HELPING CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE
IN PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS

ESTABLISHING A LASTING ATTRACTION TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In-camp youngsters interact with Birzeit University mentors to develop competencies and essential life skills primarily through ICT.

http://home.birzeit.edu/nzitce

BZU CONNECT is a premium community outreach program that aims to empower children and youth living in Palestinian refugee camps. By establishing a network of Computer Clubhouses in the heart of the West Bank's refugee camps, this initiative aims to create engaging community-based learning environments through which youngsters [living in Palestinian refugee camps] can interact with university mentors to develop competencies and essential life skills primarily through the use of ICT.

Building a univeristy/refugee-camp bridge

Birzeit University values the interactions between the university and its surrounding communities especially those that lead to positive social change in the community. In this project, university-community engagement is happening at many levels:
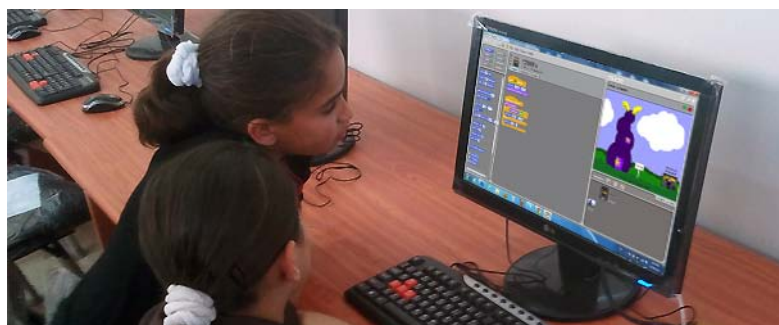
■ Computer Science and IT students at Birzeit University lead 8-14 year olds in the Jalazone refugee camp in hands-on projects using computer-based tools.

■ Birzeit University has partnered with community centers at the Jalazone camp. As a result of this authentic partnership, one Jalazone community center is hosting the computer clubhouse of this project.

■ Engaging in-camp parents is a critical part of the program and many parents visit the computer clubhouse with their children.

Fostering social embeddedness

Passionate undergraduate university students [tutors] are the driving force of the computer clubhouse program at the Jalazone refugee camp and the face-to-face mentoring that they deliver to the in-camp children is a critical factor that sustains the success and continuity of the program.

Engaging Birzeit university students in meanginful service promotes a life-long commitment to civic responsibility, public service, and student connectedness to the local community.

Providing fulfilling learning experiences to in-camp younsters

At Al-Jalazone refugee camp, the computer clubhouse program emphasizes creativity with information technology and provides fulfilling learning experiences to youngsters living there. The result, is a new form of an engaging learning community - in which in-camp yongsters and university student mentors work together on projects and ideas to create their own digital artwork, animations, computer games, interactive story-telling, websites, and robotic prototypes.

Cultivating a new attitude for learning

"We are leveraging the power of information technology tools to transform the Jalazone computer clubhouse memebers into active and creative learners," says George Yerousis, the project manager who is also helping build and mobilize the camp-university network component of the computer clubhouse.

The learning model in the Jalazone computer clubhouse is based on current research that shows that youngsters learn most effectively when they are actively engaged in designing and developing projects based on their own interests and talents - rather than memorizing facts and figures or learning random skills.

To find out more about the Jalazone computer clubhouse, visit **http://home.birzeit.edu/nzitce** or email us at **info.nzitce@birzeit.edu**

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