



WOMEN2WOMEN
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A SPECIAL EDITION OF EP NEWSGRAM

SPECIAL EDITION, 2009

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Leadership in Action: W2W Alumni Journey to Jordan



Letter from the Founder...

Dear Friends,

In Empower Peace's most impressive year to date, our international young women's leadership program, "Women2Women," continues to grow at an amazing rate! Our upcoming August "W2W - America" conference has attracted a record 550 applicants from 40 countries, and we have also just completed our first-ever "W2W Alumni Conference" in Amman, Jordan!

From June 26 to July 3, 2009, 50 of our amazing alumni traveled to the Middle East for round two of their W2W experience. Through a series of community service projects, speakers, interactive workshops and panels, the delegates were given an opportunity to broaden their perspectives, build relationships and engage in "Leadership in Action" in this next step toward becoming influential women of today and tomorrow.

We feel very fortunate for having the opportunity to interact with these remarkable young women once again, to learn about their achievements since their first W2W experience and to give them the chance to put their ideas into action on a larger, global scale in one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East. We hope that this is the first of many alumni conferences, as the energy of the week was tangible and the young women leaders as inspiring as ever!

Keep the faith,
Rick Rendon
Founder
Empower Peace

During the last week of June, 50 young women leaders from around the world converged in Amman, Jordan for Women2Women's (W2W) first-ever alumni conference. This weeklong conference, featuring W2W's most promising alumni from the past three years, provided the participants with practical opportunities to explore and demonstrate "Leadership in Action."

The young women participated in several civic engagement projects throughout the country. They first enjoyed a day of service at the SOS Children's Village, where children who can no longer live with their biological family can grow up in a healthy and loving family setting. The delegates also participated in a beatification project on the grounds of the Queen Rania Family and Child Center, where they also served as teachers'

"Having a relationship with women in other countries, I have a personal stake in conflict resolution and establishing peace."

- Alyssa Simari, Michigan, US, W2W - 2008

aids. Through workshops and a speaker series, the alumni met with international women leaders who shared their advice and experience, encouraging conference delegates to work towards bringing about positive social change.

Empower Peace also hosted an international webcast from the Columbia University Middle East Research Center in Amman called "1,000 Voices for the Future." The discussion centered on

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elevating the global status of women and attracted an audience of 3,000 young people from 60 different countries via the Internet. To showcase the importance of community involvement and volunteer service, Empower Peace created a new program, The Global Village. Over 200 Jordanian youth attended this unique volunteerism and civic engagement fair featuring keynote speaker Her Excellency Hala Latouf, Jordan's Minister of Social Development, and over a dozen of the country's NGOs.

The W2W participants also visited important cultural and historical sites including Mount Nebo, the Dead Sea and the ancient city of Petra. Throughout the week, the young women strengthened their friendships forged in past conferences and made lasting bonds with other participants from all over the globe. ●



SOS Children's Village

Following our theme of "Leadership in Action," W2W – Jordan participants boarded a bus and headed north toward Irbid where they spent the day volunteering at the SOS Children's Village. This uniquely designed foster care system, serving 96 orphans, offers children a loving home and a lifelong community support system. The village is comprised of twelve homes each headed by an unmarried woman who has made a lifelong commitment to caring as a mother for up to eight children.



To prepare for the day, W2W participants broke into groups and designed activities to teach the children. The kids were very excited to have new playmates for the day – and loved our cameras! After several hours of games and activities, everyone enjoyed a tasty

lunch together and was treated to a Depka performance – a traditional Jordanian folk dance.

In the afternoon, each group of young women paired up with a family and helped them decorate a keepsake quilt. As the kids were finishing their crafts, conference participants snuck down to the office where tables of gifts they had collected prior to the trip were separated into piles for boys and for girls. With arms full of toys, the groups gave each child a small present to thank them for their hospitality.

The day was a tremendously rewarding experience for everyone involved. The children, who live far from Amman, do not usually receive large groups of visitors. The young women felt both useful and gratified for having volunteered with the families. For delegate Allie Campos, a W2W – 2006 participant, "The best part was spending the day with an organization truly succeeding in creating a loving environment for children. It was the first day at SOS for one of the kids, and it was impressive to witness how welcoming and excited his new family was." We left tired, but energized by such a wonderful day! ●

"I expected sad children, something hard to deal with, but they were just amazing and so talented! I just love the kids and I really hope that I can be here again because it was a life-changing experience."

- Danah Alsharah, Kuwait, W2W - 2007



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1,000 Voices for the Future

Using the power of the Internet, Empower Peace developed an interactive 90-minute webcast broadcast live from the Columbia Middle East Research Center in Amman, Jordan. "1,000 Voices for the Future" focused on the international status of women and featured established professionals from various fields including government, nonprofit, business, education and the media. In addition to the 100-member multinational studio audience, over 3,000 people from 60 countries logged on via the Internet to participate in the program.



Panelists Left to Right: Samar Haj Hasan, Lina Nealon, Dr. Rula Qawas, and Her Excellency Maha Khatib

The event was hosted by **Cyba Audi**, Senior Presenter for the Al-Arabiya News Channel. Panelists included **Her Excellency Maha Khatib**, Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities; **Dr. Rula Qawas**, Jordanian National Commission for Women; **Dr. Safwan Masri**, Professor and Director of the Columbia University Middle East Research Center; **Samar Haj Hasan**, Managing Partner/Chief Consultant, Mahara; and **Lina Nealon**, Program Manager of "Demand Abolition," Hunt Alternatives Fund.

The presenters addressed many questions raised by both the in-studio and online audiences concerning women globally ranging from the true meaning of leadership to how women's rights can be best protected. Following the webcast, participants were able to meet and network with the panelists at a reception hosted at the Research Center. For those not able to watch the webcast live, an archived version is available for viewing on the "1,000 Voices for the Future" webpage, found at www.voicesforthefuture.org. ●

"Women's rights are not privileges; they are rights... Women do not need protection. We can protect ourselves... Empowerment comes from within, you have to be the one to arm yourself with the skills, the knowledge, the training, to be able to protect yourself... Don't say 'I need to be protected;' you can do it. Look at you young vibrant women; can't you take good care of yourselves? Of course you can."

- Dr. Rula Qawas, Consultant for International Relations and Programs/
Knowledge Production - Jordanian National Commission for Women

The Global Village

A new Empower Peace initiative, The Global Village, brought together over a dozen NGOs operating in Jordan and over 200 Jordanian youth for a unique volunteerism and civic engagement fair. Students and their teachers traveled from every region of Jordan, coming from as far north as Irbid, near the Syrian border and from Aqaba, located in Jordan's southernmost tip. A group even traveled from a small village, situated over five hours from Amman, where young people have very few opportunities to visit the capital. Participants filled the room for a presentation on community service and civic engagement by **Her Excellency Hala Latouf**, Jordan's Minister of Social Development and for the volunteer fair that followed.

The students, ranging from 14 to 19 years old and from all corners of Jordan, were visibly eager to hear about the volunteer opportunities available in their communities. Perhaps even more significant, they also learned that important members of the Jordanian government value the passion and commitment of youth and plan on investing in more youth-centered civil engagement projects.



After hearing from Her Excellency, the students filtered into two adjoining rooms for a reception where they mingled and networked with local NGO leaders who were looking for volunteers. After several hours of gathering and exchanging information, dozens of youth stepped forward, offering their talents to help improve their communities and their country through volunteerism. ●

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Cultural and Historical Site Visits

The week's intensive seminars and service projects were also interspersed with visits to important historical and cultural sites within Jordan. During a guided tour of Amman, delegates visited the Citadel – an ancient site occupied as early as the Neolithic period and home to a number of ruins dating as far back as 1800 BC. Here, the young women visited the Jordan Archeological Museum, which houses part of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a collection of other impressive antiquities. The group also donned Abayas (long black robes) to enter the ornate King Abdullah Mosque where we were given a tutorial on Islamic prayer traditions and the history of the great blue-domed structure.

Later in the week, the group traveled to Mount Nebo, from which, according to the Bible, the prophet Moses viewed the Promised Land before he died. Standing atop the mountain, we

could see as far as the West Bank, the Dead Sea and – without the fog cover – Jerusalem. Boarding the buses, we continued on to the Dead Sea where many mud-covered travelers soaked in the therapeutic waters and tested their buoyancy.

On our final day together, we ventured three hours south of Amman to the ancient city of Petra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the new Wonders of the World. Delegates traveled by foot, horse and camel through a long, narrow passageway that opens up into a breathtaking landscape of red rock buildings carved into the surrounding mountainsides. Marveling at this remarkable human achievement together was a perfect way to finish the week. ●

"I can't express enough how much W2W has shaped the way that I view the world. I always had an interest in international affairs and foreign policy but the forum and the environment that W2W creates for international discourse for girls... is invaluable... The first thing my mom said to me after I told her about all the amazing things that happened at the '08 conference was, she said, 'You are not the same daughter we sent to Boston a week ago.'"

- Lindsey Young, Pennsylvania, W2W - 2008



Life After the Conference: W2W Alumni Making Their Mark



Malia West, Tennessee, US, W2W- 2008

“After having such a great experience at W2W – America, I came to Jordan ready for a whole new experience,” says W2W – 2008 participant Malia West from Tennessee. “During last year’s conference, we were asked to identify a problem in our community and brainstorm a goal to help resolve this problem after the conference. The main problem that came to me was ‘Acceptance’ – speaking out, voicing one’s opinion,” she describes. It was through this idea that Malia created “Voice It!” – an organization that helps people speak out about important women and minority issues. Her soon-to-be revealed video journal, partially filmed in Jordan, features powerful, goal-driven women. “The Jordan conference helped reinforce that this organization is possible,” says Malia. “Last year was about learning and this year was about action.”

“My favorite event of the Alumni conference was definitely visiting the SOS Children’s Village,” recalls Malia. “The children lived in a community, a real family. The older children looked out for the younger and the twelve families supported each other.” Aside from volunteering, Malia was also pleased to find few barriers between the multitudes of delegates from varying cultures attending the conference. “At W2W, there is a great feeling of connection with the other young women,” says Malia. “Here, I know that everyone respects me for who I am.” For this reason, Malia affirms, “Women2Women has been so important to me, and I don’t want anyone to miss out on it!” ●

Faryal Gohar, Pakistan, W2W – 2006

“After W2W, I was inspired to write a research paper on factors influencing professional career preference and gender and conducted a comparative study of male and female students in Pakistan,” says Faryal, a W2W – 2006 participant. “After traveling abroad for the W2W conference, I realized that there is a wealth of career opportunity available that is not limited by gender.” She states that her larger goal is to help youth in Pakistan become more independent in choosing their career path, to “wipe away preconceived notions regarding women’s careers and to give all students access to career counseling.”

“I was looking forward to the W2W – Jordan conference, focused on ‘Leadership in Action,’ after learning about how youth around the world, particularly American youth, are involved in volunteerism,” says Faryal. “I want to bring this spirit of civic engagement to my community in Pakistan.” In fact, Faryal – who is now teaching a business class at a local university – has already begun pursuing this goal. Soon after W2W – 2006, Faryal organized a three-day community service project called “Confidence Building and Training Program for Special Children” for children of the Al-Farabi Institute for Special Children in Islamabad. She also collaborated with a local NGO, Social Aid and Awareness Program, to help make her idea a reality. “W2W – America was my first exposure to volunteerism,” Faryal recalls, “and it really inspired me to reach out in my own country.” ●



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Overheard...

"I'd like to do a master's degree and start my own environmental project in Bahrain. And my long term goal: I want to build the first aquarium in the country, in Bahrain, and I also want to become recognized as one of Bahrain's first marine biologists."

- Reem Khalifa Al Mealla, Bahrain, W2W - 2007



W2W delegates visiting Mt. Nebo.



Watching the sunset over the Dead Sea.

"A lot of people are afraid that Americans might not be welcomed in certain places...but...people are so willing to meet you and as long as you keep an open mind and you are willing to try new things and meet new people, you'll get the same attitude back. And I think that's pretty general across humanity."

- Julie Hawthorne, Pennsylvania, US, W2W - 2008

"I was a part of W2W back in 2006, that was three years ago, and these three years I've truly celebrated what I took back home – that is, friendship, new connections; misconceptions were taken away."

- Assra Jabeen Jafri, Pakistan, W2W - 2006



W2W delegates mingle and network at "1,000 Voices" reception.

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