

The Advocacy Project: Cooperative des Tisseuses d'Ain Leuh, Morocco
Laura McAdams Summer 2012 Peace Fellow
Final Report

My role as a Peace Fellow with The Advocacy Project in Ain Leuh was to facilitate online purchases and to generate interest in the cooperative's work. I also aimed to lay the groundwork for future volunteers through The Advocacy Project.

To facilitate online purchases, I overhauled the existing website and provided basic computer literacy training. The site (www.tissageainleuh.beep.com) includes translations into Arabic, French, German and Spanish, and now features the following content that was collected over the summer:

Welcome Page- Basic information on the Cooperative des Tisseuses d'Ain Leuh

Who We Are - Photos and description of each full-time weaver at the cooperative.

Our Products - Photos and descriptions of products for sale

Our Process – An eleven-minute video on the process of creating a weaving

Our Motifs - Photos and descriptions of traditional Amazigh design motifs used in the cooperative's weavings

Place an Order - Customers are able to order products directly on the site.

Once a week I provided computer literacy training at the local internet cafe for all interested artisans of the cooperative. I began with the very basics, that is, explaining each computer component and their function, and ending with e-mail basics. Unfortunately, no member of the cooperative is yet able to take pictures of new products, write a small descriptions of them using Google translate, post them online, and then be able to read and respond to orders sent via email. One cooperative member's educated daughter was recently sent home from her work in Syria, and has agreed to temporarily take over this work once I leave. It is my hope that a future volunteer with The Advocacy Project can continue these computer literacy courses with the members of the cooperative.

To generate interest in the cooperative's work, I created content on the cooperative in a number of different places:

A Facebook page for the cooperative that currently has 46 "LIKE"s
(www.facebook.com/tissageainleuh)

A Flickr page with nearly 100 photos
(www.flickr.com/photos/advocacy_project/sets/72157630286515590)

11 blog posts on The Advocacy Project site (www.advocacynet.org/blogs)

6 short videos on various aspects of the cooperative and Amazigh culture (to be posted shortly on the cooperative's channel; ainleuhtissage)

The artisans of the cooperative also were excited to participate in creating an Advocacy Quilt. Eleven women produced a panel featuring traditional Amazigh design motifs. The panels will be connected by a quilting guild in the United States to create one large tapestry for a three-month exhibition at the Human Rights Institute at Kean University, New Jersey with other Advocacy Quilts.

This summer has been one of great personal growth. I've learned how to shoot and edit simple videos and photos, update a website with basic HTML, and how to fully utilize social networking sites like Facebook and twitter.

More than this, though, I've come to understand more about Moroccan Amazigh culture. Throughout my volunteer period, I lived with Khadija Oujkak, the cooperative's treasurer. I am thankful to her for her patience and willingness to share with me her immense body of knowledge. She introduced me to each woman at the cooperative and made sure I was completely involved in the cooperative's activities.

Thanks to her and the women of the cooperative, I was able to improve my Moroccan dialect, learn some key Tamazight (Berber) words, understand the importance of weavings to Amazigh culture and catalogue traditional motifs used in their weavings.

I was invited into their homes and they shared their lives with me. I met their husbands and children, and in many cases, their entire extended families. I broke the Ramadan fast with them, celebrated a birth and a circumcision, mourned at a funeral, attended a birthday party and countless lunches. Each day I spent at the cooperative felt like spending time with friends as I got to know them and understand was important to them. I thank them for their generosity and for welcoming me as part of the family.

Thank you so much to the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation for their support and for making this summer possible.