



Graduates of the Vocational Training Centre celebrate the end of their studies.

LWF VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

In East Jerusalem and Ramallah, hope for a better future for Palestinian youth is being built through educational opportunities supported by Canadian Lutheran World Relief. The Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has been in operation in the West Bank since 1946 as a program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), CLWR's principal partner in community development work being carried out there.

VTC began as the Lutheran Trade School, operating on the campus of Augusta Victoria Hospital. Originally, three-year training programs were offered in carpentry, auto mechanics, and metalwork. In 1964, the Center moved from the Augusta Victoria campus to a new and larger facility in Beit Hanina, a suburb of East Jerusalem. In 2000, the LWF began training women in the profession of telecommunications and has graduated over 75 females during the past nine years. VTC leaders say these young women have become terrific role models in their

communities and are encouraging others to consider vocational training.

The Ramallah campus opened in 2004 to meet a need for additional training programs in the West Bank as a result of the Israeli-built separation barrier. Ramallah also serves as a base for satellite outreach programs being offered in smaller and more remote villages. Together, the two campuses enroll 260 students per year.

Overall, VTC's strategy of training young people between the ages of 14-18 in vocational areas that match employer demand has reaped impressive results. Employment rates among graduates are among the highest of all degree programs nationally. Three of every four VTC graduates find employment or become self-employed within six-months of graduation, and 96% have become actively engaged in the work force or seeking work compared to 44.7% of youth in the same age group nationally.



Photo: LWF-Jerusalem

In recent years, the number of females participating in VTC programs has doubled.

GRADUATES FIND MEANINGFUL WORK

Since its launch in 2004, the Vocational Training Centre's Ramallah campus (VTCR) has graduated close to 300 students from its one-year apprenticeship training program. The apprenticeship program combines classroom learning with in-the-field training. The first three months are spent entirely in the center, learning the technical skills needed in a competitive market. The rest of the year, students are sent directly into the market three days each week. VTCR Trainers visit each student at least once a week and hold consistent meetings with site supervisors. All of this training serves students well when they are ready to enter the job market. Three graduates from class of 2008 demonstrate this well.

Mahmoud Mkhaimer, age 21, is from Beit'ur, a village near Ramallah. He made the decision to attend VTCR based on its good reputation of training and quick entry into the workforce. Mahmoud says that VTCR not only gave him the technical skills needed in carpentry, but life skills needed to work with people. After graduation, he was hired by Ahmed Ajoly Carpentry workshop in Ramallah, a company he had apprenticed with during his training program. His boss, Akram Ajoly, says that most 40-45 year olds from his village trained at the VTC in Beit Hanina and that he wished he would have been able to train at the VTC when he was Mahmoud's age.

Heba Khaseeb, also age 21, graduated with a degree in telecommunications in August 2008 and was immediately offered a position at Al-Nada Mobile Center in Ramallah where she now works as floor manager. Besides working



Photo: LWF-Jerusalem

Automotive mechanics is one of the programs offered to Palestinian youth at the LWF Vocational Training Centre.

with customers on a daily basis, Heba also specializes in maintenance, hardware and software. After a friend originally told her about the program, Heba decided to enroll especially because of the special training in the market. She still keeps in close contact with her instructors and encourages all women to engage in some sort of technical training and to be a voice for all women in Palestine.

Yousef Abu Safiyeh, age 19, is from the village of Beit Sera. Like Heba, Yousef went directly into the job market at the Hisham Sarsor Aluminum workshop. Yousef believes his training at VTCR taught him how to treat others with respect and kindness, traits that are especially important in the workforce. He keeps in close contact with his aluminum trainer at VTCR, and still visits the center.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The overall goal of the Vocational Training Centre as stated in its current strategic plan is "to provide quality vocational training and education, to empower young people to become employed skilled and semi-skilled workers, and to contribute to economic development that is critical to building a strong civil society."

You can play a role in helping the Centre reach its goal with a symbolic gift of \$800. Such a gift would provide support for one student for one year covering costs related to tuition, books, tools, accommodation and travel.

For more information, please contact the CLWR Community Relations Department by telephone at 1.800.661.2597 or by email at tbrook@clwr.mb.ca.