

ASSABIL: Friends of Public Libraries
Rebuilding Lebanon: Strengthening Public Libraries and Public Schools
August 2006

Rebuilding Lebanon

To successfully rebuild Lebanon, we must do more than repair roads and bridges, rebuild schools and homes, and clean up our polluted beaches. We must also address the psychological and emotional damage that our children in particular have experienced as a result of this war. Some of them have witnessed the death of a family member; many more have seen terrible devastation and experienced great fear and uncertainty. Days after the war broke out, ASSABIL, Friends of Public Libraries, began to organize activities to help these children cope with the effects of the war. We want to expand and build on these activities.

Public Libraries and Public Schools: Working Together

We are seeking funds to institutionalize these activities, to support public schools, and to strengthen public libraries in Lebanon. We believe it is critical to the long-term future of Lebanon that we strengthen public schools and public libraries and encourage them to work together and to support each other. In addition to providing “free and unlimited access to knowledge,” public libraries are places where people from different socioeconomic, religious, and sectarian groups can come together. By linking these spaces with schools, we seek to expand the space in which young citizens can learn to participate in the public sphere—away from confessional and other communal allegiances—for the common good of the community. We want to organize activities at all of the libraries in the ASSABIL network as follows:

- Librarians will read stories to young children (3-8 years old) once a week to encourage them to read and introduce them to their local public library.
- Groups of students (9-13 years old) and their teachers will visit the library and learn about the important role that libraries play in the community as “public spaces” and about the wide range of services that libraries offer.
- Librarians will work with older students (14-16 years old) on research projects and teach them some basic research skills.

Although we realize that the needs may be particularly great in southern Lebanon and in the southern suburbs of Beirut, we believe strongly that it is important that we work to strengthen public libraries and public schools **throughout Lebanon**. This project will involve 22 public libraries (including two in Beirut and 20 outside Beirut) and 28 public schools. We anticipate that 300 children from each public school will participate in the project activities: a total of approximately 8,000 public school students (300 students x 28 schools) throughout Lebanon.