



Zajel

An-Najah National University

Youth Exchange Program

October 2005

Preface

In cooperation with the Askar Center for Social Development, Zajel Youth Exchange Program successfully held its 2005 international voluntary summer work camp "For a Better Future." The work camp, which lasted for three weeks, brought international volunteers from around the world together with Palestinian university students and youth with the goal of helping the children of Askar Refugee Camp deal with the difficult conditions caused by the conflict.

Activities of the camp included programs designed to offer psychological assistance to the children, who have suffered extensive emotional trauma as a result of the often war-like conditions. The work camp also addressed the needs of handicapped children, teaching children how to care for each other and integrating special needs students with their



peers instead of isolating them. The volunteers also sought to recapture some of the kids' lost childhoods by playing sports, music, learning Dabka, and generally just having fun in each others' company.

The volunteers, who came from countries as varied as South Korea, the United States, Switzerland, Hungary, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Netherlands benefited by seeing first hand the damage caused by the occupation during extended tours of the Old City and Askar Refugee Camp. They were also able to hear eyewitness accounts of the 1948 exodus, "the Nakba," from Palestinians who lived through the ordeal, forced to leave their homes, possessions, and entire lives in the hopes of survival.

After volunteering at the refugee camp daily, workshops on Palestinian history, culture, politics and current affairs deepened the international and local participants' understanding of the Arab Israeli conflict. In the spirit of exchanging cultures and ideas, the international volunteers also prepared presentations on their own countries and histories, introducing all the volunteers to cultures that they might not have learned about otherwise.



However, undoubtedly the most important achievement that all the volunteers felt was the lifelong friendships made with people from around the world, united by a common goal: to bring a better future to Palestine. We hope that you will enjoy reading the impressions of both the international and local volunteers included in this newsletter.

Impressions of the International Volunteers, Summer 2005

Alesandro/Italy

“Going to Palestine had always been one of my dreams”

Going to Palestine had always been one of my dreams. I always read about it in the good newspapers (on the web instead of official media) and I arrived to Nablus with a different idea of the situation in Palestine.

Staying there, working with the Palestinian people and kids, and seeing reality with my own eyes was totally different than what I expected. I found incredible, kind people and a lot of friends. Despite the Israeli occupation the people have a lot of energy and a wonderful longing to live. The work with the kids was an experience that gave so much to me. I left my country with the idea that I would give something to them, but I received more than I gave. Thank you a lot to the kids, the volunteers, and all the people of Nablus for this life lesson.

Iglika/Bulgaria

“We felt some kind of a longing in the air”

The camp was full of emotions. I had a new experience, learned many fun children’s games, and I met very interesting people. I also got to better understand the real situation in Palestine.

I think everybody in the camp could feel something very special in the atmosphere, which is difficult to describe with words. But I think it was related to the fact that even though we did not previously know each other, live far away and have different cultures, we all liked each other very much. We felt close and wanted to be together for a longer time; this is mainly because we are united by the same goal, to make life in Palestine a tiny bit more pleasant.

Or perhaps we felt some kind of a longing in the air, a longing for something very beautiful, for which one strongly wishes but is very difficult, almost impossible to have; like in a dream or in a fairytale. Probably for some of the local people this was the longing for the freedom of their land, happiness and peace for their people. Or maybe it was the feeling of missing friends from all over the world

who have become a part of one’s heart, but probably will never see each other again. Or maybe it was craving to see places and countries outside Palestine, whose beauty and culture at the moment they can only slightly touch by communing with the international visitors to the city.

Maybe for us, the foreigners, the magic was born by appreciating local people who have devoted themselves to a fight for the welfare of their country and wish to struggle to keep their human dignity despite all the humiliating factors (the Israeli soldiers, the checkpoints, the poverty). Or maybe it stemmed from appreciating the fact that sometimes we saw people to be happy and smiling simply because other people were happy and smiling. In my opinion this is a bit different approach to life the one we often see. We also felt something special because of all the nice people on the streets and in the shops being helpful and generous to us. And of course the beautiful children, smiling, laughing, playing, with their original and happy ideas. Or perhaps, the pain and suffering that we saw in some moments, the violence and killings made us wish to do something to make the life a bit better.

All this brought some fairytale wind to the place. A lot more could be said, but then I would have to keep writing forever.

OJ/ United States

“All I know is that every day is just another day closer to my return to Nablus”

The day I arrived back in New York after spending my summer in Palestine, all I could think about was how and when I would return to Nablus. The second I entered the house, the first thing I did was open up Messenger to try and talk to some of the international and local volunteers. I realized how different life was at home, how people were unhappy over the most trivial things and took for granted the freedom and security that should have elated them.

Yes, we slept on mattresses no thinner than a carpet, using a bundle of clothes as a pillow with my legs and arms providing food for countless mosquitoes. But once I came home, the bed I had seemed too soft and luxurious and I found myself scratching at imaginary bites, slightly saddened as the last bites healed. The cold showers we took every morning were quickly replaced by the warm-hearted local Zajel volunteers and the bright faces of the children. I hadn’t realized that I haven’t watched television for three weeks until one night in a hotel room in Ramallah, and more importantly, I didn’t care.

The kids at the camp were absolutely adorable. The most difficult thing was to tell them not to do something. Not because they didn’t listen, but because I just didn’t want to limit their freedom in a place where their freedom was already restricted. Several blurry photos of

the floor taken by the children when they took my camera are evidence of this, my inability to say no.

Unfortunately, I do not have as much of a grasp of the Arabic language as I would like, but this was not an issue as all the volunteers speak English better than some Americans.

Being half Palestinian, I had one of the more difficult journeys into Palestine. I’m not going to lie, traveling was not particularly enjoyable. Waiting six hours under the heat of the sun at the bridge crossing between Palestine and Jordan only to be turned away and forced to take a plane to Tel Aviv was not amusing. Being held at the airport for over 8 hours for “security” purposes, even though I was born in America, have an American passport, and have no criminal history, was not pleasant. Taking a taxi to Allenby Bridge, only to be turned away to take another 2-hour cab ride to King Hussein Bridge to exit Israel because, “that’s where people go if you came through the airport,” was not entertaining. No, traveling for me was not fun, just like it isn’t fun for Palestinians. But I am not saying it wasn’t worth it. I would have stood in line for hours, I would have taken a 6-hour cab ride, and I would have waited at the airport for days if it meant that I could go to Nablus for just one day and spend time with the best people on earth.

No, I don’t think I could possibly give back as much as I have received. All I know is that every day is just another day closer to my return to Nablus.

Rawan/United Kingdom

“One of the most important benefits... was getting a new family for life”

My visit to Palestine was initially for the purpose of getting to know my homeland as well as experiencing and witnessing in person the Palestinian suffering caused by the occupation. From the first minute I arrived in Palestine this aim was achieved.

However, one of the most important benefits that I accomplished from my visit to Palestine was getting a new family for life. Every adult and child was always extremely helpful, they would do anything to try and make our stay more enjoyable and no matter what the situation was, there was always a smile on their face. As a result

this meant there was never a dull moment for the camp volunteers to share. I am really glad that I have been blessed by being able to meet such great people and I am thankful for all the hard work they put in. It really was a shame that we had to say goodbye, however I will be back soon so that I can hear Jihad, the camp leader telling everyone to “yalla yalla” (“come on, come on” in Arabic) or the Askar kids giving us the best greetings and the happiest smiles in the morning. So I will be back, Palestine, and hopefully peace will come soon as the children of Palestine deserve more than what they currently have. Just like any other child around the world they deserve to have a normal innocent childhood of play, laughter and peace of mind.

Thank you to every local and international volunteer for making this one of the best experiences I will ever encounter in life, there really aren't any words that I can say to express this appreciation. Continue the great work so that many people after me can learn as much as I did and so that the truth about Palestine can spread around the world.

Mate Kurucz/Hungary

“I feel that I owe the Palestinians something”

Looking back at the three weeks spent in Nablus, I feel thrilled about having gone there. I didn't expect such a rich experience. Working with the children at Askar refugee camp gave the foreign volunteers a chance to give something back to the local community that so willingly took us in. The afternoon workshops were important in providing useful background information and helping us understand the Palestinian perspective on various political and cultural issues like the Oslo peace process and the situation of women in the region. But the thing that meant the most to me was our interactions with the local volunteers. These boys and girls were not only willing but eager to share with us their personal and often painful experiences during the occupation.

We found it was next to impossible to talk to a Palestinian who didn't have someone from their family killed, used as a human shield during an operation or severely beaten up by soldiers of the Israeli army. We can only begin to understand what they must be going through, for

a great majority of us coming from Western cultures have never had to endure such things. What I can imagine though, is how hard it must be to rise above these grievances, and instead of giving up and lapsing into passive self-pity, find productive and peaceful means of making the situation better - and this is exactly what our friends in Nablus are doing! This three week long project was a perfect example.

Another thing I felt after hearing these stories of sorrow is confusion. Since back home the media's interpretation of the situation in Palestine often suits the Israeli side more, the impression I had before arriving greatly contrasted with my experience on the ground. I am now coming back to Hungary with a sense of commitment to learn more about the whole issue. I also want to share what I saw, to let people know both sides of the story.

Another thing that changed in me during the camp is my level of involvement, I feel much more drawn in now. I feel that I owe the Palestinians something. I find it hard to live with the thought that somewhere people I know are suffering without me trying to help them. Going back home, I will find ways to aid their efforts for a better future. Expect the Zajel home page to eventually be translated into Hungarian and at least one other volunteer from Hungary next year! Inshallah.

Ala/United Kingdom

“Children are still able to play, smile and laugh”

I have never felt more at home and more safe than I did during those three weeks. Wow. Where to start? My overall impression of the camp is generally very positive, showers are cold here (which actually work out perfect to cool down after a hot day of playing sports).

The camp was an experience I would recommend to anyone. It will change your perspective on life. It seems like I have never felt more at home and more safe than I did during those three weeks in the school, in Nablus, and in Askar.

The children we worked with were honestly a delight to be around. They are so full of life and energy. It's incredible that despite everything they have seen and been through they are still able to play, smile and laugh. But most of all they still want to reach out to people, strangers like us, who came for such a short time, allowing us to enter their world, sharing their hopes and dreams with us. It was beautiful. There are

times when it can seem a little overwhelming though, with kids demanding your full attention all the time, remembering your name and expecting you to remember theirs! Nevertheless it was the best fun working with them. I shouldn't even say “working” as it was more playing. I, being who I am, seem to attract chaos wherever I go, and this suited me and the kids just fine. We had a great time making a mess in the art room, our lame attempts at learning Dabka, sports under the heat of midday sun, acting silly in drama, singing out of tune in music, and countless other activities.

The local volunteers were all wonderful. They also, just like the children, opened their warm hearts to us in so many ways: spending time with us, and sacrificing their life in every morning to be there with us when we went to Askar. They are generous and welcoming, allowing anyone to feel right at home. They are a fountain of knowledge on local history and customs, and are glad to answer any question. It is incredible to hear their stories of life in Nablus. Very educational. I was always kept entertained by them all just talking, laughing and joking around (and of course smoking arguileh, something you can get very used to over there!) They looked out for us all the time, making sure we felt as safe and happy as possible. I love them all dearly and feel I have a new (very large) family over there. Thank you locals!

Kim/South Korea

“Thanks to all volunteers”

Working with the children at Askar refugee camp was the best work I’ve ever done. This work camp was first voluntary activity that I have ever participated in. I learned about the situation in Palestine, Islamic culture and much more that I did not know before. In Korea, I will spread the truth about the Palestinian situation and Islamic culture to my friends, seniors and the Korean people. I will recommend this work camp to my friends.

Last Saturday, I recommended the Zajel work camp to other people and they showed interest in Palestine. Because of enjoying the camp, learning about different cultures and Palestine, I can easily recommend it to others.

Naomi/Switzerland

“The local volunteers who took care of us and were great people with huge hearts”

it’s really hard to write about my feelings so instead I’ll start with a short story: back home I’m always getting asked if I wasn’t scared or afraid all the time. So I have to answer: NO, not at all. I felt very safe and the only time I was scared was because of this stupid cat that was trapped between the window and the iron in the middle of the night. But the reason I never felt scared was also because of the local volunteers who took care of us and were (and still are) great people with huge hearts. They made us smile and took care of us when we didn’t feel well or when we were down. Somehow that was hard to accept, because you think that it should be the other way around. I mean I’m from Switzerland, I have a safe life, a red passport that allows me to travel the world, my university never closes and I never hear shooting. But I went to Palestine and found

Mincheol/South Korea

“History which does not tell the truth is doomed to repeat itself over and over again”

I was ashamed to learn the true facts about what happened and is happening in Palestine and was so unlike what I had imagined. After I have experienced the life of Palestinians, I have to accept that I had been brainwashed by the distorted mass media that intentionally hides the truth. Having known a false story, I thought Palestinians had the freedom to move and the right of free expression and so on. In reality, they don’t have such human rights; rights which are stated in the United Nation’s Charter and that everyone is entitled to have as we are all human beings, regardless of religion, nationality and race.

Whenever they go from city to city or want to go anywhere in West Bank, even if it is seemingly under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians have to be checked by Israeli soldiers at a

Seungdae/South Korea

“It was an even more amazing experience than I had expected”

This was my first summer camp and the first time I have been out of my country. I’m very glad that I came to Palestine. It was an even more amazing experience than I had expected.

During this work camp, I had problems communicating with volunteers because my English is not good and I’m bashful in

Thanks to all volunteers. I would not have been able to complete this work without the help of local volunteers, Jihad, Diana, Ghazal, Asem, Jihan, Omar, Mais and everyone else. I will always remember the smiles of the children at Askar refugee camp, the landscape of Nablus, the market of the Old City, the wedding party of Ala, the mountains of Nablus, the view from the top of the hotel at night, and the women of Palestine, so many impressions overall that all remind me of the beauty of Palestine.

I think that working with the children at Askar refugee camp was the best work I’ve ever done. The children are very, very beautiful and I love them so much. The work camp has improved my attitude so that I can do hard work in my life. I want to visit Palestine again. I discovered a lot about the cheerful side of Palestine and I am so happy that I had this chance and an amazing experience in these three weeks.

a bunch of lovely people without any privileges and still, they made me smile, laugh and I admit, sometimes cry.

I had a good time with the kids. At some moments you were playing with them and making jokes, forgetting that they’re living in a refugee camp. In other moments you’re looking in a face of a two year old with no expression or sign of emotion on it and I just felt very helpless, not knowing what to do, consumed by a feeling so desperate to see any kind of expression on this little face.

Before I came I was a little bit suspicious of all the people I was going to meet there, I didn’t know anything about them. But I have to say that instead I made a lot of new friends. I learned many things from them, from the locals as well as from the internationals. I really missed them when I came back home, especially the talks with the locals which were of the most interesting parts, they made me realize that I had a little clue about real Palestinian life.

So in general: I had a great, sometimes hard, time, but it was worth it a million times over!

checkpoint. The soldiers ask a lot of questions before they allow them to pass, The only thing that I couldn’t understand was that even I was treated as an assistant helping “terrorists”. Why should Palestinians live in a tight squeeze like a prison? Even though I stayed only three weeks, I felt that I was living in a jail without windows.

Nevertheless I found the bright side in the situation of what Palestinians are facing because I was impressed to see that they are very positive and optimistic enough to get over bad things which have made them frustrated and upset. Finally, I believe that the Palestinians will triumph because history never tells a lie as we are able to discover evidence that supports the truth easily through the past.

I have learned many things how to live and what I want to do by having taken part in this work camp. I promise to stand for Palestine by spreading what I have seen and heard to my friends until the Palestinians regain their liberty. We have to avert the repeat of such a disgraceful history by letting people know what has happened in Palestine.

company. But when I was with the children, my mind was at rest. I couldn’t understand their Arabic... of course neither did they understand my Korean. But we have in common body language (especially eye contact). It’s more than enough.

From this work camp I got a lot more than what I expected. Despite my lack of English skills, I’ve made a lot of friends around the world and especially from Palestine. Thank you to all the local volunteers for working with us in these activities.

Mincheol/South Korea

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Whenever they go from city to city or want to go anywhere in West Bank, even if it is seemingly under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians have to be checked by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint.

Manja/Netherlands

“I've learned so much about Palestinian life and people”

I've learned so much about Palestinian life and people... more than I could possibly list here! I've learned so much about Palestinian life and people... more than I could possibly list here!

I loved the kids and it was very nice to really do something to give them

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some love and attention. It was nice to be able to add something to the programs of the teachers and to feel like we were able to help.

I used to believe in a two state solution but now I see that the situation is much more complicated. The refugees should have the right to return to their homes and they should get compensation but it will be hard to let them return. Israel will probably not want to let them in but the international community should pressure Israel to let them return. I still believe that the only possible solution is a two-state one but it will take lots of time. I had a great time and learned so much.

Ursula/Switzerland

“When everyone works together, I believe that change is possible”

The refugees live in a situation that definitely needs to change! But for sure this is hard to achieve. The international community definitely must make sure that everything is done to give a future to Palestine and I will do my part by telling the Swiss people. When everyone works together, I believe that change is possible.

I'm very glad that I came to Palestine. It was very important. I found out that this topic interests and touches me a lot and that I want to keep being informed and active. I became conscious of the fact that you have to pay attention to the news that is given to you, because it only shows a little

part. You have to go see yourself if you really want to know the truth.

In one way I felt sorry for the kids of the refugee camp because they grow up in a difficult place. But I didn't want to show them so I just tried to treat them like kids and was happy to see that they laughed with us. I hope that the future will bring them positive things, that some of them go on to university and that they will be able to achieve their dreams.

We were able to give them extra attention, even if only for a few days. And we opened their eyes that the world is big, that people look different and speak different languages but that you can achieve something and have a good time when you work together. I hoped we showed them in a way that there are people outside Palestine that care about Palestine and about them.

Impressions of the Local Volunteers, Summer 2005

Diana

“Working with them made me more ambitious about our future”

This was the first work camp of my life and I really want to thank Zajel for giving me the chance to take part in it. These 20 days meant a lot for me and gave me more than I expected. The work camp provided me with enough information to defend our Palestine peacefully in diplomatic ways based on just plain truths, now I know how to express my beliefs and how to stand up against the deliberate lies and propaganda that often controls news around the world.

Personally, this camp allowed me to make many friends from different countries and different cultures. Working with them made me more ambitious about our future which is supposed to be better and fairer. I'm really lucky to have met the international volunteers and I'm sure that they will spread facts about Palestine all over the world.

In Askar-refugee camp I had a great experience. I was very impressed seeing those children still know how to smile from the depth of their hearts despite living in extremely bad conditions. We did many activities that were useful to the children and even to us as volunteers. I can really say that I learned many things that I didn't know when I was a kid and was really satisfied to learn now.

I will not hesitate to participate again in the camp next summer, thank you again Zajel for everything.

Asem

“I found myself through Zajel's work camps”

How to laugh and yet still do serious work at the same time. I think this is one of the most important things that I learned from my participation in this work camp. I have to admit that I learned many new things. I learned how to be a more conscientious person, how to improve my personality and character, how to serve Palestine and how to show people the true picture of the situation here. I also made many new friends from all over the world. In short, I found myself through Zajel's work camps. Really, thank you Zajel.

Ahmad

“I'm proud to have made it possible”

I was really able to do something for my country, something that I couldn't do through any other means. I would like to thank everyone who worked on this once in a lifetime experience and gave me the opportunity to participate.

I felt that I truly contributed to this work camp and I'm proud to have made it possible. Although this was not my first international work camp, this one was truly special because I was really able to do something for my country, something that I couldn't do through any political mean. For the first time I believe that something will take place in reality.

The other thing I gained from this camp, and the only part that I know will last forever, are the friendships I made with the international and local volunteers. In this camp I felt that we were truly treated as the equals of the international volunteers. We were included in the schedule with the internationals and participated in all the work to make this camp possible and this is how I know we were truly friends.

The camp was well-organized and the schedule was well-planned, we were able to show the internationals so much and I hope that the next camp will be the same and much better.

Lutfi

“We appreciated the volunteers' braveness in coming here”

It took a lot of effort from all of us, but the camp and its results were worthy, Three two one... the camp has gone, this is in brief what happened in the previous camp, and all the camps I participated in.

Months of preparation and weeks of hard work went into this camp. It took a lot of effort from all of us, but the camp and its results were worth it!

We appreciated the volunteers' braveness in coming here; even though they had better chances in more quiet places, they chose to come to Nablus and see the truth about several things: occupation, Islam, the wall, etc.

I had a great opportunity to create new great friendships that can last forever with people from totally different cultures and circumstances. These friendships gave me self confidence and a great knowledge of other cultures that I don't think I could have learned about without the camp.

It was a great opportunity for all of us to show them a simple part of the truth about Islam, which has been hidden from them for a long time. We were able to show them that Islam is a religion of peace and love. We also gave them a real life example of how three different religions (Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans) can live together peacefully, as they do here in Nablus, and all be united against the occupation.

We met some great internationals who were of Palestinian origins. It was a great opportunity for them to visit their homeland Palestine. One of the greatest events in the camp was the voluntary work in Askar refugee camp. We all shared in bringing a smile to the kids' faces, smiles that had been forced to hide because of the invasions, curfews, and other suffering caused by the occupation. It was a wonderful event in my life and all the volunteers' lives.

Ghazal

“I've learned how to be a better person”

It's amazing how close you can get to people in such a short time! I had three incredible weeks with incredible people who had different religions, cultures, traditions and opinions, but all shared in having loving, caring hearts for Palestine and the Palestinians.

I'll never forget the smile completely illuminate the face of Ameer, a handicapped kid from Askar refugee camp, when he felt the volunteers' care. I will never forget the shouts and laughs of the children running to

meet the volunteers at the center's gate and even out into the streets!!

Let me please thank you, my dear international volunteers, because when you were around, the kids had a better life and by your continuous, dedicated work for justice in Palestine they will have a better future.

I can summarize the benefits of my experience in this work camp in this brief sentence: I've learned how to be a better person.

The camp has ended, but it's only the beginning!!

Haytham

“I gained much more than I gave”

The most wonderful experience I had during this summer was the international work camp. I participated in the camp with spectacular people and exceptional events which made me more aware of western culture and policies, and that happened by meeting other people foreigners (especially) and local people...

This is my first time participating in Zajel's youth exchange summer camp and I hope that it won't be my last. It wasn't only fun, it was also full of duties and hard work. But the duties taught us how to do our work without argument or discussion and strengthened my character. Meeting Alaa', Fawaz and the other Zajel volunteers has changed many aspects of my life and has expanded my knowledge about my city, Nablus, and has given me rich information that I'm learning for the first time.

This extraordinary experience has also changed view of voluntary work and has improved my sense of charity, desire to help needy people, especially children, and my sense of giving without expecting to be rewarded. I gained much more than I gave. Thanks a lot for giving me this chance, for great friendship, and for this unforgettable time.

Safa

“I was able to make friendships...from the first time we met”

This camp was not like the camps that I have participated in previously. For a Better Future was completely different in a positive way because I was able to see the work of the locals and their cooperation greatly enriched the camp. But it was not just the locals. The internationals also contributed so much in their work with the children and gave a lot of effort.

Although I wasn't able to spend the whole time with the camp as I wished, I still met really great people from different parts of the world. The volunteers were very friendly and I was able to make friendships with them from the first time we met. I feel the same about the local volunteers and I think that the activities enriched their life and experience. Everyone was so friendly and ready to listen to what we were going to teach them. This is what made the camp great.

Ayman

“I can say now that I have friends from all over the world”

It was a great opportunity to join the camp “For Better Future” and to participate in the yearly festival where a large number of people from all over the world come here, to our beloved Palestine, seeking the truth about what is happening here, trying to help the Palestinians and learning about Palestinian culture and history.

The most valuable thing I came away with is that I can say now that I have friends from all over the world from all nationalities and cultures and that I now know a lot about their customs, language, religion and spirit. I also learned more and more about our Palestinian history through the presentations held during the camp. Not to mention the way I felt towards these nice people with whom my constant interaction broadened my horizons and increased my understanding of people with different views and backgrounds.

The knowledge, friendships and great experiences that I have gained made me wish to attend this wonderful event every year and made me more and more proud to be a part of the Zajel team.

Jehad

“I used to say that if you wait, good things WILL come your way and now I truly believe it”

I can't decide on which was worse, saying goodbye and the tears or the awkward silence in the taxi all the way back home. Somehow in the past three weeks they've all grown on me. It's hard to imagine how 3 weeks were enough but they turned out to be more than enough.

I kept saying throughout the three weeks how exhausted I'm, how tiring it is to be a camp leader, I felt that I was missing out on stuff and that there was distance between me and the rest of the volunteers. I wished that I could be a normal volunteer again. I was wrong and I really noticed that in the last week, I had the chance to connect with them all on a deeper level, a chance to know them one by one. I got to work with all of them and for that I am really lucky. The camp had a special flavour this year, and we owed it all to the volunteers that came, it wouldn't be the same without them. They were all great people, unique individuals!

Because I was camp leader, I spent all night working on the final presentation. The volunteers worked too hard and I thought they deserved to see the things they've accomplished, the friendships they made. I didn't prepare gifts for everyone this year so somehow the presentation was my gift, my present.

I think I made 26 new friends. Not volunteers, not contacts, friends and they will stay in my heart never checking out! I can't wait to see them again, I am so happy and also sad but you could actually see me smiling right now because I can still see flashes of memories that happened while I'm writing this, don't want to stop writing but I guess I have to.

I used to say that if you wait, good things WILL come your way and now I truly believe it. Thank you for being part of my life and hopefully you will be there for ever, see you in a better future.



Zajel Youth Exchange Program
Public Relations Department
An-Najah National University
Nablu, Palestine
info@zajel.org
www.zajel.org