

## SUMMARY OF YSEP '09 OUTCOMES & RESULTS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The "Young Social Entrepreneurs Program" (YSEP) was launched in 2009 as a joint project of Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Outward Bound Center for Peace Building (OBCPB). It partnered OBCPB's expertise in leadership training through experiential education with SFCG's extensive experience addressing conflict resolution through transformational leadership for civil society leaders. The program's objectives were especially relevant to the Israeli-Palestine conflict, where Middle East experts cite a need to develop more effective civil society leaders and coalitions capable of sustaining peace.<sup>1</sup>

The program's activities, conducted between February and August 2009, included a catalyst wilderness expedition in Texas, USA, two 4-day reunion training/workshop retreats in Turkey and Cyprus, and ongoing training through individual coaching and mentoring.

Regular assessments were conducted throughout implementation with questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and group debriefings. 11 participants completed an exit interviews and questionnaire in August and September of 2009 and a One-Year Follow-up survey in November 2010. These provided the staple of participant feedback on outcomes and impacts and form the basic "data" set for this evaluation. They are supplemented with the Memo of Understanding between the partner organizations, program descriptions and some facilitator notes. A complete list of documents can be found in **Addendum I**. The analysis used qualitative methods to draw conclusions. The One-Year Follow-up included a numerical rating scale which suggested a few quantitative results (See **Addendum III**).

The purpose of this evaluation as was to present findings about the results and impact of YSEP09 with reference to its stated objectives and intended outcomes. The goals, objectives and outcomes can be found in the Memo of Understanding between OBCPB and SFCG and in other YSEP program descriptions. An explanation of the categories used for this report is attached in the as *Addendum II*.

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<sup>1</sup> See as an example: "Role of civil society in promoting a just and lasting peace in the Middle East; an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue; proceedings." International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. United Nations Publications. 2004.

## SECTION I: POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

### OVERALL PROGRAM QUALITY

Alumni uniformly praised the quality of their YSEP experiences, attributing their recent personal and professional growth to the program. They characterized YSEP'09 as “unique” when asked to compare YSEP to other leadership programs. Others described YSEP'09 as “amazing and powerful”; “simply incomparable... in a different league”; “unparalleled”; “the most effective program I ever had” and “a life changing process”.

### PROGRAM ELEMENTS CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT TO PARTICIPANTS:

Alumni distinguished several features of the program as the most effective:

- The Outward Bound format which presented unique physical and mental challenges in a wilderness environment;
  - “The combination with Outward Bound is genius (sp author’s).” (Participant, 1-yr Follow-up)*
  - “The insight of producing peace and initiative through adventure-base peace building- it works, integrated us very well,” (Participant, Exit Interview)*
- The quality of facilitation; the skills, level of engagement and diversity of styles among the program’s facilitator;
- The deep interpersonal connections between participants, enhanced by working, learning and living together in the outdoors, away from familiar environments;
- The emergence of a group identity and the degree of commitment to this group that participants sustained throughout the program;
- Individual coaching and mentoring;
- A sense of external validation, personal value and increased confidence which participants derived from being “invested in” by both implementing organizations. The duration of the program, the equipment and logistical attention given to the Texas expedition, the opportunity to travel internationally, regular follow-up of their progress and individual coaching all contributed to these feelings of trust and appreciation.

### PROGRAM IMPACTS:

YSEP '09 demonstrated its strongest outcomes in four areas:

1. Transmission of leadership skills to individual participants ;
2. Overcoming prejudices and transforming personal attitudes toward and “the other side”;
3. Increased engagement in peace building activities;
4. Re-enforced commitment to peace building.

#### 1. LEADERSHIP

- 8 of 11 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were more effective leaders within their communities and organizations as a result of their YSEP '09 experiences.
- 9 of 11 agreed or strongly agreed that their awareness of leadership styles and understanding of their own leadership style had improved as a result of the program.

- Several alumni said that their own leadership practices had become more “inclusive.” Several others acknowledged how important their skills of co-leadership, delegation and trust had become in their work since completion of YSEP.

*Before the experience I was used to do everything, and take charge of everything. After this experience I became more laid back. I step back in many cases. One example is my role in the forum. I used to be on all the committees. Now I delegated some of my roles, which made me more relaxed. (Participant, Exit Interview)*

- 4 participants reported increased confidence in their ability to influence their own organization and others:

*Now, I am able to change the position of a person without him/her knowing. I became more systematic and I know myself better, I also learned that leaders are not only people in front. (Participant, Exit Interview)*

*I can be more assertive within my org, for example - demand more, feel more confident in the role of a "director." (Participant, 1-yr Follow-up)*

## 2. IMPACT ON PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS “THE OTHER SIDE:”

The personal relationships fostered between participants during the expedition and retreats profoundly affected many participants. Sustained contact allowed individuals to challenge their own prejudices and stereotypes while promoting compassion for their different life experiences.

One participant articulated the fundamental connection between these new attitudes and the larger goals of peace-building through cross-cultural connections:

*“There were powerful moments of two participants- Israeli and Palestinian that touched us all and from which we learned that there is no other way but a joint struggle, since the pain is mutual.” (Participant, 6 month Exit Interview)*

- More than half the participants said YSEP’09 had provided a unique opportunity for them to interact with the “other side” and that this extended personal contact had changed their own attitudes:

*Yes, I have more information to their experience, to their hardships. I knew many Palestinians before, but the intimacy connected me to the suffering, especially the difficulties Faris in Ramallah have and I don't. (Participant, Exit Interview)*

*The way I view Israelis has changed. The Israeli participants do not represent their government and are not decision makers. They represent the people in Israel. If the Palestinian Israeli conflict was left to the people to solve, they will easily reach a solution. (Participant, Exit Interview)*

*I witnessed substantial change in some people in the way they perceive the other- moving away from stereotypes and prejudices. (Participant, Exit Interview)*

The mutuality of these contacts was remarkable:

*I was many times in my life part of a group but never had the opportunity to be part of such a group. I never meet Palestinians in a personal level and that was a big thing for me that affects me a lot. (Participant, 1-yr Follow-up)*

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*It was special to meet Yoni, who is a religious Jew, and it was surprising to find him so sympathetic, a man of peace, of meeting with people. The guy from Ramallah said he never expected to meet a religious Jew that would sit with Arabs. It was also special for me to meet a religious guy who isn't stuck in a narrow religious way of thinking. (Participant, Exit interview)*

- Several expressed an increased level of confidence that they would be able to work with the “other side “ in the future:

*I saw other aspects of our region, of the Palestinians, of people who work in the area of peacemaking and was enriched from this exposure. I feel more confident now to work with diverse people in the future, even with people who are not spiritual which my area of occupation is. (Participant, 6 months)*

### 3. INCREASED ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE-BUILDING

A powerful example of how the YSEP'09 inspired one participant in particular can be found in Mahdi's story:

*“Before participating in this program, I didn't care about the Palestinian Israeli conflict. My only concern was how I am going to cross the check point instead of thinking of the of the long term effect of the wall. I was too ignorant. I believe that I represented the typical Jerusalemite. I didn't have any political views or interests. Now, after attending the program, I got a position as consultant for the Palestinian president focusing on Jerusalem. Now, I have a clear understanding and positions regarding the Palestinian Israeli issue. After the program I realized that the Israelis don't know a lot about our suffering. To understand an Israeli, I give examples of events that took place in Palestine but I change the place. For example, I tell the story as if it happened in an African country. And after hearing their condemnation, I tell them that it actually happened in Palestine, by Israelis. Based on their reaction, I differentiate among them.” (Participant, Exit Interview)*

Although the impact on one individual is striking, the list of initiatives of alumni following the program offer concrete evidence of YSEP'09 contribution to peace building. For example:

- Within a year of completing the YSEP program, many of the participants had translated the personal connections established with other alumni into concrete activities to support cross-cultural understanding and dialogue.
- One alumni, a Palestinian journalist, interviewed one of the Israeli participants for a local radio broadcast;
- One Israeli and 2 Palestinian alumni co-launched “an Eco-ME center”;
- Another alumni created an “Inter-generational Visioning Council” and has invited both Palestinian and Israelis to Participate to invite P and I members both to participate
- Joint Israeli and Palestinian facilitation of a graduate student retreat

### 4. RE-ENFORCEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO AND CONFIDENCE IN PEACE BUILDING

Alumni noted that their increased confidence in their own leadership skills, a new clarity of vision, and the supportive network created within the group contributed to their renewed enthusiasm for social entrepreneurship.

- The majority of participants believed that YSEP09 had helped them to clarify their personal and professional goals (often described as “vision”). They further identified the importance of this clarity was to their work, increasing their confidence as leaders and re-enforce their commitment to social entrepreneurship.
- For both Palestinian and Israeli, YSEP'09 introduced them to people from their own “side” of the conflict who shared their values and social activism. These new contacts provided an important source of support – bolstering

confidence in their own beliefs and providing a network of like-minded people with whom they could brainstorm and build domestic coalitions.

*One Palestinian woman described it as “powerful and unusual” to meet Palestinians who were liberal and modern and shared her political views. An Israeli man also found, “it strengthened me to be with Israelis who believe so much in the same basic principles, and that in their environment are considered as weirdoes and traitors.(Participant, Exit Interview)*