

## Final Internship Report

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Jordan

### *At a glance*

I worked as a Communications intern for Collateral Repair Project (CRP), a small NGO serving refugees in Amman, Jordan. My job mostly consisted of interviewing people at CRP's community center, writing articles and blogposts, and maintaining CRP's social media presence. I also taught an English class and helped out with various programs at the center. CRP offers direct assistance to refugees, but much of its work centers around rebuilding community. The organization is well-integrated with the local community, and many of my coworkers were themselves refugees. CRP is still relatively small, but it serves thousands of people. I feel like I got to make a difference through my internship there, and I certainly experienced firsthand the reality of the refugee crisis.

### *Overview of the Internship*

Collateral Repair Project runs a community center in Hashemi Shamali, one of Amman's poorest neighborhoods and one home to many Iraqi and Syrian refugees. The organization is still young, and in the past few years it has expanded rapidly. CRP is currently preparing to open a second community center, primarily aimed at Sudanese and Yemeni refugees, in Amman's downtown. CRP is community-based, and I absolutely saw the benefits of that. Many of the staff members are refugees from Hashemi Shamali, and in my work there I saw how much CRP stresses placing beneficiaries at the center of its operations. CRP runs a number of programs. Direct aid is a big component; CRP distributes food vouchers, school supplies, and other essential items, since refugees cannot legally work in Jordan and thus rely on CRP to meet their basic needs. Other programs focus on skills and community building and range from English classes to children's activities.

I worked in the communications office at CRP. We had a three-person communications team, including two other interns, though other people often helped out. We were responsible for coming up with and creating content for CRP's blog, social media pages, and other communications. In the course of my internship, I got to join many of CRP's activities and speak with participants about their experiences. CRP makes a point to highlight refugees' stories in its communications material, so almost everything I wrote or photographed involved meeting some new person in the community.

## *Projects + Types of Work*

Most of my work was in an office at CRP's community center. I worked at least four days a week, sometimes five, from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m. I shared an office with as many as eight other people, depending on the day. That environment lent itself to collaboration, and most things ended up as a team effort. CRP only has a few paid employees, so most of the work usually done by paid staff is left to interns. That gave me a chance to have real input on the day-to-day operations at CRP. Internship positions are fairly selective, and every one of the interns I worked with devoted him- or herself to the work – people who come to CRP believe in the organization's mission, and that acts as motivation enough. The passion that my coworkers and I shared made for a great work environment.

My main task consisted of writing content that communicated CRP's work to the general public, especially potential donors. This included planning and writing blogposts, social media posts, and other communications material. Most material involved an interview with someone at CRP. I typically went to interviews with my friend Ibrahim, who grew up in Iraq and spoke both Arabic and English perfectly, though in a pinch I would use my (albeit limited) Arabic to conduct a brief interview. I also did a lot of photography for CRP. It wasn't in the job description, but whenever I interviewed someone for an article I took his or her picture, or pictures of an activity – soon enough, I was photographing multiple events a day.

Aside from my official work in communications, I taught an English class to a group of Iraqi refugees. I designed a curriculum for the class, which met twice weekly, and directed each session. We read poetry and science articles and talked plenty about life in America and Iraq. Teaching English connected with a lot of the people in Hashemi Shamli, and I found it a very rewarding experience.

Most of my coworkers were Westerners, though I did become close friends with the Syrians and Iraqis who worked in my office. One downside of my work environment was that it limited my chance to fully engage with ordinary Jordanians and refugees. Our office operated in English, and my Arab coworkers spoke perfect English and were far more Westernized than almost anyone else in Jordan. That said, I did get a chance to experience a different culture. Most of the people who run CRP's programs come from Arab countries, and most are refugees. I got to know many of them well during my time at CRP.

Overall, I enjoyed my time at CRP. I directly saw the impact that my work had, and I'm glad I spent my summer working for an organization that does such good work.

### *Expectations vs. Experience*

Overall, I had a good picture of my internship going in. The expectations were generally clear to me, and I had a good understanding of what work I would do. For any future interns, I would point out that internships at CRP are analogous to a job, not any sort of educational program. Interns at CRP fill many of the roles that paid employees might back in the U.S, and I found the day-to-day work at CRP very similar to paid jobs that I've held in the past. Expectations are high, and I certainly appreciated that; it gave me the chance to apply my skills and make a real difference.

### *Work Environment + Work Life Balance*

I quickly made friends through work – most of the interns were new in Amman, so we connected over that. I also made friends with some of the local staff members, and we would often meet up after work in cafes or at someone's apartment. CRP is a small environment where everyone knows each other, and our work environment was a very group-oriented one. That fact made it easy to meet people.

Through my work at CRP, I also got the chance to meet many of the refugees who live in Hashemi Shamali. I interviewed a number of people, some of whom told me incredibly personal stories about their lives. Even with people I only met once or twice, I felt I could speak freely, and I appreciated how open and welcoming people were to me.

Outside of work, I found it harder to make close friends in Amman. The joke goes that Amman is not, in fact a city, but one big village. It's much truer than I'd imagined; there aren't many things to do per-se, so people generally spend time with their friends and family. That makes it harder to meet people, though by no means impossible. People were generally very friendly, especially since there were so few foreigners around during the hot summer. People always asked me where I was from, what I did in Jordan, and a whole array other questions. The most common phrase was always "*ahlan wa sahlan*," or welcome; most everyone I met seemed genuinely excited to welcome me to their country.

### *Personal Growth, Skills Learned + Cultural Differences Encountered*

I had never lived alone before this summer in Jordan, nor had I lived in a foreign country. In fact, I had only gone abroad twice in my life. Perhaps I was a bit crazy, jumping off into the heart of an Arab city and making a go at it. And I'm glad for that. Living in Amman was difficult, certainly, but it crystallized some things I already knew and challenged me to question things I never had. I learned a lot from my time in Jordan, and I'm happy I chose to live there.

It's hard to conceptualize a society collapsing. Certainly, I'd read all about the Middle East conflict in my courses, in my books, in the news articles that I turn to every day as soon as I wake up. But I had never really seen it. What strikes you about the Syrians and the Iraqis is how ordinary they seem. Some were doctors, some laborers, other engineers or shop owners. They love their families, make sure their children do their homework, sit around with their friends – they act like normal people. Which, of course, they are. Except that a friend of mine fled with her

father across the front lines, dodging shells through the trenches along the road to the Jordanian border. And my coworker grew up as a refugee in Darfur. He found the money to attend university, where he became a student leader – but then he refused to accept a bribe from the government. They tortured him so badly that he would have died, had he not made it to a hospital in Jordan. Things like that don't seem real, until they happen to your friends.

Both those friends of mine work full-time at CRP, devoting themselves to helping other refugees. Their audacity, even in the face of inconceivable horror, speaks volumes about their characters. It evidences a fundamental humanity, and it is intensely admirable.

That's what struck me most about the Middle East. The humanity laid bare, the worst and the best of us all thrown out in the open. An hour north of my apartment, Assad's forces were carpet-bombing towns on the plains of Daraa. Refugees massed at the border, just a short drive from my peaceful neighborhood. I heard the stories of bombs and murder and sarin gas, of cigarette burns and insurgents and kidnappings. But this time, it came from people I knew, and the reality of it began to sink in.

At the same time, I also discovered an overriding humanity. I realized the lengths that people went to protect others, even more so than themselves. I heard about the fathers who stayed behind to help their families escape. I worked alongside refugees at CRP, who despite living on next-to-nothing devote themselves to serving others. I met a Jordanian man who took days off work to help a Syrian family, strangers, get their refugee papers. These acts of tremendous courage were there too, alongside the violence. I could fixate on the bad, or ignore it and believe in the good, but every day in Jordan I saw the two enmeshed, side by side. That was who we are, and I could take it or leave it.

### *Lasting Impact*

I know I want to keep studying the Middle East. Living in Jordan helped me contextualize a lot of the knowledge that I had about the region, but it also brought up more questions. More than anything, my time in Amman changed the way I understand the Middle East, and more broadly how I understand the world. I've finally decided to pursue a Government major alongside my Earth Science major. I had considered it for a while, but my time in Jordan convinced me that I had much more left to understand. I'm glad I spent my summer in Jordan – it really changed the way I see things. And of course, I want to thank everyone at the Dickey Center. I could never have had this experience without the grant I received, and for that I'm extremely grateful.