

## **OXFORD RAMALLAH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION (ORFA)**

### ***Proposal to support the visit of young people from the Al Amari camp in Ramallah to Oxford in the summer of 2010.***

**Aim** To bring a group of young Palestinians from Al Amari camp to Oxford, to break down their sense of isolation, and enable them to enjoy a transformative experience.

**Background** The deprivations and constraints in the lives of young people growing up in camps in the Palestinian territories are all too self-evident, and have a powerfully limiting effect on their world view. These visits from youngsters in Ramallah to Oxford have already proved valuable in offering opportunities for them to engage with the wider world, gain in confidence, and enjoy activities and encounters otherwise entirely beyond their reach.

**Background:** ORFA is a non-partisan voluntary organisation, concerned with promoting understanding and friendship, and with building strong reciprocal links between civil society groups and individuals in Oxford and Ramallah, on the West Bank of Palestine. ORFA has real grass-roots links, and strong commitment to solidarity with, and practical support for, the Al-Amari camp community.

Since 2002 ORFA has sent a number of delegations from Oxford to Ramallah, funded by the participants themselves, and has also invited Palestinians to visit Oxford. In 2005, and again in 2007, ORFA raised funds and organised a two-week visit to Oxford for disadvantaged children from the Al-Amari refugee camp in Ramallah. In 2008 ORFA sponsored a successful visit by 9 young people (self-funded) from Oxford to Ramallah where they spent time in the camp, participated in a video workshop with local women and young people, and made many friends.

As a completely local expression of concern with the human fall-out of an issue of international significance, ORFA does not have the fund-raising machinery of many larger organizations, and in the past has struggled to raise money from local individuals and a variety of other sources.

**Al-Amari Camp:** The camp was created in 1949 on a 9 hectare plot of land close to the centre of Ramallah and has a population of 7,300 registered refugees. The Occupation imposes a desperately hard economic situation on Palestinians, and the camp suffers extreme lack of space and resources. The population is hemmed in on all sides by checkpoints, roadblocks, curfews, and the Wall, and many children have grown up without ever experiencing freedom of movement. The only school in the camp, which is run by UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency), provides education for over 2,000 pupils. The lack of resources makes it difficult for camp students to compete with non-refugee peers in Ramallah and Al Bireh, especially in preparing for higher education. Even this brief visit to the UK is very valuable, both educationally and in terms of their self-confidence; and since higher education is mostly taught in English, the opportunity to improve their language skills has also given a boost to their ability to apply for higher education. For instance, two young people from the 2005 visit have gone on to Bir Zeit University, and one to a university in Jordan; others from the visits are now applying for university and college places.

In 2007, in addition to practising their English, students explored cultural differences through artistic workshops with the Pegasus Youth Theatre summer project; they acquired new skills, such as filming and editing their own video (in conjunction with the Oxford Film & Video Project); and created links with the people of Oxford, many of whom opened their doors to them, took them on picnics, to London, skating,

sailing, swimming, and a whole range of activities. (For further information see [www.oxford-ramallah.org](http://www.oxford-ramallah.org))

***Draft schedule for 2010 visit***

The proposed visit of 8 young people together with 2 adults in summer 2010 will be for two weeks. The possibility of a film project is being explored, as well as other activities. Emphasis will be put on making links with local schools, and there will be the usual sightseeing visits and hospitality. ORFA has good links with Oxford Town Council, and in addition to the Lord Mayor's reception, it is hoped that there will be increased council engagement.

***Note on the selection process***

In principle, ORFA targets the most disadvantaged students but also those who will most benefit. An ORFA member attended a twinning conference in Ramallah in April, and has discussed next year's selection process with community leaders in the camp. This will begin over the summer, and as a group from Oxford will be returning in October to participate in olive harvesting, the final selections will be made in conjunction with camp leaders at that time.

***Budget***

We need to raise £900 per guest, which covers visas, travel at both ends, airfares, and other incidentals. This is the core of the project and the most difficult part for which to raise funding, since support for activities once here is mostly given in kind. Airfares are expensive because the students' only exit point is Amman, which involves 2 additional nights accommodation. Accommodation in Oxford and all food are offered by Oxford supporters of ORFA.

**Total requested:**

**Maximum: ten guests x £900 = £9,000**

**ORFA**, Oxford-Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) c/o Barbara Dziala, 1 Maple Close, Oxford OX2 9DZ tel: 07766345714 ([Oxford-Ramallah-owner@yahoogroups.com](mailto:Oxford-Ramallah-owner@yahoogroups.com))