

## Project 500: Can These VA Youth Build a Masjid?

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Seventeen Muslim youth of a small community in Alexandria, Virginia are out to prove that they can make big things happen. If they succeed, their efforts could potentially change the way Muslim youth are perceived in this country.

What exactly is Project 500? What's all of this talk about a bunch of youth coming together to build a Masjid? How could this possibly work? These are all questions people everywhere are asking...and we have the answers. It all began while these 17 Muslim youth were sitting around during their weekly youth meeting expressing their discontent with how fundraising efforts for their community's new Masjid are coming up short—\$275,000 short. During the discussion, one of the brothers jumps up out of the blue and presents an idea that had been brewing in his head for over a week. "Its called Project 500", he says, "We contact 500 Masajid and ask them to donate a simple \$500 each!" The room is instantly overwhelmed with wave of excitement and passion: Project 500 is born.

This wasn't the first time the idea of fundraising for a new Masjid passed through the mind of these youth. Their current place of worship is a one story house and is the center of a large and vibrant Islamic community—too large in fact. With over 400 Muslims coming to Jummah in a house with a limited capacity, it's quite a scene, with some praying in bedrooms, others in the kitchen and hallways, and many outside on the ground in the cold of winter and the heat of summer.

Fundraising efforts by the Masjid administration haven't returned the necessary funds needed to build the new Masjid, sparking the youth to conduct a mini-fundraiser after Jummah one day, raising about \$1600. Although cheerful in seeing the fruits of their effort, the \$450,000 cost estimate for the new Masjid let the youth know that a much bigger and bolder method was needed to raise the necessary funds in a reasonable amount of time. It was only a few days later, during their weekly meeting, that Project 500 was initiated.

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Project manager brother Ramy Zamzam's idea was to send a letter to over 500 Mosques all across the United States and ask them to donate a simple \$500 each. This would add up to a quarter of a million dollars! These youth would be asking the entire Islamic community in the United States to donate just \$500. This Project would take a lot of commitment and dedication to be completed. They had to obtain the addresses, get the labels, the stamps, the envelopes, get the pictures, write up an exemplary letter, and properly advertise, if they wanted it to be successful. SubhanAllah! Within a week, they had everything planned out and were ready to get going. Committees were made, tasks assigned, and meetings held, all for the sake of Allah Subhanahu wa ta'ala.

The individual packets being sent to each Masjid are comprised of four items: A letter, a picture of the youth to add faces to the Project, a creative business card, and lastly a return envelope to send the donation -- pre-stamped and ready to go.

To get this done, three committees were formed. First, was the letter committee, which was responsible for coming up with the full content of the letter that was going to be sent. The second was the picture committee, which was responsible for coordinating and setting up the details of the picture that was going to be sent. The third committee was advertising, responsible for getting the word out about the project. Their goal is to have Masaajid everywhere expecting and eager to receive the letter.

Just a few weeks away from scheduled May 1, 2008 launch date, the committees have made a significant amount of progress. 1700 out of the 2500 addresses have already been collected, an order for 5000 business cards has been placed, the letter content has been completed after ample editing and numerous drafts, customized shirts have been purchased for the picture, orders for envelopes, labels, and stamps have been placed, and a website has been put up: [www.project500.org](http://www.project500.org)

. It seems this isn't just a dream, it is reality.

Without the unrelenting support from the leadership of the Mosque, this project could not have the structure it currently has. When the leaders of the community were briefed on the project, there was a reaction that would be strange in other communities, but not here! Their reaction was, "go for it—tell us what you need." The leaders are used to these youth setting their minds to something and making it happen. They have encouraged the youth group to be innovative and provide structural guidance to the youth's humble efforts in making a significant contribution in building a house for Allah's worship.

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Although the need for monetary funds is common among Mosques in the U.S., this Mosque has certainly tapped into a new formula for fundraising: the youth.

Who are these dedicated Muslim youth? They are the Young Muslims of Virginia youth group (YMVA). All youth group members willingly gave up the majority of time allotted for their weekly youth meetings to get work done for Project 500. This youth group does everything, from discussing heated topics about issues facing Muslim Youth in America today to going on trips to New York, New Jersey, Islamic conventions, camping, playing soccer, basketball, volleyball, and simply having barbecues or going bowling.

The youth group will also be playing a role with a major fundraiser for the New Masjid set up by the Masjid administrators on June 21st 2008, at 6:00P.M. It will be held at 6500 Quander Road, Alexandria, VA 22306 – West Potomac High School. The goal of Project 500 is not only to raise funds to build a new Masjid, but to inspire as well. When asked about the ambitions of the project, Zeshan Mahmood, one of the youth states, “We hope to inspire the Muslim youth all across America to step up and show everyone that we can get things done and prove we are the future of this Muslim Ummah.”

Project 500 sends an essential message and unravels an important lesson for us in the U.S.: the youth should be utilized and trusted more to take on bigger responsibilities within the Mosque. When given the chance, our Muslim youth can take the most complicated problems and transform them into the most interesting opportunities. Project 500 is a good example that ordinary people can do the most extraordinary things.

If you would like to learn more about Project 500 or contribute money to the building of the new Mosque, please contact Br. Ramy Zamzam, Project Manager: 202-640-8839 or email: [rzamzam@gmail.com](mailto:rzamzam@gmail.com)

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