

## **Ultimate Peace in Bethlehem, West Bank**

Israel/West Bank

Wesleyan University

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<http://ultimatepeace.wordpress.com/>

### **Section I:**

#### **Project Goals:**

Our first goal for this project was to empower youth from Bethlehem, in the West Bank, by introducing them to the game of Ultimate Frisbee. Our second goal was to foster interaction and conversation between them and Israeli youth at an Ultimate Frisbee summer camp organized by Ultimate Peace (UP), a sports-for-peace nonprofit.

#### **Project Overview:**

The Davis Project for Peace grant funds covered most, but not all of our project costs, and additional funds came from independent UP fund raising. Our time during the summer was split between Frisbee organizing in the West Bank and working at the UP summer camp in Israel.

During the first few weeks of June we travelled every Sunday to a turf field in Bethlehem, to lead casual ultimate Frisbee games and practices. In the first week we had the unexpected pleasure of meeting and playing with youth from Bayt Sahour, an area near Bethlehem. A UP assistant coach from Bethlehem helped us identify eight kids from two refugee camps located in Bethlehem that were interested in playing Frisbee. The next two Sundays were spent playing with both them and the Bayt Sahour youth.

After three successful practices in Bethlehem we travelled to the UP summer camp for a four-day Frisbee intensive camp and a five-day, all-level Frisbee camp. We did not originally plan on attending the first training camp but were invited to join as assistant coaches. We had a fantastic time teaching and playing with experienced players from both Israel and the West Bank, including many kids from Bayt Sahour. The Bethlehem kids then met us in Akko for the second camp, where they were split into a few different cross-cultural teams.

We did not realize how difficult it would be to find field-space in the West Bank. Due to tensions between different refugee camps in Bethlehem and a major lack of public and private field space in the West Bank, we found it very difficult to reserve and play Frisbee on a field. Although we planned our final practice in Bethlehem weeks ahead of time, we weren't able to get field space at the very last minute because of the major limitations that cultural barriers and geographical limits placed on our program.

Additionally, the level of interest was much greater than we originally thought it would be and unfortunately greater than we had the means to immediately support. There were a number of kids interested in joining that we could not accept because of funds. We only had enough money to support the travel and camp expenses of eight kids. Language barriers and difficulties with border crossings were present, but we expected them and found that they did not greatly impact the kids' experiences.

Our project focused directly on the eight kids from two refugee camps in Bethlehem. However, we also spent significant time meeting and coaching 20 kids from Bayt Sahour as well as many other Palestinian and Israeli kids who attended the UP camp. The camp was very well run, with a heavy focus on teamwork and "spirit-of-the-game." Though not all of the Bethlehem kids fell in love with Frisbee, they were all welcomed well and enjoyed the camp aspect, which included meeting Israeli children for the first time. The Bethlehem kids made friends with those beyond their own community. They played and learned together despite the difficulties of language barriers.

The Bethlehem kids are extremely enthusiastic about playing ultimate Frisbee and coming back to Camp UP. Now that Bethlehem is part of the UP network, they will have year-round practices and send some kids to the summer camp every year. However, issues related to space and coaching staff makes it a little more difficult to have sustained play and cultural interaction throughout the year. It is very possible for Bethlehem to become a vibrant UP Frisbee community, but it will require more UP fundraising and more personnel.

## **Section II:**

### **Our Definition and Contribution to Peace:**

“Peace” is too often thrown around with little regard to meaning or context. It is a word that for Orwellian purposes has lost its power to describe something of substance beyond a feeling of goodness. It is with context that the word “peace” comes to convey an idea worth investing in.

In the context of our project, mutual respect, integrity and non-violence broadly categorize the “peace” fueling our project. The beginning lines of our Camp UP’s song list the organizations five values, including the three we find most important for peace in this context: “mutual respect, integrity, and fun, non-violence, and friendship put into one.” These kids live in very close proximity to each other and while they may be often separated by the words “Israel” and “Palestine,” “Jew” and “Arab,” they share physical space with each other that demands a certain baseline presence of peace. This peace entails a basic level of mutual respect for oneself and for the “other.” It requires one to uphold a level of communal integrity and it requires that individuals and collective bodies solve disputes and hardships through non-violent means.

Ultimate Peace gives a face to the “other.” Many of these kids have never seen or interacted with the “other” face-to-face. The summer camp spurs continual and positive interactions between kids of different populations through Ultimate Frisbee. Because of our project, Frisbee is now a tool that these Bethlehem kids will have in their lives to challenge negative prevailing ideas including the idea that “people need mediators to rescue them from interactions with their opponents, with the “other.” Frisbee challenges the idea that players cannot solve foul calls with the integrity of “the Spirit of the Game.” It challenges the idea that kids cannot solve their own disputes with each other peacefully.

### **Changes in the Way We think:**

It is possible that we’re idealistic, but this project didn’t change the way we think about the world – it only strengthened it. We chose this project in part because as we developed the idea, it did not seem far-fetched to us. As Ultimate Frisbee players ourselves, we knew the potential that this sport has to affect the way in which individuals perceive their opponents and referee themselves. We also had faith in the power of human interaction and exposure to other cultures as a means of delegitimizing the ugly misconceptions and dangerous dogmas that fuel the idea of enemies. We were deeply affected by our travel in the West Bank and being exposed to the conditions and culture in Bethlehem and Bayt Sahour. Seeing with our own eyes these realities and connecting them with our later camp experiences greatly affected and affirmed the way we think about the possibility for peace in the Middle East.

It was our great fortune to be apart of a program that harnesses the power of Frisbee to change the lives of not only our campers, but ours as well. The Bethlehem kids and all of the campers and staff at Camp UP were some of the most caring, energetic, interested, and fun group of individuals that we have ever met. The way in which people interacted at Camp UP changed the way we interact with people. It is an experience that would affect the worldview of many people. It is not an overstatement when we say that it was a life-changing project for us.

### **Personal Statement:**

“Playing Frisbee in this context opened my eyes to the power of sports and non-verbal communication, and affirmed my belief that children are too often underestimated in their ability to shape the world.”  
Noam Sandweiss-Back

“If you’ve divided them by worlds and see them only as Israeli-Arabs, Israeli-Jews, and Palestinians, you’ve missed the point entirely. They’re kids.”  
Gabriel Frankel

## Ultimate Peace Photos:



**Two Bethlehem kids and  
UP coaches**



**A Bethlehem camper  
learning how to throw**



**The Bethlehem campers, two other UP coaches, and us  
(on the right)**