FHS Donations Received by Children in Hay el-Gharbeh  
by Kareem Elzein

We arrived at the small shanty town of Hay el Gharbeh tucked below a dirt embankment beside the striking profile of the Sports City complex, adjacent to Sabra and Shatila. The three of us – Jad Jabbour, Samira Ibrahim, and myself – parked beside the madrasi ran by Tahaddi, a local NGO that provides services to street children of the area. Samira brought us to the organization’s ‘modest office where the provided medical services and health consultations and education sessions.

Samira, an MPH student in the HPCP concentration, has worked as a nurse with Tahaddi for two years. She described how working there transformed her life. She admitted that she was afraid the first time she visited the neighborhood, but that now its landmarks and colorful residents were frequent examples of hope and perseverance. Tahaddi runs an elementary school and preventive care clinic that serves the areas’ diverse population. Without the organization’s services, many residents would go without basic health care, and many children would not learn basic life skills.

We left the main office and wandered through the narrow alleyways, passing by a mixture of concrete homes, cinder block huts, and stone shacks, most with roofs made of metal sheets. Families sat outside in the alleyways, watching as we passed and exchanging welcomes with Samira. After five minutes, we arrived to the home of a woman with four beautiful children. The children sat and ate a meal of potato and bread as we talked with their mother and her friend. The room was about four meters by four meters – the only room in the ‘house’ – and had a distinct odor, likely a mixture of dust and mold, which weighed on my lungs. The conversation was very sober, as the woman described how her husband had recently been in a car accident that resulted in an amputation and several other severe injuries.

The children ran around the room, and one of the four children, a boy about five years old, playfully ran away from his mother, afraid that nurse Samira would give him a vaccination. We gave the family three winter jackets, one for their young girl and two for the boys. We took a picture of the children wearing their jackets and left soon after. Our return route took us through the ‘poorer’ parts of the neighborhood, which seemed akin to what one would expect of shanty towns in Haiti or Sub-Saharan Africa.

The purpose of our trip to Tahaddi was to help distribute the donations collected by FHS students for the 2010 Winter Donation Drive. In total, we collected over 30 winter jackets, 25 pairs of shoes, 5 bags of non-perishable food, and a variety of other items. A majority of the clothing contributions came from purchases made with the proceeds of the FHS Christmas Event, an amount totaling over $400. But to be honest, I believe we fell far short of our potential as a faculty. In reality, our contributions may not dramatically change the life conditions of Tahaddi’s constituency. Much more must be done to make that difference. If you are interested in working with Tahaddi or want to make other contributions, please contact Samira Ibrahim (sammour07@hotmail.com) or check out Tahaddi’s website (http://www.tahaddilebanon.org/index.htm).

White Ribbon Campaign Challenge at AUB  
By Silva Kouyoumjian

KAFA is an active NGO dedicated to stopping violence against women in Lebanon. “KAFA’s mission is to work towards eradicating all forms of gender-based violence and exploitation of women and children through advocating for legal reform and change of policies and practices, influencing public opinion, and empowering women and children.” KAFA was celebrating the 16 Days campaign, which is against gender-based violence. The campaign is an international effort originating from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute in 1991.

This year for the first time in Middle East, KAFA held a White Ribbon Campaign (WRC). Before their closing event for the 16 days’ of activism, they launched the WRC at the American University of Beirut (AUB) campus on Thursday on Dec. 9th from 10am
FHS Faculty Retreat
By Farah Saab

On a rainy Wednesday in January, FHS faculty members and five students postponed their busy schedules to attend the FHS Faculty Retreat.

As your elected graduate student representatives, we worked to democratize student participation at the retreat by including undergraduate students and improving the student selection process. As your representatives, we suggested that undergraduate students should be part of the retreat, as they are “in the faculty” longer than graduate students and probably feel a great sense of ownership and belonging at FHS. Striving to keep a diverse group of students at the table, we proposed that students should volunteer themselves to attend, as opposed to the department heads making the decision. We sent an e-mail informing students about the event and urging their participation. Four students responded, though only two graduate students (Nabil Natafji and Wissam Haj Ali) ended up coming to the retreat.

Dean Iman Nuwayheh began the Fall 2010-2011 FHS faculty retreat with an opening address that introduced the main theme of the retreat, “Developing a Strategic Plan for 2012”, followed by an elaborated overview of the major recent accomplishments and coming activities in the faculty. Following that, Dr. Kassem Kassak from the Health Management and Policy department revisited the FHS strategy map which includes a vision statement, strategic themes, objectives and initiatives.

Afterwards, we discussed long term trends and influences that might impact the direction and growth of our faculty. A debate was then held after all groups completed discussing the components of the document supplied. Following that, groups were divided in order to analyze the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that were delineated to FHS. This space provided room for us as students to highlight some of the academic and non-academic concerns that were raised in the student town hall meetings. After the lunch break, the group examined, analyzed, and discussed AUB’s “Strategic Plan Overview 2009”. Finally, the retreat ended with an interesting “Open Floor Discussion” facilitated by Dr. Kassak and a “Thank You” note by Dr. Nuwayheh.

Participating in the faculty retreat was such a great opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students. Hope all of the above mentioned will get you interested in participating with us in the next faculty retreat!!
FHS Christmas Event
By Liann Abu Salman

The Faculty of Health Sciences held its first Christmas Gathering this year. Over 150 graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff from all departments attended the event, all contributing to its great success.

Everyone came together to share the Christmas spirit over food, drinks and dance, but several surprises were in store as well. Several FHS students showcased their talents, performing music with singing, guitar and piano to an adoring crowd. Students organized a cake competition, whereby a panel of FHS faculty members judged student-prepared cakes on their merits of taste, smell and decoration. The student who prepared the winning cake was awarded a special Christmas gift.

Last but not least, in line with the beloved Christmas tradition of Secret Santa, students from the Environmental Health (EH), the Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS), Masters of Public Health and Masters of Sciences programs exchanged gifts with one another. Nevertheless, no one went home empty handed, for Drs. Jurdi, Ramia and Kamleh offered every attendee a Christmas mug as a keepsake from the event.

As Christmas is a time of giving and sharing, the event that fostered this spirit extended beyond FHS and included two humanitarian organizations: ‘Ajyalouna’, and ‘Tahaddi’. The food at the event was prepared by Ajyalouna, a humanitarian organization and women’s cooperative that serves the needy. During the event, many attendees purchased Tombola tickets, the proceeds of which were contributed to the FHS Winter Donation Drive, a charity drive benefiting Tahaddi, a community-based organization that provides street children in Hay al-Gharbeh with educational resources and medical services. The money went towards clothing, shoes, medical services. The money went towards clothing, shoes, and food for these children.

The Christmas Gathering was planned and coordinated by FHS students Kareem El Zein, Liann Abu Salman, Crista Bassil, Mia Nasr, Reem El-Hajj, Paul Nahhas, Nour Saab, and R.A. Khalil Kreidieh, all of whom worked alongside the FHS-SRC and under the guidance and support of Ms. Joumana Nasr.

The event was a huge success as it brought together the whole FHS faculty: students, teachers, and staff. All enjoyed each other’s company amidst a festive atmosphere. Hopefully, this gathering becomes a yearly tradition.

Lab Safety and Hygiene: An Option or a Must?
By Mohamad Al Medawar

Being a Medical Lab Student, or as we’d like to call it “MLSPians”, it’s hard not to think of every item you pick up as a source of contamination! After studying and going over most of the pathogens that exist in our environment and their modes of transmission and infection, it’s hard not become a hygiene freak, where cleanliness is a priority as much as food and water are.

Still, we sometimes find ourselves unaware of the contaminants we might be transporting from our hospital to our community by the mere fact that we are not properly isolating the objects we use inside the lab from the objects we use outside! For example, we use the same pen to write the reports in the lab while wearing the gloves that we touched tubes and specimens with, and to write our notes during classes. We might even lend those pens to classmates unaware of where that pen might have been. Some people also have a nasty habit of biting on the back of the pen facilitating a much more dangerous route for oral transmission of diseases. Cell phones pose a similar problem. Students and staff alike tend to pick up their phones from their pockets to check the time or answer a call or a message without contemplating the possibility of contamination and the contamination of every object that comes into contact with the phone (pockets, purses and their contents). Even though we might remember to take off the gloves or wash our hands before taking it out, virtually every surface in the lab is contaminated and placing a phone, book, or paper anywhere in the lab may lead to contamination.

Although it may be obvious, we sometimes tend to overlook these incidents whether absentmindedly or on purpose, possibly to showoff “indifference” or “toughness” about the matter. However, we all know there’s nothing “cool” about disease and sickness, especially if our careless actions lead to the illness of our loved ones.

The solutions to this problem are clear, as they have been laid out in the lab safety rules all MLS students have committed to memory through the course of our education. We need to think carefully about our actions in hazardous environments and their potential effects. We must
emphasize the need to isolate items we use in the lab from the outside environment, and changing our gloves every once in a while helps reduce the risk of contamination considerably. We must also keep our guard up during lab activities (i.e. we shouldn’t “get comfortable” and throw our stuff around the lab or slack off on performing the routine hygiene procedures). I raise these issues not to inspire fear among the non-medical lab community at AUB. Rather I raise these concerns to serve as a reminder to students, faculty, and staff in the MLS program of the importance and benefits of good lab hygiene and safety practices.

**Graduate Town Hall Meeting**

By Silva Kouyoumjian

On Wednesday January 12th, 2011, the FHS-SRC invited the graduate students for a town hall meeting from 12 to 1pm. The meeting was held at FHS in room 201, facilitated by Silva Kouyoumjian, Farah Saab and Kareem el Zein. We were lucky enough to have students from all concentrations (HPCH, EB, and HMP) and most were first year students. After we introduced ourselves as SRC members, students were informed about the SRC members’ meeting with the dean later that day. They were assured that their comments would be anonymously communicated to the dean.

The first discussion started with a second-year student about group work. She expressed her concern that students were not trained to work in groups, especially with people they did not know. Other students were concerned about group coordination and sharing of work responsibilities. Most felt that work was not shared equally, and that it was unfair that group work was given a large percentage of final grades. Students also felt that group sizes were too large in many of their classes, and this lead to problematic group dynamics.

During our meeting with the dean later that day, the dean agreed to support a ‘group skills’ workshop for graduate students, one which will be held Wednesday 2 March, 2011. Moreover, several SRC members developed group work guidelines that suggest several ways to strengthen how group work is taught at FHS. This document was sent to the Associate Dean of FHS, Rima Affi.

The size of the class was another issue that was brought up by town hall participants. They felt that large class sizes impeded the quality of learning. Two students also mentioned that having a large proportion of graduate students without any work experience was a setback in terms of maintaining the quality of discussions in the classrooms. Furthermore, they believed that the learning process was inhibited by the load of courses and that there was too much emphasis on grades. Students felt limited in their choices for electives and for practical courses provided in the faculty. The SRC communicated this issue to the dean, which lead to his agreement to offer an elective writing course that taught practical public health writing skills.

We realize that the timing of the town hall meeting coincided with the exam period, but we hope that in the coming events there would be more participation. We want to sincerely thank the students who attended this town hall meeting. Thank you for coming and for sharing your critical comments with us. We’ve raised all of the issues that arose during the town hall with the Dean and administration and they are taking them into consideration for improvement. Finally, before ending this letter I would like to share this quote with you from the well-known American advisor Anthony Robbins that “Quality questions create a quality life. Successful people ask better questions, and as a result they get better answers.”