

For Immediate Release



## **Center for Civic Engagement at AUB finds light in darkness and community in service**

Beirut, Lebanon- 29/12/2011 - Utter darkness. Confusion. Only voices and your remaining senses to guide you and get you through dinner.

This is what a group of non-visually impaired participants experienced during “Blind Date”, a special event recently organized by the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) at Crepaway Hamra, where they dined, blindfolded, along with a group of visually impaired people from the Youth Association of the Blind.

The unique experience was a success for participants of all ages.

Marwa Bohsaly, event organizer, said that the event was meant “for people to see that visually impaired people should have rights like everyone else, and the benefit of the event is to make people know how others feel, to experience what they experience.”

She explained that the visually impaired in Lebanon are not considered as part of the community and that this event is a first step to helping change this. As a result of the event, Crepaway has been inspired to create a special Braille menu catering to the visually impaired.

This is just one of many other exciting and groundbreaking events organized by CCECS at AUB.

Propelled by the holiday season and their now solid foundation, the CCECS has planned many activities in the past few weeks, such as the Donation Drive and the Christmas Fair, and have organized a plethora of upcoming events for 2012, such as: Supporting Education in Public Schools with MMKN NGO, Drama Therapy with Lebanese Down’s Syndrome Association at AUB, Reading Campaign in Palestinian Camps, Computer Refurbishing, Electronic Waste Collection, Braille Menu and other activities with the Youth Association for the Blind. Starting January 2012, there will be cooking classes for AUB staff, faculty, and students, with proceeds going to Faire Face, a non-profit organization helping cancer patients. Teaching photography to the visually impaired is another activity currently under discussion for next year. With the Outreach Unit planning for volunteering camps, the Community Development Projects Unit involved in many development projects that include urban and rural landscaping/planning, water conservation and alternative agriculture practices,

targeting people with special needs, and the Service/Community-Based Learning (CBL) Unit, the CCECS is targeting all areas of the Lebanese community, through activities, projects, and partnerships.

Earlier this month, members from several organizations around Lebanon representing the disabled, such as the Lebanese Autism Society, Lebanese Down's Syndrome Association, Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union, Youth Association of the Blind , and Arc en Ciel, came together to celebrate "Breaking the Barriers" on The International Day of the Disabled at AUB, organized by CCECS.

The full day of activities included two seminars on inclusion in the schools and in the workplace as well as a poetry competition organized by YAB.

"In every population, in every country in the world, there will be people with disabilities," said Maha Damaj, National Inclusion Project Manager and a member of the Lebanese Down Syndrome Association. The rewarding challenge will be finding each a place and role in society.

The next goal is to make the AUB campus 100 percent accessible to the disabled. Mounir Mabsout, CCECS director, explained his plans for improving publicity, and visibility for CCECS, now in its third year in operation.

All these events and activities are done to "promote volunteering within the AUB community and encourage people to care more about the communities in which they live and to get actively involved with them," said Mabsout. "We would also like to bring the NGOs and AUB closer to each other and create meaningful collaborations for the benefit of all."

"So, what's for the future? CCECS is moving to get more recognition via its action and interaction with the various partners and constituents at AUB and outside. Our motto says it all, '*for a better community*,'" said Mabsout.

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Note to Editors

#### **About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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