Participating Institution: Bard College  
Student Organizers: Lauren Blaxter, Ameer Shalabi, Nadine Tadros, Daniel Gettinger (Sister-City Relationship)  
Student Participants: Zelda Bas, Sylvia Estes, Kathryn Dixon, Wilson Brehmer, Dylan Cassidy, Caley Cross, Kedian Keohan, Jason Toney, Matilda Tucker, Harrison Liddle, Hallie Greenburg, Benjamin Difabio  
Title of Project: Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative – Youth Center  
Dates: June 9-29th 2013  
Country: West Bank, Palestinian Territory  

**Proposal for the Davis Projects for Peace**

**Description of Project:**

The Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative (BPYI), an entirely student run organization, was founded in 2008 with the belief that constructive civil engagement, cultural exchange, and education are fundamental means to building a viable and sustainable Palestinian State. By working in collaboration with the people of Mas’ha, a small village in the West Bank, BPYI hopes to create a non-political action-oriented program with the goal of connecting Palestine with Bard College and its surrounding area.

Every year, twenty Bard College students travel to Mas’ha, a small village in the West Bank, where we partner with the local community to run children’s summer camps and community service projects, teach English classes and engage in cultural discourse. Additionally, the summer program BPYI organizes field trips within the region including the first Palestinian educational visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, with the exception of the past summer, wherein we encountered political obstacles that prevented the trip. The Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative established the only public children’s library in Palestine, which opened with a ceremony in August 2010, attended by members of the US Consulate in Jerusalem and the Governor of Sulfite Province. The following year in 2011, with the help of the Davis Peace Grant, BPYI built the first playground in the village of Mas’ha. In 2012, we began building a youth center for the village, which we were unable to complete in full.

Over the past four summers, BPYI in cooperation with the village has created well-loved public spaces of learning and play for the children of Mas’ha, the library and the playground. In the summer of 2012, we began the ambitious project of renovating an abandon building to be used by the local youth group. The youth group is extremely important to the village because it provides a space in which teenagers and young adults can develop skills and learn from each other rather than spend their time on the streets. The youth group of the village is highly
motivated. They want to bring diverse programs and projects to the village to empower and educate the youth. However, their ambitions have been stifled because they lack a space to use. BPYI, as project run by and for young people, understands the immense potential of young people. Youth have a particular kind of energy and drive that when supported can result in extraordinarily successful projects like our own. Many of the participants of BPYI are members of the youth group who wish to see the kind of work we spend our summers doing continue throughout the entire year. For the summer of 2013, with the Davis Project for Peace’s support we would be able to complete renovations of the three-floor youth center.

**Importance:**

Although the Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative is strictly non-political its importance is highlighted by the situation on the ground. Conflict in the region has lasted more than 60 years, the Palestinian people are isolated from the rest of the world by a wall and the poverty rate is very high. However, political avenues have been largely ineffective. By emphasizing civil engagement, enabling human connections between Palestinians and Americans, and encouraging education, BPYI, as a grassroots project, bypasses the stalled political process, creates an arena for dialogue and facilitates real change on the ground. Furthermore, being the only American student run organization of its type, the Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative is truly unique.

**Feasibility:**

While last summer, the renovations of the youth center had many unexpected costs, having worked on it already for a summer we now have a clear picture of the cost and feasibility of the project. The budget narrative listed below details all expenses necessary for the construction of the youth center. We are able to save significantly on labor costs because BPYI participants will be the primary source of labor. There are a few specialists such as the contractor and the electrician that are necessary to make the youth center safe. However, aside from that labor is voluntary by BPYI participants. We anticipate the final renovations to cost the entire $10,000 of the grant. However, we hope that we will complete the youth center under budget and if that is the case then the remaining funds will be donated to the youth club for operational costs. This project is sustainable because after the BPYI summer program ends, the youth club will use and maintain the youth center. It will become a space that can be used year round. The youth club and the village council have pledged to maintain the upkeep of the building.