

THE PROBLEM

Women in Palestine live under a “double occupation.” Not only are they subject to the restrictive conditions of Israel’s military occupation, but also the pervasive expectations to remain in the home as mothers and wives. In a society in which gender is the primary determining factor to the shape of one’s life, women carry the heavy burden of upholding family honor while men are enlisted with the charge of protecting it. At puberty, girls are pulled off the streets where they once played with the boys and relegated to the “womanly” tasks that will define the rest of their lives.

In Palestine, women carry the terrible weight of constantly having to fear for the safety of their families. Every day husbands and sons are arrested arbitrarily, leaving their wives without any means to income. Homes are ransacked by military incursions that devastate the space that women spend their lives caring for. Mothers must watch their children’s pickup soccer games end suddenly as they return home, their eyes watering from the sting of tear gas.

All Palestinians carry the weight of these threats. However it is men who have the ability to actively resist. While men lead the national movement through protests and hunger strikes, women must remain at home and wait, not knowing if their families will return in one piece.

Despite these challenges, women across Palestine have established networks of support and solidarity. When a community member is arrested or killed, women are the first to mobilize support for the grieving family. Though often overruled, women struggle with their husbands and sons to keep them from engaging in violence. The traditional narrative of Palestinian resistance led by men neglects the tremendous strength women demonstrate in carrying out these roles. Moreover, it neglects these women’s immense potential to act as forces for peace in their communities.

OUR PROJECT

Increasingly, studies have shown the positive results of sport on the development of the five “C’s”: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring.¹ These skills will directly enable women to better combat daily social and political challenges and grow into leaders of their communities. Increased confidence will enhance women’s voices as they advocate for peace and non-violence. Connections and team-building skills will build relationships that will strengthen networks of cross-camp support.

Our project will use soccer as a platform to empower and develop leadership for the girls of three refugee camps in Bethlehem: Aida, Azza, and Dheisheh. We seek to develop locally-led programs by training young women from the camps to coach teams of girls ages 11 to 14. Success over the summer would lead to a stable program and the potential to expand to other refugee camps in Palestine and Jordan.

PARTNERSHIPS

Our partners on this project will include a network of experts and organizations that will advise and take active roles in programming. Due to cultural norms in Palestine, formal agreements on how each organization will support the project will be difficult to determine until we are on the ground. However, it is important to express that either Mary or Baheya has solid personal relationships with each of these contacts and are confident in their commitment to the project. First, the Holy Land Trust, responsible for large cross-Bethlehem events such as the Bethlehem Live festival, will serve as an administrative base for operations and networking. HLT will be essential to procuring the support of influential families within the camps as well as provide assistance for event planning, advertising and community backing. Second, the Palestinian women’s national team founder, FIFA ambassador and prominent girls’ sports activist Honey Thaljieh has led women’s sports programs across Palestine and offered her support, though it is

¹ <http://truesport.org/resources/publications/reports/psychological-and-social-benefits-of-playing-true-sport/>

not yet finalized whether she contribute to coach recruitment and training, program visibility, and/or augmenting the ethical design of the program. Finally, Jackline Jazrawi of Right to Play and former captain of the national team is interested in supporting our project alongside Diyar Sports Academy; we are still in the process of determining in what capacity. Staff at the Aida Youth Center will help coordinate community outreach and field restoration. For some of our contacts, the exact nature of their role has yet to be finalized; however, we have all of the key elements in place to move forward if funded.

SCHEDULE

Spring 2015: Awareness and Equipment Raising – In the spring we will host drives on campus and in our respective hometowns to gather soccer equipment that can be used for the program.

July 5th - 19th: Preparation – As Ramadan ends, we will finalize logistics, recruit coaches and players, and focus on building connections with the community.

July 19th - July 26th: Coaches Training – We will host a week-long coaching clinic.

July 26th - August 17th: Team Training – Teams will train 2 to 3 times per week, coaches will meet weekly to debrief, and a joint clinic will be held by the national team. Each coach will host at least one mother-daughter practice to foster family support.

August 18th - August 31st: Tournament Weekend – All teams will come together during this weekend for a final tournament featuring food and music. This will open the camps to the greater Bethlehem community that often stigmatize the camps, associating them with violence and “slums.”

QUALIFICATIONS

An Arab-American, Baheya is fluent in Arabic and experienced in the culture. In 2013 she began a girls' soccer program in Burma that still runs today. She conducted independent research on the Palestinian refugee experience in Jordan in the fall of 2013. In Summer 2014, she lived in Azza refugee camp in the West Bank, trained with the Palestinian women's national soccer team, and worked with the Bethlehem-based organization Holy Land Trust.

Mary is a senior International Political Economics Major and Arabic and Islamic Studies minor. She is a member of the CC Women's Club Soccer team and will assistant coach a club team in the spring. Over the past three summers she has interned for Women in Hebron, lived in Aida Refugee Camp, and worked at the *Palestine-Israel Journal*. She studied Arabic throughout the Arab world and is proficient in Levantine Arabic. In Spring 2013 she completed research on comparative refugee experiences in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile.

SAFETY AND CONTINGENCY

We are committed to our own safety as well as the safety of the girls on our program. We have communicated with the camps and they do not anticipate any security issues; in fact, both men and women are optimistic and enthusiastic about the prospects of this project. We recognize that there are real safety issues in the West Bank. In our experience violence in Bethlehem is concentrated in specific locations and circumstances. We know where these places are and will actively avoid them. We have no reason to believe these long-standing patterns will differ greatly in the coming summer. Our familiarity with the city and our personal networks in Bethlehem will help maintain safety and be resources in case of emergency. Furthermore, Bethlehem is a major destination for tourists, foreign volunteers and students and is generally regarded as safe. We will register our trip with the State Department and be proactive about security issues, arranging for emergency exit plans with the consulate if needed.