

Israeli-Arab company wins prestigious fellowship

Founded by a Beduin in Rahat, Duroos helps students with university entrance exams

• By ARIEL BEN SOLOMON
and ARIEL BARBIERI-AGHIB

A young social oriented Israeli-Arab company called Duroos won the Global Fellowship this week for its ground-breaking work in improving college entrance exam scores for Arab high school students.

Duroos was founded by Beduin Fadi Elobra, who began working on improving test scores in the Negev city of Rahat in 2008, he told *The Jerusalem Post* in an interview on Thursday.

Duroos expanded and now boasts five academic centers in Israel: in Haifa, Rahat, Nazareth, Sakhnin and on the Golan Heights.

Elobra said that the next

step is to expand to the Triangle region, east of Kfar Saba, and continue developing their materials and courses. Because college entrance exams are in Hebrew and deal with cultural subject matter that is often unfamiliar to Arabs, Duroos intensive four-month courses focus on filling in the gaps.

This week, Echoing Green – a global nongovernmental organization that provides funding to emerging enterprises that solve social problems – announced that Duroos was one of 52 projects in the Global Fellowship that would receive \$90,000 for two years in addition to receiving mentoring and other services.

The company only hires local teachers, in turn fueling regional economy. Elobra says



MUHAMMAD ZIDANI
(Echoing Green)

that some of the profits are reinvested in the community by providing scholarships for needy students.

A major problem in the Arab sector is that students who study abroad in Jordan or



FADI ELOBRA
(Echoing Green)

Europe, often have difficulty in finding employment when they return. Their program allows more Arab youth to stay and study in Israeli universities.

“Every year 24,000 Arabs take the test and our course helps them take it successfully one time instead of multiple tests,” he said.

Asked how the company is funded, Elobra said that it is a private company, but that important financial support and business development services have been given by the Israel Venture Network, which helps social business initiatives grow.

Muhammad Zidani, the company's CEO, told the *Post* that it is staying private for now, but is open to working with the government and other NGOs in the future as the program grows.

However, at this point, he said, getting the government involved could prove to more of a hindrance in terms of

bureaucracy and time delays.

Zidani, who earned his MBA at Tel Aviv University, said that their goal is to expand the program to other kinds of entrance exams, such as for architecture school and to include post-graduate job placement services.

Responding to a comment that this program appears to be making up for the failures of existing Arab high school programs, Zidani replied that they are filling in the gaps.

“It is very rare for a Beduin enterprise to scale outside of the Negev,” said Michal Steinman, executive director of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues, a coalition of North American Jewish organizations, foundations, private philanthropists

and international affiliates. “Beduin are often seen as the minority within a minority among Arab citizens in Israel, ranking lowest on all economic parameters and often hailing from the conservative traditional clans.”

Duroos uses a focused approach to teaching, specifically honing in on materials and methods that encourage and stimulate the student. Learning is done in small groups in order to maximize understanding and to ensure that no student falls behind.

The average psychometric grade for participants after the Duroos course was 550, in comparison to the average of a 456 for the general Arab population and a 564 for the general Jewish population.