GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Very special greetings from the hot and busy summer in Ramallah. It has been a full year for us at the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center with many changes and activities. We have at last decided to publish the first regular newsletter to update all of you with our news. We are planning to produce three newsletters a year with different articles, news and photos of our students.

The highlight of our progress for the next school year is the opening of a new vocational stream in computer maintenance and IT. It is a challenging venture and of great importance for many students in the region who are seeking a better future.

Our hotel school graduates are expecting their qualifying exam results in the coming week and many of them are ready to apply for college or university. Several graduates are already working in some of the best hotels in Ramallah.

One of our main projects for the next school year is to start major renovations in our guesthouse in order to raise hospitality standards on the one hand, and to give our students the opportunity to train in proper facilities on the other.

During the school year we will also continue developing our extracurricular programs in the Ballet School, Karate School, and hospitality courses and consulting for local professionals.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our local and international friends from around the world who believe in our mission, as well as the Episcopal Church in the Middle East and our Bishop Rt. Rev. Suheil Dawani. We are deeply encouraged by your support for providing better opportunities to people who face many difficulties under occupation.

~ Mr. Giovanni Anbar
ETVTC OPENS IT & COMPUTER MAINTENANCE VOCATIONAL STREAM

The dream for the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center (ETVTC) has always been to have more than one vocational stream. Last year, the management began thinking of the possibility of opening an information technology and computer maintenance stream. “We looked for what is needed in the labor market,” explains director Giovanni Anbar. “We looked for what would be interesting for the new generation and what would help them for the future.”

“We are trying for the development of the vocational stream in Palestine because it is good for the future of the Palestinian community.” – Administrator Al-Husseini

A growing number of businesses in the West Bank depend on IT and computer systems for their daily operations. They are looking for workers to provide maintenance, repair and consultation for their technologies and computer systems. The team at the ETVTC expect that after graduating from the new IT stream, young people will be able to find well-paid and respectable work for these businesses.

Between 10 and 15 students will start classes in the new IT vocational stream this fall. A generous grant from the American Friends of the Diocese of Jerusalem will enable the ETVTC to renovate infrastructure in the technology labs and purchase new computers and equipment for the program.

Giovanni Anbar is hopeful that the IT vocational stream will help change the image of vocational training among Palestinian families. “People aren’t sure about hotel schools,” he explains. “But when it comes to technology and computers, people open their eyes in a different way.”

However, it is by no means Mr. Anbar’s intention to let the IT stream be perceived as superior to the hotel stream. The two are equal to each other. The goal is to help families see that vocational training at the ETVTC is a rigorous program that graduates disciplined and competent students who are competitive in the job market.

“We are trying for the development of the vocational stream in Palestine because it is good for the future of the Palestinian community,” says administrator Munjed Al-Husseini. For the ETVTC, the IT stream is the next step in building the vocational skills of Palestinian workers in all fields. The goal is to improve the labor market with more well-qualified graduates and spur on the development of the IT sector in Palestine.

STUDENTS TRAIN IN LOCAL HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

We congratulate our 23 current students in the Hotel School vocational stream on completing 14-day trainings in regional hotels and restaurants. Students gained practical skills in housekeeping, reception, restaurant and bar service and culinary skills. We extend our thanks to the participating businesses: Intercontinental Hotel Jericho; Intercontinental Hotel Bethlehem; St. George’s Guest House and Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem; Jasmine Café; Restaurant Darna and the following hotels in Ramallah: Grand Park Hotel, Crown Suites, Al Hambra Palace, Royal Court Suites and Ankar Suites.
The Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center (ETVTC) Ballet School performance of Tchaikovsky’s ballet “The Sleeping Beauty” was the first classical ballet ever performed in Palestine. The performance this May at the Cultural Palace in Ramallah for over 700 enthusiastic audience members, is the fruit of the Ballet School’s seven successful years. Ballet instructor, Katja Sheikh, and the staff at the ETVTC who manage the Ballet School were proud and thrilled to introduce something new into Palestine.

An opportunity for Palestinian girls

The Ballet School was the first in Palestine when it opened in 2006. Today, there are 38 students in eight levels studying under Katja Sheikh, a professionally-trained ballet instructor from Russia. “Ballet is good for developing personality and patience,” says Ms. Sheikh. “It provides an educational, cultural and social experience in a safe environment. Parents send children to our classes for many reasons: exercise, social skills, and also because of genuine talent.”

Students in the ballet school, the majority of whom are girls and young women, build physical awareness, strength and discipline. The school is an important resource for families in Ramallah who struggle to raise children in the dangerous and uncertain environment created by occupation. Palestinian girls in particular have few opportunities to get outside the home and participate in activities with other girls. During the performance of “The Sleeping Beauty,” these young people had the confidence-building experience of being at the center of a community activity.

Local community mobilizes for performance

The performance, with a spectacular set and costumes, was the fruit of local resources and philanthropy. Several community members generously contributed their time, and Palestinian companies made in-kind donations worth more than 6,000 US dollars. Al-Falístiniya TV provided publicity by interviewing Ms. Sheikh and administrator Munjed Al-Husseini live on the morning program, “Alay subhakkhayr.” The audience’s delighted response rewarded the students and volunteers for their efforts.

Director Anbar and Mr. Al-Husseini are currently pursuing plans to renovate the ballet studio. The Ballet School is an opportunity for them to connect more local families with the vocational program. Most importantly, however, the Ballet School is aligned with the ETVTC’s mission to build character and self-confidence in Palestinian young people.
STUDENT DRAMATICALLY CHANGED BY HOTEL SCHOOL

Dalin was a not so happy student at the Arab Evangelical Episcopal School (AEES) in Ramallah. Her marks were poor, and she was not motivated to make any effort. Instead, all she did was cry. Her teachers, classmates, and even her own family had only to look at her and she would start crying. No one knew what to do.

Near the end of tenth grade, Dalin’s teachers decided that higher education was not what she needed. The staff recommended that she enter the Hotel School at the ETVTC. If she had cried before, Dalin cried even more now. She cried for so long at her written entrance exam, without answering a single question, that Director Anbar accepted her without it.

― Our school becomes like a supportive and affirming family to our students. ― Director Anbar

Mr. Anbar can find the tiniest seed of potential in each enrollee. He also knows that placing students in an environment where their self-esteem as well as their skills can grow, is the key to their success. According to him, “Working with hospitality is working with society, and if you do not have a strong character and a pleasant and cooperative personality, you cannot move on in this career. In the beginning, some students arrive with shiny faces and are ready to explore, while others have to be helped with developing a positive image of themselves. Our school becomes like a supportive and affirming family to our students. In Dalin’s case, our program was just what she needed.”

Dalin thrived in the ETVTC’s supportive environment. She was selected to make a presentation on behalf of the vocational school to her former teachers and fellow students at AEES. With confidence and enthusiasm, the now happy young woman spoke about the merits and excitement of the ETVTC’s Culinary Program. Not only were there no more tears, but even her former classmates could not recognize her. Her former teachers’ response over and over was simply, ”Who is this girl?”

In Dalin’s senior year, her newly found leadership and motivational skills led her very own ”Team Dalin” to win the coveted First Place Award in the Spring Cooking Competition, a six-week long event. Dalin may have arrived at the ETVTC in tears, but she is leaving this spring as a young woman with solid culinary skills and a sunny future.

― Contributed by Lynn Lantz, AEES Volunteer from Church of the Good Shepherd, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee

SPECIAL THANKS TO INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

We extend a warm thank you to the volunteers who have traveled to Ramallah this past year and spent time working with our students and in our organization: Jo Bronson, English-language volunteer from Portland, Oregon; Lynn Lantz, AEES volunteer from Lookout Mountain, Tennessee; Joanna Springer, outreach volunteer from Amherst, Massachusetts; and Mike Levchuk, English conversation volunteer from Conway, Massachusetts.
COOKING COMPETITION BUILDS LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK SKILLS

Hotel School seniors participated in the ETVTC’s first ever Cooking Competition in March 2013. With a grand prize of 500 dollars at stake, students put into practice what they learned in cooking class from Chef Ibrahim. Working in teams of five or six, students prepared international cuisine for the first round of the competition. Team leaders had to motivate and mobilize their team members to participate and come to agreement on the dish to prepare. The students made trips to local restaurants in order to make their dishes more competitive.

Four teams chosen as semi-finalists competed with desserts, and Team Sylvia and Team Dalin were selected to prepare a five-course meal for the judges. The students had to write a menu in English, prep each menu item, and set up the dining room. The experience was an opportunity to exercise organizational skills. In addition, team leaders learned how to delegate tasks as they researched recipes, inventoried supplies and went shopping for the best ingredients.

The competition involved cooking and serving the judges’ selections within a three and a half hour time limit. In the end, the teamwork ethic driving the competition was the most salient part of the experience, and the members of both teams hugged each other in excitement when Team Dalin was declared the winner.

- Contributed by Jo Bronson, Volunteer from Grace Memorial Church, Portland, Oregon
HOTEL VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STRENGTHENS STUDENTS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

I was honored to have the opportunity to see the twenty-five students from the fifth class of the Hotel Vocational School accept their diplomas on June 1 and warmly shake the hand of Director Giovanni Anbar. Many of these students had previously struggled in school, academically and socially, and some teachers and parents had lost hope of seeing them in a graduation robe. I was able to congratulate Julie Hindailleh, the student sponsored by Grace Church in Amherst, Massachusetts during her two years at the Hotel School.

Giovanni afterward confided to me that helping students who would otherwise have fallen through the cracks gives him the greatest satisfaction; he and the staff work hard on the personal development of young people who face particular hardships and sometimes disabilities. By the end of the program, the students have gained confidence and learned to conduct themselves professionally, enabling them to enter a better future and contribute to the development of their country.

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Parents have noticed that the students who attend the vocational school are ending up with important advantages other students lack. The students who graduate from the vocational stream have taken a step into the real world and think of themselves differently than students who intend to go on to four more years of education. Graduates who continue their studies as well as those that are unable to do so are better able to take advantage of work opportunities.

Students have started coming from other areas of the West Bank to attend the Hotel School in Ramallah. One such student, Angela, comes from the city of Qalqilya. This city is choked off from the West Bank by the Separation Wall and further isolated by miles of illegal settlements, making everyday life hard for its inhabitants.

Angela’s father has been a political prisoner for most of her life. The young woman faced severe disadvantages in school due to some disabilities. Her mother believed so strongly in the vocational program at the ETVTC that she made big sacrifices to arrange for her daughter to live away from home for two years. Angela thrived in the Hotel School environment. She now has the professional skills and experience to find work, which will enable her to contribute to her own and her family’s stability and financial security.

The greatest benefit of the vocational stream is the personal investment in the students made by Giovanni, Nizar, the manager of the Hotel School program, Munjed, the general administrator, and the chef, Ibrahim. The staff provide thorough mentoring and, as Giovanni puts it, “work on the personality” of the students to cultivate discipline and self-respect. The students reward the staff by their warm appreciation, staying in touch and returning to see later Hotel School classes graduate.

- Contributed by Joanna Springer, Volunteer from Grace Church in Amherst, Massachusetts

Joanna Springer, Director Anbar, Julie Hindailleh and Administrator Al-Husseini