



# YES

## Alumni Newsletter

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**AYUSA Consortium**

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# A Fond Farewell



This will be the final edition of the YES Alumni Newsletter, which was created as a one-stop source for information on the activities of those alumni chapters within the AYUSA consortium. Originally envisioned as a quarterly newsletter, it didn't always make it out on time. But the amazing stories that have been highlighted over the years reflect the great work that you, our YES alumni are doing, which in turn is a reflection of how the YES program experience has impacted your lives.

The original consortium model, which combined overseas recruitment organizations (AMIDEAST and iEARN), and placement organizations (AYUSA, ASSE, CCI, PIE, YFU), is coming to an end. The new model has recruiting organizations world-wide forming a new consortium, while the placement organizations sign individual grant agreements with the U.S. Department of State (DOS). The last group of students under the AYUSA consortium will depart in June of this year, so it seems a fitting time to retire the newsletter. We encourage you all to continue to submit articles about your chapter activities directly to DOS for inclusion on its alumni website. If you have not registered for the site, please visit [www.alumni.state.gov](http://www.alumni.state.gov).

The past eight years have been an adventure, and it seems appropriate to reflect on where we all started and how far we have come! The AYUSA consortium began in 2002 with AYUSA, ASSE, AMIDEAST, iEARN and Sister Cities. The following year, ASPECT joined the consortium, and as the program numbers increased, PIE, CCI, YFU and CIEE joined in the fun as well! In 2003, we started with a total of 69 students from Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. For the 2010-11 academic year, our consortium recruited and placed 392 students from these





Amy Chamberlain

same countries (with the exception of Syria), and added Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Liberia, Mali, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Suriname.

Some of our “defining” moments came during the early years of the program. Alumni from the first YES cohort will recall their arrival to the U.S., which coincided with the New York City blackout in August of 2003! AMIDEAST had arranged for staff members to travel to JFK

International airport, and assist incoming students from the Middle East and North Africa with their arrival and ongoing flights. While in New York, students had to stay in hotels with no electricity for several days, since flights were disrupted and everyone’s travel had to be re-booked to their host communities. It was after this incident that we all decided it would be more convenient to have participants travel to Washington, DC, and an arrival orientation would be an excellent idea to eliminate the difficulties of rebooking flights due to delayed arrivals.

We will also cherish the memory of Amy Chamberlain, AYUSA’s Director of Grant Programs in the early years, who died in a tragic swimming accident on July 4, 2005. Alumni who were on the program from 2002-05 will remember her energy and sheer enthusiasm for student exchanges. She was dedicated to the YES program and a true believer in the impact that YES students could have in the world. YES alumni planted trees across the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia to honor her life.

Another milestone was the retirement of Bob Persiko, former Chief of the Youth Programs Division at the Department of State’s Bureau for Education and Cultural Affairs, and ‘Founding Father’ of the YES program. Many of you will remember seeing Bob at the Washington arrival orientations, and again when you all departed. Bob was the guiding force of this program, a strong supporter of youth exchanges, and was genuinely interested in all of you. Bob retired from his position in 2007 and moved to Germany, where he currently resides. His legacy to the world of student exchanges lives on in all of you.

The 2009 YES Alumni Conference held in Washington, D.C. was another major milestone for YES, as we celebrated the 6th anniversary of the program. We were fortunate to be able to bring representatives from most of the YES countries world-wide. It was a real treat for those of us who work on the program to reconnect with you as Alumni; we were thrilled to see first-hand how you have become confident young men and women making a difference in your communities. One conference attendee from Lebanon, Khaled Diab ‘05, summarized the conference and his YES experience: *“I can write magazines and newspapers about the YES program, and I am pretty sure that I cannot fully express all that I am feeling. Leaving the conference was so difficult; it was over as soon as it started because fun times are spent as quickly as the speed of light! Not only did we meet our old YES friends, but we met new YES friends that we will never forget.”*

The newsletter and alumni chapter updates have always been a highlight for the consortium and Department of State. We

always feel a sense of pride after reading what all of you have accomplished over the years. Whether you were coordinating relief efforts during the 2010 flood in Pakistan; or organizing what has become an annual Open Day Celebration event at the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Hospital for Children; your stories show that you have gone on to become global ambassadors in your communities and countries. From school renovation projects to beach clean ups, we continue to be inspired by your volunteerism and community service.

The consortium is grateful for the leadership of AYUSA International, as well as the relationships we formed with each

other. In this final edition of our alumni newsletter, we would like to wish the old consortium a fond farewell. The following message comes from David Beiser, Grants Officer for AYUSA International: *For AYUSA, working with the Consortium has been a rewarding and exciting experience that provided a unique opportunity to form relationships with each other, and create possibilities for the participants that no single organization could have provided. We are grateful to AMIDEAST and iEARN for providing outstanding students and cultural guidance over the years, and to all of the placement organizations for their support and heartfelt commitment to the YES program and students in a true spirit of partnership.*

As we move ahead in our new program model, we look forward to maintaining contact with the YES alumni world-wide, and we hope that you will continue to embrace future alumni as a part of the YES family.



# YES Alumni Chapter Updates

## Algeria



Lamia Lahreche '06 provides information for her organization "Roses of Hope"

YES Alumna Lamia Lahreche '06 has been extremely active since her exchange experience in the U.S. One of her biggest accomplishments has been the creation of a new organization called "Roses of Hope." This association was founded by Lamia, her mother (acting Vice President) and some of Lamia's college classmates. The main mission of the association is to raise money by selling handmade arts and crafts. Proceeds are donated to several charitable events and organizations, which include children's hospitals, senior citizen home visits, and etc. Lamia's association is well-known in her hometown, and has fostered many new partnerships with other NGOs in Algeria. Next up for Lamia is her participation in the 2011 Global Village Training at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania this summer.

Other Algerian alumni have been just as active. Naila Kerkebane '06 is a member of an organization called "J'aide Donc Je Suis" (I Help So I am). Its mission is to help the homeless by collecting blankets, raising money and preparing free meals during Ramadan.

## Bahrain

Alumni visited Al-Salmaniya Hospital this past August, to celebrate Qerqa'aon with young patients. Qerqa'aon is an event held during the holy month of Ramadan, when children dress up in



2009 Alumni Ali Amrullah, Mujtaba Karimi, Noora Mohammed, Fatima AlBalooshi pose with a young hospital patient

traditional garments and ask for candy in their neighborhood. The group visited sick children at the hospital, and organized a small celebration with candy to give away along with other gifts.

Alumni wore their own traditional outfits during the visit, and the children were able to participate in a sing along, as well as other activities. It was a great feeling of accomplishment for the alumni group, as they were rewarded with smiles and enthusiasm from children and parents alike. Members of the alumni association worked hard to make this event a success. Noora Salah '09 even commented on how great it was that "we could help our society by leaving a nice touch followed by a warm smile."

The alumni were grateful to Al-Salmaniya Hospital for giving them the opportunity to celebrate this tradition, and they are hopeful that this will become an annual event.

## Bangladesh



US Ambassador Moriarty presents the Event of the Year Award to A.S.M. Toufique Uz Zaman Tuhin '09

During the summer of 2010, alumni organized a reunion to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the formation of the Bangladesh YES Alumni Association. U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty attended the event as the guest of honor, while Ms. Catherine A. Hallock, Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy, was also present. Fifty-five alumni participated in the reunion, which included other iEARN/Bangladesh representatives.

YES coordinator Habibullah Bahar Gulandaz gave the welcoming remarks, and thanked the US Embassy and American Center for their support of the YES Program and alumni activities. He wished for the continued success of future alumni initiatives, as well as additional involvement from the Embassy with current and former YES students.





*U.S. Ambassador Moriarty with Alumni*

Ambassador Moriarty also gave a few words of encouragement, by stating that he had been “truly amazed” with the work performed by alumni to date, and expressed his happiness and satisfaction with the group’s commitment to community service. The Ambassador also thanked the alumni for organizing the reunion, and boasted that the alumni were the “future leaders to the country.” Overall, the Ambassador expressed pride in the success of cultural exchange, and extended his continuous support on behalf of the Embassy toward alumni programs and activities.

An award ceremony followed, and alumni decided as a group to award Mr. S. M. Fahad Bin Kamal ‘05 for being named YES Alumni of the Month by the U.S. Department of State, during the month of November 2010. Mr. A.S.M. Toufique Uz Zaman Tuhin ‘09 was also awarded for organizing an English Language and Democracy Club, to educate students on how to use proper English, and to introduce ideas of freedom and democracy found in English speaking countries. This particular event was declared “Event of the Year” by the alumni association. After the award ceremony, a video put together by the alumni that chronicled different events and activities, was debuted. This was followed by a short speech from Mr. S. M. Fahad Bin Kamal, president of the alumni association.

After the program, Ambassador Moriarty cut the first slice of cake to celebrate the 5 year mark of the alumni association, at which time he challenged the alumni to continue to give back to their community and country. The event ended on an enthusiastic note, with dinner and mingling amongst guests and alumni.

## **Israel**

Although YES alumna Sari Shbeta’06 has been busy with university studies, she still continues to give back to her community. As a member of a student group called “Campus for All” at Hebrew University, Sari lends a helping hand in the organization of academic and non-academic activities for the university’s student body. Sari is also a member of the “Tira Academics Union,” founded in her home-

town of Tira, which provides counseling and guidance for high school students preparing for university study. Sari is also a participant in the nonprofit group “Belonging and Giving,” which was created with the goal of raising scholarship funds for underprivileged high school students to attend college.

## **Jordan**



*Farah Ayaad '08 with a few new friends during the YES Charity Meals Project*

Alumni have been busy raising money to conduct several different types of community events. They set up booths to solicit funds at Mecca, Abdoun, and Arabella Malls, and have received donations from additional sources. As a result of their efforts, several charitable events were organized.

On Thursday, September 2nd, the YES Charity Meal 2010 event was held at Al Tazaj restaurant in Amman. During this event, Al Tazaj provided meals for 30 amazing children from a local orphanage outside of the capitol. Another event held was the YES School Bags 2010 campaign, which took place on September 8th. For the School Bags event, alumni canvassed the entire town of Ghor Al Mazra, going door-to-door to greet community members and to hand out school items. Ghor Al Mazra is one of the poorest communities in Jordan. Alumni distributed school bags and other supplies to over one hundred students to help them begin their academic year.

Next up was the YES Toys Drive 2010 event, where alumni distributed toys and gifts to children at Al Basheer and Al Jama’a hospitals. This was followed by the YES Childcare event, where alumni painted the nursery at Ain Jaloot Secondary School. The goal was to make the nursery more child friendly, which was successfully accomplished.

## **Kuwait**

Alumni Nada Gaber ‘08 and Hadiya Nasser ‘08 participated in the 2010 “Women 2 Women International Leadership Conference,” which took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Around 120 girls from around the globe gathered for the weeklong event to discuss issues related to women’s status and leadership opportunities.

## YES Alumni Chapter Updates

Conference participants had the chance to meet students from different nationalities, backgrounds, cultures, and ages. It was a great opportunity for networking, while learning more about women's issues, building bridges of understanding among cultures, and applying leadership skills. The purpose of the conference was to empower young women to be successful in the future. The core theme of the conference was how to "claim your seat at the table."

The alumni attended several lectures and workshops that focused on themes related to leadership, empowerment, community service, women in government, human rights, and etc. They also had the opportunity to participate in a community service activity where they helped plant, pick, wash, and pack fruits and vegetables for the needy. They also experienced college life in the U.S. by staying on Lesley University's campus, and touring Harvard square. In addition, they attended workshops on the art of negotiation at Harvard Law School.



*Nada Gaber '06 and Hadiya Nasser '08 represent Kuwait at the W2W International Leadership Conference*

In other news, alumni also visited young hospital patients during the Eid celebration after the holy month of Ramadan. They brought along many gifts, and organized several different activities for the children during this special event.

## Lebanon

Alumni hosted their first ever reunion event last September. Ninety-two alumni participated, with representatives from every year since the program's inception in 2003. The event, held at the Pineland Hotel, gave alumni the chance to reconnect and discuss the course of action they wanted to take for future events. The day was filled with team-building seminars and other great activities.

In October, alumni held their 4th Annual Access Field Day Event at the American University in Beirut's green field. With more than 50 alumni in attendance, the event was a complete success. Alumni were in charge of over ten different games that included tug-of-war, a potato sack race, a spoon race, football and frisbee throws, high jump, long jump, jump rope, and jump the creek. Later in the month, alumni helped the English Access Microscholarship students organize six different Halloween parties, all held on

October 29th and 30th. The alumni were in charge of carnival games, and helped to bring the spirit of Halloween to the party.



*Jilan Khazaal '08 paints the hand of an Access student for Halloween*

In November, alumni volunteered to run a "water and fruit" vendor stand during the 2010 Beirut International Marathon. With 20 alumni on-hand, volunteers at the vendor stand were full of cheers and smiles while showing their support and encouraging runners to do their best.

## Mali

Over the Christmas holiday, alumni participated in several different community service activities. Among these activities included a football match between alumni and members of the junior AS Korofina team (a Malian football club) to support sports in the community. The alumni also volunteered with and visited young children at the Village d'enfants SOS Sanankoroba the day after Christmas. The alumni ended their year of activities by visiting the remote villages of Teriyabugu and Segou in order to brainstorm different activities that would benefit both communities.



*Alima Mwemerabugabo '08 helping kids to draw water from the village well*

## Morocco

Alumni organized a full day of gift giving and entertainment during their visit to a local shelter for young orphans last summer. In prepara-



tion for their visit, alumni reached out to local artists and musicians, and asked them to provide entertainment for the kids. Alumni also gathered used articles of clothing for distribution, as well as prepared a wide range of fun and educational activities.

On the day of the event, the kids were split into two groups. The first group attended the fun activities workshop, where kids played games and sang camp songs. The second group attended the educational activities workshop, which was a learning competition centered on different education topics such as the environment, religion, music, world capitals, and etc. Since the event was held during the holy month of Ramadan, the kids also broke their fast together with members of the alumni association.

A party was planned after the meal, where girls wore traditional clothes and staff members at the shelter were invited to participate. Milk and dates were served, while the local musicians prepared for their performance. The musicians sang songs from various musical genres; mainly Rap and Berber/Rhythm and Blues. Overall, this day of activities and entertainment made the kids at the shelter very happy. They came to understand that there were people out there who cared about their well-being, and the alumni were happy to volunteer their time as well as give back to their community.

## Pakistan

Alumni from all over Pakistan responded to the call for volunteers during the country's biggest flood of 2010. The disaster struck as alumni prepared for their national conference in the small town of Ayubia. Due to the heavy rainfall, the conference was postponed and the alumni were asked to organize relief efforts instead.



*l-r Syed Aizaz '09, Obaid Khan '07, Hassan Khan '09 and Haider Sarwar '08 with flood relief packages that were distributed to victims in Charsadda*

The country was under devastating conditions, as heavy rains continued for almost four weeks. Dams overflowed, property was damaged, and agricultural areas were destroyed. Thousands of families were misplaced, and the death toll continued to



*YES Alumnus Samiullah Beg '09 helps to distribute relief packages to flood victims*

rise. On August 2nd, alumni began fundraising for the flood victims. They solicited donations from friends and family, and were able to collect more than half a million rupees (almost \$12,000 USD). Many creative ideas were also utilized to raise additional funds, including the design and selling of Patriotism Wrist Bands, social events, and the placement of donation boxes at local schools and universities. YES alumna Zahra Ramzan Ali '05 even organized a fundraising project while participating in an internship program at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

Packages that included food, clothes and other basic essentials were put together and shipped to families throughout the country. The first delivery that went out to the flood victims was in Charsadda, a village near Peshawar, where more than 40 families benefited. Two full trucks of food and clothing packages went to a flood relief camp in Karachi that was set up by the Pakistani government. More than 3000 displaced victims were moved to this camp, and the materials were distributed by a team of 18 alumni and other volunteers. Medicine from local hospitals was also donated and distributed.

The flood relief efforts haven't stopped, and alumni are still generating and donating materials. They have also started to look beyond the relief efforts, to come up with ways to help rehabilitate the country so that victims may get back to their normal lives. There is a lot of work that still needs to be done, but the spirit and energy of the alumni is enough to succeed and continue to give back to their community.

## Qatar

The alumni association continues to meet on a regular basis to brainstorm community service activities. More and more returning YES students are anxious to be a part of the growing alumni network. Students continue to serve as a resource for future cohorts of the YES program, including volunteering at the YES pre-departure orientations. YES Alumni Hamza Qadoome '08 and Ahmed Dagash '08, were on-hand to answer questions at the pre-departure orientation for the YES class of 2010- 2011. Alumni helped to allay many fears and concerns about traveling abroad, and provided tips on how to acclimate to U.S. culture.

### Senegal



*YES Alumna Matar Beye '10 receives her diploma from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Maura Palley*

Maura Pally, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Professional and Cultural Exchanges with the U.S. Department of State, visited the 2010 YES alumni at the American Cultural Center in Dakar last Fall. The alumni gave presentations on their experiences in the U.S., and discussed their new roles as alumni to the program. After their presentations, Ms. Pally presented the YES 2010 Diplomas, while YES alumna Fatou Cisse received a special award for her vision and initiative while organizing and implementing new alumni projects.

In other news, alumni and students from the Emerging Youth Leaders program visited the Elementary School of Wayambame in the village of Wayambame. They volunteered their time by planting trees in the school's garden, and helped with additional landscaping.

### Tunisia



*Waad Kahouli '10 with an elderly resident at the nursing home she visited in the town of Gafsa*

YES alumni Roua Seghaier '10 and Waad Kahouli '10 continue to give back to their community through volunteerism. On September 5th, the alumni volunteered at the SOS Akouda Orphanage, where they engaged the children in several games and activities, and organized a three-day celebration of Eid to mark

the end of Ramadan. The children were very excited about the entertainment and fun planned during their visit.

For the first day of Eid, the alumni took 50 of the young orphans to an attraction theme park called Hannibal in Sousse. There, they walked along Kantaoui port where the kids had chocolate crepes for free, thanks to the cafe owner. On the second day of the Eid celebration, alumni organized an animation party with dancing and presents for the kids at the orphanage. On the third and final day of Eid, a free trip to Friguia Animal Park in Hammamet was planned for the children, and the alumni served as chaperones.

In other news, alumna Waad Kahouli '10 continues to visit a local elderly home in the town of Gafsa on a regular basis. She has made many friends amongst the residents. During her most recent visit, the nursing staff arranged a private room where several of the elderly women could meet together with Waad to spend quality time all at once. The room was full of laughter, joy, tears, and stories, and the women were very grateful for the time spent. "It has always been a very rewarding experience for me," said Waad. She hopes to bring other alumni and friends along for future visits.

### West Bank



*Mohammad Hithnawi '06 and Wa'ed Jaradat '06 play games with children in the community*

Alumni, with the help of English Access Microscholarship (Access) students, prepared an Iftar event during the holy month of Ramadan. The event was held in the city of Qalqilya, where 70 children were able to participate in American-themed carnival games. The children broke their fast on a balanced meal for Iftar, and the alumni topped the evening off by inviting a local hip hop group called "CULTURESHOC Band" to provide entertainment. Volunteers were assigned certain tasks throughout the event, and the children were divided into groups mentored by either a YES alumnus/na, or an Access student. Activities included painting, tug-of-war, knock the can, the X-O box, and many more! Each group of children enjoyed their time playing with and competing against other groups. Some of the



alumni even dressed as clowns to provide extra fun and cheer.

After the games, evening prayer was called and everyone headed to the dining hall at the city zoo where they broke their fast. Once the meal was over, the groups moved to center stage to watch CULTURESHOC Band perform. At the end of the event, everyone left with smiles on their faces. It was a joyous occasion for all of the young children.

## Yemen

Alumni from Sana'a organized a cleanup activity at Al-Sabeen Park last October. As part of an international environmental awareness campaign, YES alumni, English Access Microscholarship students, and AMIDEAST student interns participated in this event. The goal of the activity was to raise public awareness about the environment, and to encourage residents to be more active in their communities.

After the clean up event, the Yemen Times and National Yemen conducted interviews with alumni and took pictures. Articles were published during the week of October 17th 2010.

## ALUMNI MILESTONES

### Jordan

Laith Hajarat '04, the first Jordanian to become a YES Alumnus, graduated from the University of Jordan with a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering.

Farah Debes '06 has been selected to take part in the 2011 Global Village Training Program at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania this summer.

### Oman

Sami Al Asmi '05 has been selected to take part in the 2011 Global Village Training Program at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania this summer.

### Senegal

Mouhamadou Moustapha '09 and Dina Diatta '09 were admitted into the prestigious African Leadership Academy. Opened in September 2008, the African Leadership Academy brings together the most promising 15-18 year old leaders from all 54 African nations and beyond, for an innovative two-year program designed to prepare each student for a lifetime of leadership on the continent

### Tunisia

Asma Gouba '07 was granted a full scholarship to Texas A&M University in Qatar.

Lynn Ammar '07 was awarded a full scholarship to Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

Souha Ouni '07, a recipient of AMIDEAST's Diana Kamal Scholarship Search Fund, received a full scholarship to attend Barnard College in New York beginning in September.

### Yemen

Fatima Al Baiti '05 has been selected to take part in the 2011 Global Village Training Program at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania this summer.



The YES Alumni Newsletter for the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia is produced by AMIDEAST. The YES scholarship program is funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs, and administered by several organizations. AMIDEAST is part of a consortium that includes AYUSA International, ASSE, Center for Cultural Interchange, iEARN, Pacific Intercultural Exchange, ISE and Youth For Understanding.