth Center in partnership with Kufr Dan Village Council; Arraba Youth Center in partnership with Arraba municipality.

⁵ **Shababeek Centers in the Gaza Strip:**

Rafah Youth Center in partnership with Rafah municipality; Community Computer Center, Jabalya; Khan Younis Youth Center in partnership with Khan Younis municipality.

D. Safe Playgrounds for Children⁶

In late 2006 Sharek was approached by a private donor in cooperation with Medical Aid for Palestine (MAP) Canada to establish playgrounds for children in **marginalized areas lacking recreational facilities**. The project began in 2007 with the establishment of four playgrounds in the West Bank. This cooperation was expanded during 2007 and the private Canadian donor established the Playground Builders Foundation, which is continuously raising funds through high profile events and media coverage under their motto '*Creating Play, Building Hope*'. As a result another seven playgrounds were built for the children of Palestine so that currently thousands of children are benefiting from these recreational facilities. All of the playgrounds have been established in cooperation with municipalities and/or local organizations, ensuring continuous maintenance and general care for the equipment and location. Due to the increasingly difficult situation in the Gaza Strip, resulting also in sharply rising prices for raw materials and other essential goods, only one playground could be established there (Al Maghazi).

E. Sea Camps "Safety First" Project

During the Summer of 2007 Sharek Youth Forum, as an implementing partner of the *UNRWA Summer Games 2007*, launched the *Sea Camps "Safety First"* project in the Gaza Strip. This project sought to provide recreational outlets and was founded on concepts of creativity, personal development and enjoyment. **Given the sheer lack of recreational facilities in the Gaza Strip**, many youth and children come to the beach in their free time, particularly during the summer holidays. Lots of them do not possess the necessary swimming skills though and hence place their lives in danger. During 2006 alone, 20 Gazan youth drowned.

Seeking to address these tragic incidents, approximately 150 youth were trained in lifeguard duties as part of the *Sea Camps "Safety First"* project, and a total of **12,179 children and youth** (6,161 female and 6,018 male) were engaged in swimming trainings, water-based games, team sports and fun beach activities. For that purpose, five permanent well-equipped locations were constructed in the Gaza Strip governorates, which will be used for future beach-based activities as well.

⁶ **West Bank and Gaza Strip Playgrounds:** Al Obaidia in partnership with Al Obaidia municipality; Al Khadir in partnership with Al Khadir municipality; Halhoul in partnership with Halhoul municipality; Saffa village in partnership with Al Mrouj centre; Rameen village in partnership with Rameen women centre; Selwad in partnership with Selwad women centre; Beit Hanoun in Al Tagreed Association; Qabatya in partnership with Qabatya Municipality; Al Maghazi in partnership with Al Maghazi municipality; Al Dahria in partnership with Al Dahria Association for Development; Sharek Youth Forum General Activities Center in Ramallah.

This project was implemented at a very critical period as the situation in the Gaza Strip had deteriorated gravely at the end of June due to internal fighting and the opportunities for youth recreation were few and far between. The *Summer Games* therefore provided a timely and productive outlet for Gaza's youth to forget their worries for a while and engage together in fun and entertaining activities.

F. *“Why Not” Internet Exchange*

The essence of Sharek’s *“Why Not” Internet Exchange* project is **to increase cross-cultural awareness and understanding between Palestinian and American youth** by implementing several virtual exchange activities. During the first phase of the project (Summer 2007), 30 Palestinian high school students from Jenin and the Gaza Strip and their counterparts from Portland in the United States filled in questionnaires to determine their awareness about each other’s country and culture. They also wrote poems about themselves and their communities which were placed on the *“Why Not”* website so that the participants from Palestine and Portland could add comments and post questions on each other’s work.

In the second phase of the project (late 2007), two Palestinian groups (20 from Ramallah and 20 from Gaza) and another group of American youth participated in different exchange activities. The Palestinian students watched movies, showing aspects of American people dealing with their daily life. Based on what they saw, they wrote letters articulating their opinions in order to initiate a discussion between the Palestinian and American participants. These letters were posted on the website too, which functioned as a forum for the students to virtually meet and share their views by commenting on each other’s postings. Short films were produced by all the groups and as a final activity, a video conference was arranged between the Ramallah, Gaza and Portland students, during which they had the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other, ask questions and present some of their locally implemented activities.

Working For Youth and With Youth

III. Partners – *Building Capacities*

Needs, aims and objectives

In the face of the ongoing conflict in Palestine **the presence of an active and accountable civil society in Palestine is of major importance for community development** and the development of Palestinian society at large. With this in mind it is imperative that organizations, especially those dealing with vulnerable groups such as youth and children, have the opportunity to grow and expand so that they can address **critical societal phenomena** through the empowerment of youth.

From its own experience Sharek Youth Forum realizes the need for the institutional strengthening of youth organizations and it recognizes that **many organizations face major structural problems regarding project management, fundraising, administration and financial matters**. In light of this situation the *Partners* program was launched to assist Palestinian youth organizations in their growth and development so that they can **work more efficiently towards the empowerment of youth**. Moreover Sharek, acknowledging the lack of resources that are available for youth groups, aims at supporting a number of original and creative youth initiatives through the provision of grants to youth groups active in their local communities.

Youth: A Valuable Resource.

Sharek recognizes that institutional organizations are only one group of agents working towards youth development in Palestine, there is another more important group striving to improve the situation of youth: **youth themselves**. Individuals, youth groups and societies are much better placed than large organizations to identify the problems of youth and to design innovative projects to address them.

The *specific objectives* of the Partners program are:

- To involve local youth volunteers in social activities
- To create a network of active Palestinian organizations and to foster partnerships between them
- To support original social projects and youth initiatives of local organizations and youth groups
- To encourage the participation of youth in civil society and their incorporation into social and volunteer activities
- To strengthen the skills and capacities of beneficiaries and project management
- To nurture positive and constructive change in Palestinian society through youth

Through the activities of its two core components *Partners* epitomizes the emphasis Sharek places on the crucial capacity building of the youth sector in Palestine. The two core components to the *Partners* program are:

-  **Support of Youth Organizations**
-  **Be the Change: Supporting Youth Initiatives**

A. Support of Youth Organizations

To assist Palestinian youth organizations in their **institutional strengthening and capacity building** an intensive training program was designed by Sharek Youth Forum. The idea behind it was to create a host of organizations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip with strengthened abilities and increased potential, thereby enabling them to **affect positive change** within their communities and better serve the needs of their youth beneficiaries.

The goals of the training were:

- To develop the administrative and financial systems of youth institutions
- To assist youth institutions with the formulation of aims and objectives
- To increase the effectiveness of institutions by helping them to implement projects successfully
- To help institutions stay up to date with the latest global developments in technology and information services

- To advance the Palestinian institutional network to the global level of professionalism and specialization
- To develop a talented pool of human resources and provide them with the required experience to assist youth institutions in their growth and development
- To increase coordination and communication amongst institutions so as to avoid the duplication of projects and to prevent the waste of valuable resources

Through an analysis of the weaknesses and needs of the youth organizations that applied to participate, over 140 Palestinian youth organizations were initially selected to join the training. The activities started with 25 training hours in administrative management in the following seven areas: Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin, Abu Dis, Khan Younis and Gaza City. Main topics, such as **definitions and importance of administrative systems, strategic planning, organizational structure, decision-making and public relations** were introduced through a participatory approach.

In addition, 25 hours training in financial management were organized. **Training manuals** on both administrative and financial systems were distributed among participants at the end of the workshops. In order to increase the capacity of Palestinian youth organizations in obtaining funding for their projects and overall work, an intensive training on **fundraising and proposal writing** was also organized and a guidebook handed out. At the end of this program phase in July 2006, Sharek hosted a final event for 33 West Bank organizations. Representatives of organizations from different districts participated in a final training in proposal writing, discussions, and exchanges of experiences.

Sharek further expanded the project structure from trainings into a program for **capacity building of the Palestinian youth sector through the provision of funds to youth organizations and youth initiatives** by providing advice tailored to the specific needs of the individual organizations. Before assigning grants to certain organizations though, an on-the-spot evaluation was carried out by program staff and consultants on the 70 organizations that had been committed to the whole training program. During the second half of 2006, project proposals were submitted by youth organizations from the Gaza Strip and West Bank. In total, Sharek received 32 requests for funding. **17 organizations (10 from the West Bank and 7 from the Gaza Strip)** were selected to undertake their innovative projects.

Implemented Projects:

The 17 projects listed below were implemented in the beginning of 2007:

- Folklore Tales Initiative – Ajyal Society for Communication and Development, Bani Suhaila, (Gaza Strip)
- Youth and a Healthy Life Initiative – Ruwad Society for Palestinian Youth, Eastern part of Khan Younis governorate, (Gaza Strip)
- Education – Entertainment Initiative – Palestinian Language Forum Society, Al-Nasr Street, (Gaza Strip)
- Youth Initiative for the Advancement of the Educational Process – Light of Knowledge Charitable Society, Al-Nusseirat, (Gaza Strip)
- Youth Towards Change – Youth without Borders Forum, Khuza'a town, Khan Younis, (Gaza Strip)
- Project for the use of waste and garbage in producing works of art – Palestinian Youth Forum, Bani Suheila, (Gaza Strip)

Project for the Use of Waste and Garbage to Produce Works of Art

Implemented by: Palestinian Youth Forum – Bani Suheila, Gaza Strip

The project's idea was about making use of waste and garbage so as to produce works of art for the decoration of houses, gardens and public places at the least possible economic cost and least environmental damage. A group of youth was trained on handling and remanufacturing waste materials. The products were displayed at an exhibition specifically organized for this purpose. Some products were distributed as gifts to children in the town and to local institutions. Participants also used some of their products to decorate their houses and other products were sold to local people, who admired the idea and expressed their support for the project.

- Website and magazine on motor sports in Palestine – The Palestinian Motor Sport and Motorcycle Federation, Ramallah
- Nonviolence Children's Parliament – Taffouh Center for Culture and Arts, Taffouh town (Hebron Governorate)
- Initiative for Training Youth on Expressing Their Views "We Have an Opinion" – Association for the Development of Personal Skills, Hebron
- Children's magazine – Beit Al-Maqdes Literary Center, Ramallah
- Sawa'ed Al-Bina' Project – Arroub Social Youth Center, Arroub Refugee Camp (Hebron)
- Creative Thinking Initiative – Youth Regional Information Technology Center, Jenin
- Child Parliament – Nersan Cultural Center, Yatta (Hebron)
- Vocational Counseling Project (A Step Forward) – Students Forum, Bethlehem

- Diaries of a Palestinian Child – Save the Future of Youth Society, Al-Shate' Camp, (Gaza Strip)
- Child Club – Women's Programs Center No 1, Ein Betil-Ma' Refugee Camp (Nablus)
- "Old City in the Heart" Project – Al-Mahawer Charitable Society, southern area and the Old City of Hebron

Following a second call for proposals the following 26 projects were selected and implemented during the second half of 2007:

- “Be the Change” Summer Camp for Girls Initiative – Cultural Center for Child Development, Tulkarem
- Scouts Camp Initiative “The Wall, Olives, and Settlements” – Builders of the Future Institute, Abu Dis, Sawahra and Ezareya
- Youth Training Initiative "Jafra Website" – Baladna Society, Haifa
- “Farkha International Festival” – Farkha Youth Development Instiution, Farkha
- “Be the Change” Camp – Qibya Children's Club, Qibya
- “Be the Change” Summer Camp – Friends of Thalassemia Patients Society, Tubas
- Merging Summer Camp Initiative – Jenin Municipality Youth Center/Sharek, Jenin
- Youth Without Borders – Burj Al Laqlaq Society, Jerusalem
- “Be the Change Summer Camp” – Baladna Cultural Center, Ramallah
- Jifnawi Days Initiative – Jifna Club, Jifna (Ramallah)
- “Cartoon Production” for Child Rights – Abna' Elbalad Organization, Nablus
- “Hope for disabled people” – Ehsan Charitable Organization, Hebron
- We like Our Environment Clean Initiative – Ibda' Palestinian Youth Society, Qalqiliyah
- “Better Life” Initiative – Women Working Institution for Female Care and Rehabilitation, Ramallah and surrounding villages

“Better Life” Initiative

Implemented by: Women Working Institution for Female Care and Rehabilitation.

The initiative’s aim was to increase the awareness of young women about reproduction, sex education and early marriage. The project was implemented in Almghair, Kufer Malek, Beitsera, and Kharbathamusbah (West Bank). The campaign was implemented through different activities such as presentations and awareness-raising workshops.

- “Volunteers Workshops” – Dalal Institution for Culture and Arts, Bethlehem
- “Playgrounds Activities” – Hebron Municipality, Hebron
- “Be the Change” Summer Camp Initiative – Abu Dis Youth Club, Abu Dis
- “Be the Change” Initiative – Ahlia Charitable Organization, Al-Khadr
- “Child Playground” – Child Care Institution, Ramallah
- Specifically for Graduates "Career Awareness Program" – Ruwwad for Developmental Work, Deir al-Balah (Gaza Strip)
- Documenting our Reality Initiative – Iman Radio, Gaza City
- Palestinian Bazaar Initiative, Gaza Days Cultural Week – Cultural, Art and National Heritage Society, Gaza City
- Youth Cup Initiative – Solidarity Society, Rafah
- Participate with Us Initiative – Center for Information and Communications, Greater Ibbisan Municipality
- Our Heritage Beautifies our Environment – Human Development Society, Al-Qararah (Gaza Strip)
- Environmental Visit – Al Quds University (Students affairs) – Abu Dis

More detailed information about these projects can be found at Sharek’s website:
<http://www.sharek.ps/partners/support-youth-organization-activities.html>

BE THE CHANGE!!

B. Be the Change: Supporting Youth Initiatives

Following on from the success of the training workshops and to reflect Sharek's philosophy of youth participation, at the end of 2006 Sharek decided to focus more attention on the *capacity building and support of Palestinian youth groups* through the provision of seed funds for the innovative ideas of individuals and youth groups.

***Be the Change* seeks to reinforce and develop the capacities of Palestinian youth to become active and creative members in Palestinian society.** The project entails a framework of youth responding to a call for proposals with their creative ideas. By implementing their own ideas on the ground, **youth will become the catalysts for positive change.**

The pilot phase was carried out in the Gaza Strip and 9 youth groups participated, each consisting of 4-5 persons. **These groups not only received**

financial support for their initiatives, but also received basic training in project management, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting, as well as leadership and community work, so that they would be fully prepared to implement their initiatives. The following 9 groups were selected to realize their projects:

Implemented Projects:

- Marah Group for Educational Arts: "A Child Laughs, A Child Learns" – through entertaining festivals throughout the Gaza Strip, children were assisted in debriefing their stress, bringing a smile to the face of children
- Paletta Group for Forming Art: "Wood Mural" – an artistic wood sculpture was carved, reflecting the hope of youth
- Beit Lahia Youth Group: "Food Security" – food security was increased in an environmentally sound manner for six disadvantaged families from the Beit Lahia area by providing them with green houses, plants and crops and a training workshop
- Baladna Youth Group, "Approach of Mind to Mind" – principles of love, fraternity and tolerance were disseminated among members of various Gaza Strip communities, especially the youth, through awareness brochures, workshops, CDs and a website

Baladna Youth Group

This group worked on the implementation of the initiative "*Approach of Mind to Mind*". The idea of this initiative originated from the youth group's desire to strengthen the principle of love, tolerance and fraternity among the Palestinian people through the promotion of a culture of national affiliation and based on the philosophy of dialogue, tolerance, and citizenship. The group wanted to create a tolerant, respectful and educated society and to achieve a situation of social solidarity and psychological and social stability amongst youth.

Members: Mohammad Kafina, Omer Abu Shaweesh, Shifa Himada, Sabreen Gibreel, Zanab Abu Galal.

- Youth From Palestine Group, "Youth from Palestine Website" – a youth website was created dealing with development issues so as to enable youth to contribute to societal change, promote the spirit of participation, creative work and volunteerism
- Shorouq Group, "Guide Blind" – in Khan Younis three apparatuses were designed which warn the blind of obstacles in front of them, increasing their confidence and facilitating the movement of the blind and their efficiency in communication and interaction with the community

- Palestine is First Group, "Dental Health Care" – 16 awareness meetings on dental health were implemented for children in the central governorate of the Gaza Strip, encouraging children to care for their teeth
- Mawaheb Group, "Play: the Girl of Dreams" – through this initiative the talents of children involved in theatre work were developed and 10 performances of the play "Girl of Dreams" were shown all over the Gaza Strip highlighting the importance of education for youth in Palestine.
- Youth are Hope Group, "Campaign – Youth International Day" – the International Youth Day was celebrated through a media campaign carried out throughout the Gaza Strip, including banners calling upon youth to participate in the community development process.

After the success of the pilot phase, a new call for proposals was launched on a national level in mid 2007. An immense number of 242 youth applications were submitted to Sharek, of which the following 11 were selected for funding in the West Bank and Gaza Strip:

- Cartoon Group, "Cartoon Film Production" – a cartoon film was produced by unemployed youth graduates in Gaza focusing on transportation problems
- Play Group, "Dolls Production Initiative" – both children and youth were taught how to make dolls which were used in shows and entertainment activities
- Environment Youth Friends Group, "Protecting Water Initiative" – awareness was raised in the Rafah community on the correct use of water by door-to-door visits, brochures, leaflets and posters
- BirZeit Student Forum, "So I Won't Dream Alone" – eleven early school-leavers participated in academic and examination workshops in Ramallah and were given advice for preparing themselves to return to their studies
- I'm Here Group, "Disabled Youth Rights Support Initiatives" – awareness was raised on the rights and needs of disabled youth in several communities in the Jenin area and a media campaign was undertaken by the participants, who were trained also in communication and media/campaigning skills
- Media Forum, "Child Community Council" – the main aim of this Hebron council is to foster youth development, in particular on media-related issues, and through this project 30 youth were trained in film production, media topics and the organization and promotion of exhibitions
- Al-Bidiyah Group, "Together on the Right Road" – 16 boys and girls were trained in communication skills and methods and joined creative thinking workshops, showing them that together they have the tools to empower themselves and grow together and enabling them address issues of importance to Palestinian youth
- Jerusalem's Youth Camp, "Summer Camp" – 120 children of Beit Iksa were involved in summer camps organized by local youth, where activities also focused on developing capabilities and community development

- Tomorrow Maker Group, "Social Awareness through Folklore Initiative" – during workshops in Jenin, 25 youth were trained on social issues and awareness was raised on the social problems affecting Palestinian youth, such as smoking and drug use
- Rouka Group, "Film about Sexual Harassment" – this West Bank group, after being trained on media and film, produced a film through which youth awareness was raised on sexual harassment in social, political and educational situations
- Welcome Group for New University Students, "Volunteer Activities" – a group of students from Al-Quds University, Abu Dis, organized activities and events to assist new students in adapting to university life and offering advice on social and education issues.

For more detailed information about these projects please visit Sharek's website:
<http://www.sharek.ps/partners/be-the-change-activities.html>

Initiative for Youth Research

In support of youth-orientated research, Sharek called upon Palestinian youth to submit research proposals on topics related to their problems in society.

Both sides benefited as the youth were given the opportunity to have their voices heard and Sharek was able to collect valuable information and ideas for future projects and activities and devise suitable plans to address them. Around 67 applications were submitted by youth, of which 29 research proposals were selected. The research proposals dealt with various topics such as smoking, drugs and alcohol, the gap between university specializations and market needs, IT learning and its effect on youth, youth emigration, youth unemployment, volunteerism, and the current political situation.

Youth Rights

IV. The Dynamic Human Rights Unit

Needs, Aims and Objectives

Aiming to increase the enjoyment of human rights among youth in Palestine, and refugee youth in particular, Sharek initiated the Dynamic Human Rights Unit (DHRU) project early 2007. Two units, one in Ramallah and one in Gaza City, were established as a **referral point** for youth individuals and youth organizations **to receive legal advice** on human rights violations, as well as general information on human rights issues. In addition to disseminating information, the DHRU organized interactive trainings and initiated a network of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in refugee camps.

The **main objective of the DHRU** is to contribute to the exercise of human rights for youth in Palestine, and refugee youth in particular. The first step towards this objective is to inform youth about their rights. In fact, the underlying concept of the DHRU is that *if you don't know your rights, you can not claim them and enjoy them fully*. In keeping with this idea, a series of training workshops have been held in 23 refugee camps to raise awareness on human rights and human rights violations in Palestine. Also, youth organizations receive assistance to integrate a human rights' perspective into their projects.

As a first step a needs assessment was conducted of 595 youth in 25 refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to determine the human rights situation of these refugee youth. The results highlighted the difficult and restrictive conditions faced by refugee youth in Palestine. **The ongoing conflict and the militarized nature of the country have especially affected the quality of life for youth.** Refugee youth are often exposed to violent actions by the Israeli military and armed Palestinian groups in the camps, creating a damaging environment for children and youth to grow up in. Domestic violence and aggressiveness in schools only further exacerbates the problem.

The needs assessment also indicated that **access to education, healthcare and employment is often denied to refugee youth due to their economic situation and**

their social classification making an already difficult situation worse. It was furthermore found that **knowledge of human rights was very limited** in general and a form of human rights discourse 'fatigue' was discovered.

Accordingly, DHRU training staff in cooperation with legal and human rights experts adapted the training strategies to the situation and needs of the beneficiaries. Specific educational tools were designed, such as the 'Human Rights Race' table game and a quiz on human rights issues and violations. 135 youth volunteers were selected to participate in 'Training of Trainers' sessions in order to become human rights agents within their refugee communities and implement training workshops locally. They were introduced to the most essential human rights treaties and conventions, common human rights principles, trainer attitudes and human rights education and training techniques. Provided with a training manual and the different educational tools, these volunteers implemented workshops for youth aged 15-18 in refugee camps and youth organizations outside camps. For some volunteers, this was their first experience as trainers.

Activities Implemented:

Needs assessment: 595 refugee youth from 25 refugee camps in West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) participated in a needs assessment through focus group discussions and a survey

Capacity Building: WB and GS staff received a total of 60 hours training on various Human Rights topics such as vulnerable groups protection, international human rights treaties, Palestinian legislation, and international humanitarian law

Training of Trainers (ToT): 135 youth volunteers from 11 different governorates in GS and WB received 18 training hours on human rights education in 5 different training locations

Interactive Training Workshops in 23 refugee camps, all the trainers were (refugee) youth

Training Material: training manual developed, educational game "Human Rights Race" produced

Publications: introductory leaflet and informational brochure produced, results of needs assessment to be published early 2008

Networking: network created of 15 youth NGOs in Palestine

Legal monitoring and advocacy: legal database developed, recommendations directed to Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Labor

Legal Aid: individual cases and support to youth organizations

As a result, **two major achievements can be highlighted; the fact that the DHRU gave these youth the opportunity to play an active role in their society, as well as the increased awareness among refugee youth on human rights issues.**

This was not always an easy enterprise, as testifies Yasmeeen from Al Doha (Bethlehem). She managed to break the ice with her participants and created a suitable atmosphere in the group and hence the training succeeded. Positive feedback from youth participants encouraged the DHRU to continue. For instance, Sahar from Al Balata refugee camp (Nablus) stated: **"I learned about different kinds of human rights and that these rights are for everybody. All in all I feel I still have a lot to learn and I am hoping that Sharek will organize more of these workshops."** In 2007, around 500 youth benefited from these workshops. Furthermore, in cooperation with staff of the *Bridges* program, human rights education experts have been implementing a number of child rights activities in different locations.

Besides training and awareness raising activities, the DHRU also works on legal cases and monitors Palestinian laws related to youth issues for lack of enforcement or shortcomings in the laws themselves. The Palestinian Labor Law for example was legally analyzed and a brief research study was conducted on youth unemployment in Palestine. A letter with recommendations to reduce unemployment among youth was then directed to the Ministry of Labor. In its reply, the Ministry ensured that they would make reducing youth unemployment a priority, to be reflected in the strategic planning document for 2008-2010. Other legislation that was studied included the draft Palestinian Youth Welfare Law and the Elections Law. The DHRU is also in the process of documenting and referring a number of individual cases to organizations with expertise in that specific area. **It is planned that the DHRU will concentrate more and more on advocacy, both locally and internationally, in the coming months.**

III. Campaigns: Awareness Renewal and Results

During 2006 Sharek implemented three major awareness-raising campaigns: *“Participate in Elections”* campaign, *“For Tomorrow”* anti-smoking campaign and *“Baladna Ahla with Dardish”* environmental campaign

“Participate in Elections”

This campaign, which started a few months before the PLC elections of January 2006, was implemented in order to encourage Palestinian youth to have their voices heard through active participation in the elections. The campaign aimed to make youth aware of the importance of free and democratic elections and motivated them to become more active within the political process.

In order to attract as much attention as possible from Palestinian youth and other segments of society about democratic rights, a huge media campaign was carried out. In a final move shortly before the Election Day, many of Sharek’s youth volunteers went to the streets for a door-to-door campaign encouraging citizens to vote. In a series of 'after-election' workshops, youth were given the chance to discuss the election results and share their views on important political issues for the new government to deal with.

“For Tomorrow” Anti-Smoking Campaign

The aim of the anti-smoking campaign was to raise awareness about the negative effects of both active and passive smoking. This was done through many different activities. Firstly, an anti-smoking covenant was produced; consent for anti-smoking policies and smoke-free workplaces was encouraged. Sharek’s project team managed to obtain 400 signatures from organizations and companies prohibiting smoking within their offices. This constituted the start of a lobbying campaign, which aimed to pressure politicians into proposing laws forbidding smoking in public spaces and regulating smoke-free work places. Through many newspaper advertisements, posters and billboards, lectures and sports activities, the general public was brought in touch with the anti-smoking campaign.

“Baladna Ahla with Dardish”

During the last four months of 2006, in cooperation with one of the most important Palestinian private sector companies Jawwal, Sharek implemented an environmental awareness campaign. The campaign aimed to educate Palestinian youth and make them aware of environmental risks through implementing different activities and voluntary work, such as cleaning up cities. Cooperation between youth was strengthened and team work reinforced. Moreover, the campaign activated students' role in society and provided them with an opportunity to give something back to their communities.

IV. Responding to Emerging Needs: *Interventions and International Days*

In addition to the core program projects and campaigns, Sharek has been implementing a number of other initiatives.

Baladna Ahla - 2006

This “Beautiful Cities” campaign was implemented early in 2006. Widespread cleaning and painting activities were carried out by large groups of youth volunteers in 9 cities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Esmek Ya Bladi Competition - 2006

Sharek joined the Palestinian Social Committee in Abu Dhabi for the “*Esmek ya Bladi*” competition. Palestinians were encouraged to participate by submitting a creative piece of art, or digital art, about their thoughts on the word “Palestine” under the motto “Beloved is Our Nation”.

Gaza Strip – Against the Chaos of Internal Fighting - 2006

In December 2006, most notably after the killing of three children by militants in the Gaza Strip, Sharek and other groups participated in a series of demonstrations, workshops and vigils against violence and abuse of weapons in the Gaza Strip. Many associations and individuals, including children, distributed leaflets stating “Stop the chaos, stop the killing of innocent children”.

International Thalassemia Day - May 8 2006

The commemoration of *International Thalassemia Day* started in Ramallah by distributing awareness brochures and posters to people in the streets of Ramallah. A march began from the center of Ramallah and made its way towards the Palestinian Legislative Council, where a meeting was organized with the Chairman of the PLC to discuss the difficulties that sick children face in the community, and the health situation in general in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Sharek youth volunteers commemorated the occasion by organizing an open day for 45 sick children, which took place in Al-Qayqab park in Ramallah. Various activities were carried out, such as singing, drawing, face painting, performances and various games.

International Youth Day - August 12 2006 and 2007 (OHCHR)

In cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) Sharek organized activities in Ramallah and Nablus on the International Youth Day. Under the motto “Tackling Poverty Together”, and in partnership with the Esad al-Toufouleh Center in Ramallah, groups of children participated in a wide variety of activities throughout the day.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty - October 17 2007

Sharek Youth Forum participated in the National Coalition for the Eradication of Poverty, along with a number of other local organizations. The motto was 'Stand Up and Speak Out'. Prior to the 17th of October, several meetings were conducted with officials from the Ministries of Labor, Social Affairs and Youth and Sports in order to encourage better policies and efforts in fighting poverty.

International Human Rights Day – December 12 2007

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day the Dynamic Human Rights Unit (DHRU) of Sharek Youth Forum gathered together 60 volunteers in Ramallah (West Bank) and Rafah (Gaza Strip) to participate in activities and an evaluation workshop. Furthermore the DHRU released the preliminary results of an extensive survey carried out among refugee youth. This survey was conducted to assess the needs of refugee youth and general human rights situation in refugee camps as perceived by youth.

V. Partners in making a difference

Donors

Sharek would like to extend its sincere appreciation to the numerous international and local donors for their dedication, generous support and contribution to the empowerment of Palestinian youth through their support of Sharek Youth Forum and its various programs, projects, campaigns and initiatives.

Sharek would especially like to thank the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation [(SDC), www.sdc.net.ps] which funded Sharek since its initiation as a project in 1996 by the UNDP/PAPP. After becoming an independent organization the SDC continued to support Sharek and the implementation of its three core programs *Bridges*, *Partners*, and *A Step Forward* and has pledged its renewed support until the end of 2009.

Furthermore, the following donors have also generously funded Sharek's projects during 2006 and 2007:

- **UNDP/PAPP**, www.undp.ps, the UNDP originally launched Sharek as a project in 1996 and since that time has provided Sharek with various means of support, technical as well as financial and also as a channel of funding for other donors;
- **Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND)**, www.agfund.org, is a non-profit regional institution concerned with sustainable human development targeting disadvantaged communities in developing countries. AGFUND supported Sharek in the establishment of 26 *Homework Centers* throughout Palestine;
- **Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)**, <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/index-e.htm>: works towards sustainable development, CIDA supported Sharek through the UNDP/PAPP with the *Training in the Field* project in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip;
- **European Commission**, www.delwbg.cec.eu.int: the EC funded Sharek's *Dynamic Human Rights Unit* project (85%) in 2007/2008;
- **KfW Entwicklungsbank**, www.kfw.de/EN_Home/index.jsp: through the UNDP/PAPP, the KfW funded the construction of Sharek's new management headquarters and youth activities center in Ramallah;
- **Welfare Association**, www.welfareassociation.org: this leading Palestinian non-governmental development organization supported the "*Shababeek*" project for establishing and operating 10 IT Community Centers for Children and Youth in 2007;
- **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**, www.unv.org: encouraging volunteerism among youth, the local UNV Programme of the UNDP/PAPP supported Sharek in the recruitment of UNV's for 2007/2008;

- **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)**, www.un.org/unrwa/: in 2007 UNRWA organized the *Summer Games* in the Gaza Strip, where Sharek was the implementing partner for the *"Sea Camps: Safety First"* project;
- **Playground Builders Foundation**, www.playgroundbuilders.org: under the motto 'Creating Play, Building Hope' and through private donations, this Canadian foundation has supported Sharek since the beginning of 2007 with the establishment of 11 playgrounds in remote areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip;
- **Islamic Development Bank (IDB)**, www.isdb.org: through the UNDP/PAPP Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme, Sharek received support for its Youth Business Support Unit project (2007-2009);
- **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**, www.opec.org: through the UNDP/PAPP OPEC supported the establishment and running of 10 Homework Centers for 2007/2008;
- **Japanese Government Human Security Trust Fund**, www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/index.html: supported Sharek in the beginning of 2007 for a Training of Mentors for *Homework* and *Shababeek Centers*;
- **Mercy Corps**, www.mercycorps.org: this organization contributed to the implementation of the internet exchange project "Why Not" between Palestinian and American school students in 2007;
- **Save the Children/Naseej** (Community Youth Development Initiative), www.savethechildren.org and www.naseej-cyd.org: the Naseej program aims at fostering communities where youth are active and valued contributors and supported Sharek for the implementation of the *Be the Change* pilot project for youth initiatives in 2006/2007;
- **United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)**, www.unifem.org: the local UNIFEM office cooperated with Sharek in the *Academic Counseling for Rural Women* project in 2006;
- **United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**, www.unesco.org: the local UNESCO office supported Sharek for the capacity building of one of UNESCO's partner organizations, that later became involved in Sharek's *Partners* network;
- **ARD**: supported Sharek in the implementation of the *Baladna Ahla* activities in cleaning up and painting cities in 2006;
- **EDC**, www.edc.org / www.ruwwad.org: through the Ruwwad (Youth and Community Initiatives) program of EDC in Palestine, Sharek's *"For Tomorrow" Anti-Smoking Campaign* was funded in 2006;
- **Palestinian Cellular Communication Company Jawwal**, www.jawwal.ps: as one of the largest Palestinian private sector companies, Jawwal sponsored the *A Step Forward* Career Awareness in Nablus in 2006 and funded Sharek's environmental awareness campaign *"Baladna Ahla with Dardish"* in 2006;

- **Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR)**, <http://www.ohchr.org/english/countries/ps/summary.htm>: the local office sponsored Sharek for the activities implemented on the occasion of the International Youth Day on August 12, 2006;
- **International Olympic Committee**, www.olympic.org: the IOC funded the *A Step Forward* – sports activities in the first half of 2006.

Partners in the field

Cooperation and Partnership Agreements:

1. Hebron Municipality: On August 1, 2006, Sharek signed an agreement in order to launch the Esad al-Tofouleh Center and the Future Generation Talents Development Center. The aim is to improve the service sector and implement development projects for children, youth and women.
2. Rafah Municipality: On July 1, 2006, Sharek signed an agreement with the aim to improve the centre's performance.
3. Jericho Municipality: On May 1, 2006, Sharek signed a cooperation and partnership agreement in order to launch the “Child Center”, which is concerned with the child and youth sectors.
4. Nablus Municipality: On May 1, 2006, Sharek signed the agreement, aiming to improve the services sector for Nablus citizens through implementing projects and activities in cooperation with “Manko Cultural Center” and to activate the services sector for children, youth and women.
5. Bidya Municipality: Sharek signed an agreement in order to provide local social services for children, youth, women and other sectors.
6. Sharek Youth Forum, through its *Bridges* program, signed a cooperation and partnership agreement with the Future Builder Forum, as the institution's concern is about the children and youth sectors. Through *Bridges*, both parties agreed on assisting children and youth by implementing projects and partnership programs.
7. Halhoul Municipality: On May 17, 2007 Sharek signed the agreement in order to implement development activities, programs and projects for youth and children in partnership and cooperation with Halhoul Municipality in the newly constructed Halhoul Youth Municipal Centre (Sharek).