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## Getting Refugee Youth Back in Class

**E**ducation is a fundamental human right, and yet it is out of reach to hundreds of thousands of refugees. As we enter the sixth year of the Syrian civil war, the education gap grows. There are refugee youth who have not been to school in over five years.

In Lebanon, an estimated 250,000 – or 50% of – Syrian refugee children between the ages of five and 17 are not enrolled in school. For older kids the rate of schooling is even lower. Only about 17% of teenagers aged 16-18 are enrolled. We are now approaching a dangerous situation in which a whole generation will have been brought up without an education.

Why the high dropout rate? Lebanon hosts over one million registered refugees, Syrian and Palestinian, but it's a small country with overcrowded schools. Syrians are at a disadvantage in the Lebanese school system, where the language of instruction is English or French instead of Arabic. Young people also feel pressure to support their families financially. Boys often quit school so that they can go to work. Girls tend to leave school to get married.

Akkar is an area of northern Lebanon and it is one of the poorest regions in the country. Because it is along the Syrian border – less than 50 miles from the war-torn city of Homs – it is one of the regions with the most Syrian refugees. ANERA has launched an array of non-formal educational programs here.



# ANERA News

The ANERA newsletter is published quarterly by American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a non-profit agency established in 1968 and dedicated to providing development, health, education and employment programs to Palestinian communities and impoverished families throughout the Middle East.

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**COVER PHOTO:** Eman (left) teaches a computer science workshop in Akkar, Lebanon that starts with the basics and advances to Microsoft Office. She has 22 students between the ages of 14 to 20. Ron Coello, photographer

## Getting Refugee Youth Back in Class

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One of them is a basic literacy and math program, which offers courses taught by well-trained teachers from the community. “The aim is to help youth develop basic competencies that they need in their practical lives,” explained Nisrine Makkouk, ANERA’s education program manager in Lebanon.

So far, 3,000 refugee teens are enrolled in these classes. By the end of the year, ANERA expects more than 5,000 additional students. Students who do well academically are referred to an accelerated program so that they can catch up with their peers in Lebanese schools. “It’s about offering the opportunity of inclusion to those who have been excluded,” said Makkouk.

Fifteen-year-old Mona takes classes in English and Arabic and boasts, “I only knew the basic stuff before coming to these classes. Now I’m intermediate level!” Another student in an English class is 22-year-old Raed, an electrician. “With my improved language skills I hope to get good job offers.”

Refugee youth also need practical skills so that they can get jobs. That’s why ANERA has also organized vocational and job skills courses to give students the precise tools they’ll need to generate a livelihood for themselves and their families. Courses cover computer skills, electrical wiring, hair dressing, cosmetology, sewing, first aid and more.

One of our vocational students is Fares, a 16-year-old who fled Aleppo two years ago. His eight-member family settled in Akkar like thousands of other displaced Syrians. “As soon as we arrived, I had to search for a job to help my father feed the family. I

had to work day and night in a nearby restaurant. Sometimes I had to sleep there, because there was so much to do,” said Fares.

He enrolled in ANERA’s phone maintenance course along with 25 other students from the Syrian and Lebanese communities. After graduating with his new skills, he joined five other classmates in opening a phone repair shop in the town of Fneidek. “I am living my dream every day now,” he said. “And I am inspired to pursue it until I can open a shop in Syria when the war ends.”

Fares’ story is one ANERA hopes to replicate among the thousands of youth we reach. Not only did he put his education to use as a young entrepreneur, but he now has a hopeful dream of what he can do in the future. A future that includes going home to a safe place.



Mona is an attentive student in her Arabic, English and health classes.



Fares works in the repair shop he and his classmates opened.



**11,200**

families still **displaced** in Gaza from 2014 conflict.

**one half**

of school-age Syrian refugees **not in school** in Lebanon.

**52%**

of Palestinian refugees from Syria are **unemployed** in Lebanon.

**1.4 million**

people face **restricted** access to health care and emergency services in the West Bank and Gaza.

**40%**

of Gaza population has **extreme** water shortages.

*Excerpted from Murad Siam's speech at the Annual Dinner on October 7. Murad is a long-time ANERA donor and board member.*

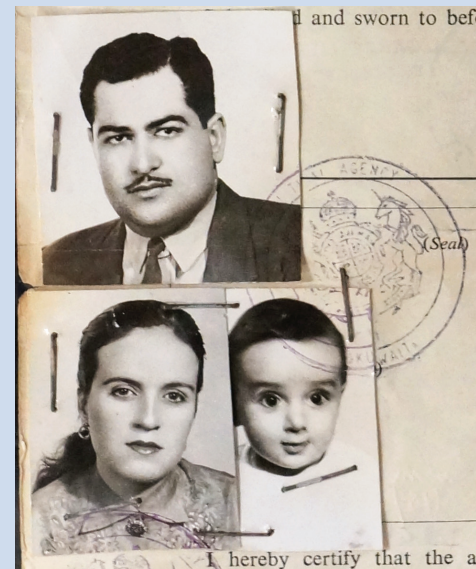
About 15 years ago, my parents' home in California burned to the ground. I drove up as the rubble was being cleared away and asked the workers to stop so I could rummage and see what was salvageable. In a small frayed pouch I found all of my deceased father's documents from when he moved from Palestine to the US – his birth certificate, his government of Palestine passport, his military ID and his US immigration papers.

My parents and older brother moved to America during President Eisenhower's administration under the Palestinian Refugee Relief Act. They were three of 50,000 Palestinians allowed in at the time. They came from Jerusalem and moved to the US because they wanted their children to grow up in a democracy and have the right to vote.

Our story is like that of many Palestinians worldwide. We have relatives everywhere – American, British, French, GCC, Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese. We're all part of the huge Palestinian diaspora that scattered all over the world. Our family has stayed connected because of our strong ties, yes, but also because of our common Palestinian heritage and humanity.

So yes, I am a Palestinian and that's certainly one reason behind why I care about what's going on in Palestine. But more importantly, I care as a human being who sees a terrible situation and has empathy for my fellow human beings.

I believe in the saying, "to whom much is given, much is asked." I have been supporting ANERA for over 20 years and I can tell you there is no organization like it doing as much in Palestine and Lebanon for as long.



*Murad's father, mother and brother from their US immigration papers.*





Ein El Hilweh | Lebanon



Beddawi | Lebanon

# The Power of Sports

For many years, sports have been an integral part of ANERA's youth programs across Lebanon's and Palestine's refugee camps and impoverished communities. In the past few years sports programming has grown substantially to cope with the influx of refugees into Lebanon and the destruction wrought by the wars in Gaza.

Sports activities have the power to bridge divides between groups – especially important in Lebanon where there is a lot of tension between Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians. In Gaza and Lebanon, young people have few safe places to let off steam and forget the challenges they confront in their everyday lives.

ANERA renovates sports facilities and fields, helps sports clubs build capacity for practices and tournaments, provides equipment and uniforms, hosts workshops and sporting days, and trains community leaders and coaches to keep the programs going. ANERA also strives to bridge gender gaps and break stereotypes so that young women get an opportunity to play together, too – a rarity in many conservative communities.

Your donations **in 2016** helped  
**48,000**  
youth access renovated and  
well-equipped sports facilities  
in Palestine and Lebanon





Al Mosadar | Gaza



Akkar | Lebanon



Nahr El Bared | Lebanon



Ein El Hilweh | Lebanon





# A Great Event

This year's Annual Dinner on October 7 brought together 400 ANERA supporters at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. It was a special evening full of surprises.

The theme this year was "tending roots, bearing fruit." The audience was asked: What roots you to ANERA? Guests texted their responses and saw them populated on a live word wall. At a photo booth, guests wrote on marker boards what they are rooted in and shared images with their social networks. Live music, Middle Eastern food, and an exhibit full of cultural artifacts from Lebanon and Palestine made the event a full sensory experience.

ANERA honored Nabila Ali, Karmel Sabri and Islamic Relief USA for their generous support. Nabila Ali started a Facebook campaign to raise funds for ANERA's work in Gaza in the wake of the 2014 war devastation. She created a huge network of philanthropists in her Chicago community and beyond. Another grassroots fundraiser, Karmel Sabri, is a young Palestinian-American who started an annual "Dear Gaza" block party fundraiser in Minneapolis. For two years Karmel's events have raised enough money to help ANERA ship over \$3 million of donated medicines to Gaza. The event also spotlighted Islamic Relief USA for being a devoted and generous partner to ANERA in early childhood development, water and sanitation projects throughout Gaza.

During the dinner, guests heard speeches from President Bill Corcoran, honoree Karmel Sabri, and board members Teresa Barger and Murad Siam [read his story on page 3].

ANERA would also like to give special recognition to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia for its Diamond sponsorship, as well as the Ruby sponsorships of Robert and Susan Trice and the Foundation for Middle East Peace.



PHOTOS [from top]: Board member Teresa Barger welcomes everyone; the sumptuous five-senses station; an Arabic coffee vendor kept very busy; the photo booth, complete with props; and the fabulous oud player Chakib Hilali.





# Shine your light. See a brighter future.



**94%**  
spent on programs  
in Palestine & Lebanon



[anera.org/give](http://anera.org/give)



# ANERA

Improving Lives in the Middle East

Since 1968

American Near East Refugee Aid  
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Washington, DC 20005

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Dear Friend:

In the politically charged climate we have been navigating in the US over the past year or so, this is something that's important for us all to remember: Whatever your politics, children and youth everywhere deserve to grow up in a positive environment, with hope for their futures.

We'd like to thank individuals like you. You make it possible for ANERA to implement projects that transcend politics and create some optimism for children and teens – and also adults – who must overcome so many barriers to reach their potential.

From non-formal education for refugees who dropped out of school years ago to community-building through sports, ANERA supporters are making a lasting impact in the lives of those who are simply trying to get by. Thank you.

Gratefully,



ANERA President

