

Youth Advocate Against Child Marriage in East Amman

On October 4, 2016, a group of youth won the We Are Social Leaders (WASL) award for their *Thamara Lam Tanduj* “A Fruit Not Yet Ripe” community initiative. The initiative aims to create awareness around the psychological and health harms of child marriage in the conservative district of Qweismeh in East Amman.

When Bushra Ata, a 20 year old college student, and her friends saw a Facebook post requesting youth volunteers in their area to participate in a community leadership program, they were one of the first people to register. Bushra and her friends attended a two-day training conducted by INJAZ, a non-profit organization that works with youth to become active members in their community. The training built the youth’s social leadership, entrepreneurship and fundraising skills and familiarized them on family and life planning and gender concepts.

Following the training, the participants chose the issue of child marriage as their community project and named it *Thamara Lam Tanduj*. They chose this topic since each member of the group knew at least two cases of child marriage in their community which had all ended in divorce. “One of my closest friends was forced to marry at the age of 15,” said Bushra, “Her marriage lasted three months, she never finished school and won’t be able to since her family won’t support her and her baby if she studies.”

Bushra’s team developed an action plan which included conducting awareness sessions around child marriage targeting youth aged 14 – 17 years and their parents, implementing debate sessions around the topic and producing a short documentary from within the community about the effects of child marriage socially and psychologically. They gained the support of tribal and influential leaders in order to facilitate their activities and sought health, social and legal experts to discuss the implications of child marriage during the awareness sessions. *Thamara Lam Tanduj* reaped its rewards when a panel of judges, made up of prominent Jordanian social leaders, selected it as the winning initiative of the WASL competition.

WASL program develops university and college students’ social leadership capacity and engages them in their local communities. Under the USAID-funded Jordan Communication Advocacy and Policy grant, family and life planning concepts were added in the practical sessions where 15 groups developed a variety of projects addressing family planning as part of life planning, gender equality and early marriage.