TRANSCRIPT

"COLLATERAL REPAIR PROJECT ON THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN JORDAN—STORIES FROM THE FIELD"

A conversation with Amanda lane

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ANNOUNCER:

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DANIEL GONZALES:

Welcome to the Open Society Foundations. Thank you all so much for coming. It's an honor to have you here. Especially the-- honorable-- Prince-- Alumi (PH)-- here. But it's mostly-- a pleasure to have the Collateral Repair Project-- here with us tonight. I'd like to thank-- Monica and Amanda, who will be coming-- oh, here she is-- for being here. Again, we are really honored to host and to associate ourselves-- with you guys. Thank you so much and welcome. Monica? (APPLAUSE)

MONICA GRECO:

All right. So thank you, Daniel (PH), for that introduction. And thank you also for-- hosting us here today. So I've been with CRP now since 2013. And it's my privilege to introduce Amanda Lane to you. Amanda's been in Jordan for a very long time and has been CRP's director since 2013. Before that, she's had a long career in international development in Jordan, in Africa and also has worked with nonprofits in the U.S.

Amanda is a friend and a mentor of mine and a fantastic speaker. So she'll-- you've got a treat in store for you tonight. And a little bit about CRP as well. CRP's a really special

organization. It's sort of unique in its space in Jordan. And-- and Amanda will tell you more about that. Something I want you all to keep in mind, too, is that-- you know, this is a very complicated situation. And there's a lot going on. And we really encourage you to ask questions. So Amanda will have a presentation, but we'd really like for this ultimately to be-- a real discussion. So-- Amanda is ready and equipped to answer your questions and excited to do so. So I think with that, I'll hand it off to Amanda.

AMANDA LANE:

All right. Good. Thanks for coming out. Wow. It's great to see so many people out. I'm really pleased to be here and happy to talk to you. I am loathe to take a whole lot of time going into great detail. Like Monica mentioned, I think-- a lot of-- it's hard for me because I've been living in Jordan for seven years. I'm often not super plugged in to what people's questions are.

So I really-- you know, I'm looking forward to any questions that you want to ask. I am not ex-- planning to talk for very long. So-- happy for us to get into nitty gritty whether it's about the refugee experience in general-- the situation in Jordan and primary host countries. Not super knowledgeable about all the primary host countries. But a fair amount about-- what's going on in Jordan. And then, you know, definitely about the work that we're doing. So-- I kind of hate this. Can you guys see? You can see?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Yeah.

AMANDA LANE:

Okay, good. I just feel odd standing right in front of this-- the screen. All right. So the Syrian refugee crisis is now in its eighth year. And for most of us, it's something-- I-- I mean, I'm assuming for most of us it feels like something that we can barely get our heads around. We've got over 5 million Syrian refugees who have fled to the surrounding countries.

And it's the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. So put a map up. This map is somewhat dated. It's probably the best one that I could find for a presentation. The numbers are actually bigger-- than-- than what is here-- representing the primary host countries. What-- the latest numbers that we have in Jordan are over 657,000 Syrian refugees, over 66,000 Iraqi refugees, just under 10,000 Yemeni refugees in Jordan.

And this is-- the fastest-growing refugee population in Jordan. As well as over four hundre-- or 4,000 Sudanese refugees. We've got just under 1,000 Somali refugees and another 15, 1,600 refugees from other nationalities. So Jordan and other prim-- primary host countries

like Lebanon and Turkey, they've been super generous in offering-- you know, accepting refugees.
One in every 10 people in Jordan is a refugee. And in Lebanon it's even one in every four people in refugees-- people in Lebanon are refugees. It's been a real struggle for these countries to absorb them. So Jordan, for example, before the refugee crisis was already really struggling with a stagnant economy, high unemployment. And of course over 700,000 refugees in Jordan is certainly exacerbating the situation.

It's really key for you to know that refugees in Jordan are largely forbidden by law to work. So this is very much-- influenced by the very existing delicate situation that the government has to kind of engineer-- you know, with the tribes and, you know, just-- a difficult economic situation. I won't go into great detail, again, about the Jordan context, but I'm really happy to answer any questions afterwards. But let's think about what we see in the media.

So the news that we see about Syria in particular is nothing short of overwhelming. We've got horrific images just continuously coming. And I popped a few on my presentation. You've probably seen some of these. Some of these are-- are quite well known and iconic images over the past seven, eight years. And then this was just from a couple weeks ago. I know that I almost feel numbed by it all. You know, with the latest images like this pouring out from-- from the recent chemical attack.

And really all I can feel when I see images like this is deep, deep sadness. You know, this is just a sampling of what we've been seeing over the past eight years. Death, destruction, and senselessness. So I imagine that you all probably feel like I do when you see these photos, when you see the headlines, when you feel inundated by all of this just negative news. I mean, the feeling that one gets from seeing this stuff is just utter helplessness.

And I think it's because we feel like, you know, "What could I possibly do in the face of so much death and destruction? How could I help? You know, how--" it's so big. And I feel-- I don't know. I think about this a lot. Our world feels like such a scary place in many ways where we have no idea what's going to pop in tomorrow's headlines. It often feels to me-- like, I think about it as if the world is just spinning out of control.

And, you know, working with refugees every day, it's something that I'm constantly reminded of. And then added to that is a feeling of, "What on earth could I possibly do to make a difference?" you know, it's just so huge. It's so big. So I am wanting to focus on some of the great things that we're doing. I want to tell you about-- what we're doing-- in Jordan to help refugees that's beginning to make the suffering and the madness-- just might be spinning out of control but just kind of stop for a moment and begin to start turning in the other direction.

So let me tell you a little bit about my work. If you'd walk into our community center at Collateral Repair Project, you'd probably r-- be really surprised by what you see-- you would see. You might walk into a room like this where you would see refugee women quietly offering up acupressure for trauma to other refugee women. Or you might hear people burst

into laughter in an English class because somebody's pronounced a word funny, which is quite common. Very common to see.
Or you might see a bunch of little kids running around, shrieking with laughter at after school club. We have a lot of happiness and a lot of joy at our center, which makes it really lovely for me to come to work every day. Have a lot of happiness and joy, but it's really in stark contrast to the extreme struggle that these families we're serving are facing every day. People who are coming to our center have fled violence in their home countries. And they have nowhere else to turn. They need to get out fast, and they need to take whatever small amounts of money that they have with them and whatever items they're able to carry with them. Once they get to Jordan, they rent a small apartment. And within just a few months, they're out of money.

We go into homes where it's really common for families to be sleeping on tile floors, living in completely bare houses and with no food to eat. And I threw in a few slides. I mean, this is-- this is very common. Like, sometimes people don't even have these thin little mattresses. And it-- you might not know, but it gets very cold in Jordan. So many people don't have heaters. Houses are uninsulated. They're stone. It's cold and very miserable.

A lot of water damage. We have very wet winters. Just really difficult-- living conditions. Here is another kitchen. So as I mentioned, it's illegal or it's-- it's not allowed for Jordan-- not allowed for refugees in Jordan to be able to work. And so that means that they're unable to take care of their basic needs. So putting food on the table, paying for their rent, ensuring that their kids are able to go to school. And that's how these people first find us.

They're desperate to find ways to feed their families. That's what we do at Collateral Repair Project. We help people with what they need. We're a grassroots organization. We're operating on a shoestring. And we really pride ourselves in getting aid to where it's needed most in a really precise manner. So precisely to where it's needed. We see our community center as a one-stop shop where people can come in, get their basic needs taken care of, and then they can begin attending various activities that give them opportunities to gain new skills, begin rebuilding the communities that they've lost, and begin to heal from trauma.

Oh yes. A couple of slides here. This is the exterior of our building. We're located in east Amman-- in a neighborhood called Hashemi Shamali. And it's really one of the epicenters of where urban refugees are living. So this is outside of the center. And then this is our living room space. So when people walk into our center-- we don't have a desk. We're not like large organizations. We don't have a reception center.

People just walk in and-- are hanging out. So we started up in 2006 with the huge influx of Iraqi refugees into Jordan. And we're continuing to serve Iraqis who continue to feel the sectarian-- violence that's still there. Since 2006, we've begun to serve Syrians. Or since almost eight years ago, we've begun to serve Syrians. And we're increasingly turning our attention to other refugee groups.

So Sudanese, Somali, and Yemeni refugees. And their situation is worse than we've ever seen. All of this is in a current context where international organizations have come to help

Syrian refugees. And they've spent the bulk of their funds in the refugee camps where less than 20% of the Syrian refugee population is living. So after seven years of war, international funding to help these refugees has continued to wane.

And that means that more and more families who have been on monthly assistance are starting to get dropped off. So the organizations are no longer able to give them some kind of monthly stipend to help them-- help them buy-- help them-- get through the month. Minority refugee groups like Iraqis, Sudanese, Somalis, and Yemenis have really fallen through the cracks in a system that's been prioritizing Syrians.

They're receiving less aid across the board, and they're unable to access the many programs that large INGOs are running that end up prioritizing Syrian refugees. So Collateral Repair Project is really unique in Jordan because we're-- we're assisting refugees based on need. We don't care where they come from. And all of our programs are open to all refugee groups, including Jordanians. Nearly all the refugee families that we meet for the first time are at their most desperate, and they need help.

What they need most are things like food, mattresses, blankets, cook top stoves, a heater, personal hygiene items. And we work really quickly to get them what they need. We're prioritizing food assistance over everything else. And this is-- this is a photo of-- we have people coming in to get food vouchers. So these are food vouchers here. And once a month at the beginning of the month families come in and get their food vouchers very similar to the food stamp program in the United States.

And they're able to go to a local grocery store and-- get what they need. We decided to prioritize food vouchers because we realized that the stress-- the daily stress of not knowing where you're going to get your food-- I mean, everybody's got to eat a couple times a day. It's a huge stressor. People are able to go. They're able to shop-- for-- for the month, get the food that they need.

And-- it keeps them from, you know, the-- the stress of figuring out how they're getting their food on their table. The food vouchers allow them to maybe not have to pull a kid out of school to beg on the street or really, you know, have to struggle with anger management issues because of just the stress of trying to deal with that. So our food vouchers are feeding families, but they're also helping to protect them in many other ways.

The images that we see stressing the large scale of the refugee crisis might be overwhelming. But really the reality is that we're able to help refugees on a very minimal budget. So with 50 bucks we're able to feed a family of four for a whole month. Or we can get a kid in school for a whole year. And that's really interesting because we have so many kids who are not in school because, you know, families typically have multiple kids.

They're able to send their kids to the public schools, but they need a backpack, they need to have a uniform, and they need to have school supplies. And so, you know, if you're unable to put food on the table, being able to, you know, pay for three kids to get into school is

going to often be a deal breaker. So I'd like to move on to what I really want to tell you about though. So getting food into people's bellies is just a really small part of what we do. It's an important first step. It's taking care of a critical need. But it enables people to begin taking part in our community center activities. And our community center programs are what really is exciting about what we do. They're creating a space for refugees to not only heal but to begin to thrive. So I remember about five years ago when-- I was asked to-- to take up this position our operations were a lot smaller.

Monica was actually in Jordan with me. And it was kind of me and Monica, and our one employee. CRP was mainly feeding people. We were-- offering a few classes here and there at our community center, but it was so apparent how the depth of trauma had just-- you know, was everywhere in our community. Nearly every family has members who are suffering from trauma, PTSD, depression. High blood pressure is rampant, as is diabetes. And I remember thinking how overwhelming it was.

Because, you know, we weren't psychiatrist, or psychologist, or therapist. We had this tiny budget and, you know, really weren't sure what we would be able to do. It was really hard 'cause, you know, I wasn't sure how we were going to proceed. And what we decided to do at that point ended up being really interesting because it really ended up setting-- setting the trajectory of our work. And it enabled us to begin helping refugees in-- in a way that I don't think I could have ever imagined.

And this is what we did. It started with yoga classes. We started thinking and we started thinking that it would make sense to help people find a way to get back into their bodies, to be able to help them to better connect with their emotional health, and to offer them ways to begin to be aware of and to engage with their stress. And we were really surprised to see so many men coming to our yoga classes. And they persisted.

Even though they would come in and they might be overdressed, wearing a suit, or, you know, coughing through the class, or rushing out to smoke a cigarette or something right after it was out. But they kept coming. And here's a picture of some of our men doing yoga. And we realized that we were on to something. So we started-- beginning to open up new activities that we knew would help people begin to connect with their inner needs. So we started up a men's listening circle. A support group we call it.

We started up leadership training for women. We started small groups teaching mind-body techniques. And we also started activities where people could begin to interact and grow together. So we started up a really active after school club and teen groups, family violence awareness and prevention discussion groups, and so much more. And something amazing started happening. We began to see people start to transform before our eyes.

And I want to talk to you guys about-- well, actually I'm gonna talk to you about a few people in particular. But starting with this guy, Issam (PH). The first time that I saw Issam was about six months ago. And he walked up to me with difficulty. His body was very much, like, rigid, kind of turned in on himself. And he came up to ask me a question. He came up to ask me if-- if it would be possible for him to get a food voucher.

But I remember it was really hard to understand him. His speech was muddled. And-- and it wasn't clear at all. I even-- you know, I eventually understood what he was saying, but it was so clear to me that he was just struggling. I mean, it was not just his physical and-- and-- and those-- those difficulties for him. But he just seemed so beaten down. And so I remember suggesting to him that he-- he try out one of our m-- or our men's support group because it was-- I remember it was happening that day.

And, again, that was about six m-- six months ago. But what has happened with Issam, like, I can't even begin to tell you. It's kind of amazing. What I know is that every time I see him at the center I feel like he is just lit from within. He now carries himself with ease. No longer folded in on himself. And he speaks so much more clearly. I have another picture. This is him here on the left.

And so before-- before I came on this trip, I-- I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to see, "What's-- what's happened to you, Issam? This is amazing." And so he told me that before coming to CRP he didn't have anybody to talk to or to laugh with. He's living alone. He's-- he's in Jordan alone. And now he feels like he belongs to a community. He says, "I can say anything that's in my heart. And I'm doing a lot better. It's beautifully that I'm psychologically relaxed."

He tells me that his stomach problems and his physical issues have really waned as well. He used to really rely on medication for his stomach. And-- yeah, he's really thriving, which is something that again and again just I see and I find it amazing. He's one of so many people that I've seen become empowered and transformed through the close community that we're nurturing at CRP. I want to tell you about somebody else.

This is Nadia (PH). And maybe you've read about people like her. She's Iraqi. She's from a minority Christian group. And you probably didn't hear about when Nadia started attending a leadership group at-- the women's leadership group at CRP. So this is a program that we have that gives women leadership skills. And it also helps them to take an active role in their own self-care. So I want to tell you what Nadia has to say in her own words because I remember very clearly like Issam the first time that I saw her.

She was-- had recently-- it was a few years ago. She w-- had been living in Mosul and had left because ISIS had come into her town. And when I first met her, she could barely make eye contact. Just very, very traumatized. And that's not uncommon at all. But here's what she has to say. She says, "My whole life I didn't feel like I had any rights. We were living in fear as a minority in particular. I got to the point where I hated myself, thinking, 'Until what point will I stay afraid? I've hurt myself and my children with this fear.'

"And so I came to CRP center. And what can I tell you? It was like psychological treatment without a doctor. I got to know so many of the women who back in Iraq I would have been afraid of." She used to hide out in her home and not go out as a minority. "I had no friends back home, but I came to CRP. And I thought, 'Where were these amazing people in Iraq?' As a group," the women's leadership group, "we have built an unimaginable bond."

And so here are a few pictures of Nadia at our center. This is her in the yellow offering up acupressure to other refugee women. And then this is her in the jean jacket with other women who are part of our women's leadership group. Nadia goes on to say, "I convinced my daughter to come with me to CRP, and I saw her personally changing day by day. Do you know what a happy thing that is to see? That you've done something for your daughter that will impact how she'll go on to raise her own family.

"My daughter has now become a trainer in the women's leadership-- program. And I see her confident in herself now. Her thoughts and her opinions come out naturally and coherently without fear. She now has big dreams." And I threw in a photo of her daughter. This is Zura (PH) in the pink-- leading one of the women's leadership sessions.

And for me, I mean, this is what I love about my work. Like, I walk upstairs to my office, and I'll often, you know, right-- look right down the hall and somebody like Zura, or her mom, or-- or-- w-- Wafa (PH) will be standing in front of a group. And I remember when I first saw them. And here they are, like-- you know, when I first met them, they, same thing, could barely make eye contact. And now they're standing confidently in front of others and-- and, you know, helping others. So where was I?

Usually when I do these talks-- in the past I've highlighted-- you know, I like to highlight people's stories. And I'm happy to-- to say many more, but these are the two I have for tonight. But in the past I would often highlight stories of struggle, and, you know, the great hardship that p-- hardships that people have, and the challenges that they face living as refugees in Jordan. And it-- it's true.

Like, people live lives of struggle every day. And that's the case for nearly everyone in our community. But what I really see now, and this is something that has really been growing over the past few years, is that there are so many, many people at CRP who have been helped in their most desperate moments through our emergency assistance program, through food vouchers, or whatever.

And now, we've brought them on as staff members in an under-the-radar way since technically they shouldn't be working-- or volunteering as community leaders. And that's why, you know, people come to us. And they say, "You know, I-- I-- I would love to lead a class. You know, I taught a computer class in Iraq, and I know you have computer classes. Can I teach?" Or, "I'd like to-- volunteer in our after school program." Very, very common. They're doing this with great joy and a great sense of purpose in spite of having lost so much. And, you know, I can't tell you how many refugees we have who are now volunteering with us. Because those numbers are growing every day. And that's truly what's special about what we're doing. So in spite of the challenges that these refugees face and the uncer-- certainty of our fut-- of their future, our community has become amazingly resilient and empowered.

So we're learning that by giving refugees opportunities to heal, by giving back and helping others, that we've been c-- quietly starting to transform our community and finding out that it's more resilient than we ever could have imagined. I could go on and on showing you

pictures of people who are volunteering for us or refugees who are now working for us who are on the front lines going into families' homes and assessing-- assessing them. Yeah, I'll show you a few. This is Mirwan (PH), who is an Iraqi.

He's now working with us, and he's with our team group on a field trip. These are some of our Syrian and Iraqi women who-- are assessing and doing-- home visits for refugees who come requesting-- assistance. This is a group of Sudanese and Zead (PH), one of our staff members, going out to give food vouchers to Sudanese. And Mahmoud (PH), one of our teenage-- we have a really vibrant teen group. And a lot of these kids are really active in volunteering, and leading out, and mentoring the kids in our after school club.

So, yeah, at CRP we are giving refugees what they need. We're giving them food. We're giving them basic assistance. But what I see as most important is that we're giving them what they really need. And these are those empowering moments that begin to dislodge a cycle for them. You know, they've come. They've experienced so much trauma. But they're getting something extra.

And whether it's to feel free, or to sense the power that they have to help themselves in some way, or just to be offered a moment in time where their world that's spinning out of control just stops for a moment and starts to spin in the other direction. And they might not, you know, be thinking, "Oh, I'm a refugee. This is how I'm identified." You know, just-- just that moment. This work is so much more nuanced, and it's so much more complex that because our community trusts us, because we know them well, we are finding that we're able to do it and that it's something that is the most meaning-- meaningful thing about what we're doing.

We see it as harnessing the intentions of our community to empower them with a way to envision a better future for themselves. And so we're building a future for these people in the uncertainty that we have and even as war and conflict continue to rage on. So war costs a fortune, right? But I want to give you an idea about how scrappy we are as an organization, how far we stretch funds.

You know, we're putting food on people's tables. To give you an example, we're working very, very effectively on-- on a minimal budget. So to give you an example, feeding a person for a week in Jordan costs us $7. And nearly every one of our community center activities is costing, like, $100 or less. So we're able to do so much with so little.
And a lot of it is because of the very close I think knowledge that we have of the community, trust, as well as so many volunteers that are-- that are enabling this to happen.

Let me-- oh, here's one more picture from-- I think this is an English class. Eight years of the Syrians-- of the Syrian refugee crisis is a really long time. And so for us our biggest challenge as we're way into this is that international organizations are able to help less and less.

International support continues to dwindle. And as a result, every day I park my car, and I walk into my office, and I have to walk through at least 50 or 60 people who have recently

been taken off of, for example, U.N. monthly assistance. This is the new thing where we have always been caching people who are falling through the cracks.

And these are people who are desperate for help. They don't know how they're going to pay for their rent. They don't know how they're going to get food on their tables. We're also seeing lots more refugees from other nationalities. So like I mentioned, the Yemenis, the Somalis, and the Sudanese. And in those communities, we're seeing malnutrition like we've never seen before. And we find them living in housing that's really just substandard beyond belief.

We plan to continue to grow. We want to grow our work to help as many people as we possibly can. And I know that as we do, we're going to continue to see people transform before our eyes as they learn ways to take care of their emotional health and through serving others as part of our dynamic community. That's what's been so amazing. You know, you often think, "My gosh, these people have nothing. They're struggling. You know, their lives are so difficult."

But yet they are-- they want to give back. And they're getting so much out of it. It's such a key part of how they're becoming resilient. The crisis continues on. We have no idea what the future holds for refugees in Jordan. But I do know that Collateral Repair Project is changing individuals' lives for the better. Especially in this world that we're living in that often feels like it's just messed up beyond hope, we're giving hope and we're giving healing one life at a time.

And sometimes I think the numbers feel so big. But just the fact that, you know, I get to see this every day is-- is wonderful. I l-- I want to close out, but I-- before I close, I just think it's so important to just mention that-- you know, these people are just like you and me. Most of them lived lives of comfort and ease just like us until one day something happened and everything was changed.

All they want to do, like all of us, is to take care of their families, make sure that their kids are safe. And-- yeah, despite their many challenges, every day I see people who are benefiting from our holistic approach. People who are able to get food on their table. Their stress is kind of freed up. They're able to get into our center and-- begin building community, healing, and giving back. And I just feel so grateful that, you know, I get to see this every day. I love going to work every day.

It's a super happy place. But, yeah, that-- that's what I want you to know. There is so much that can be done through community. And-- I'm seeing it every day at work. So thanks for listening. And-- yeah, I'm happy to take any questions. I was told by Eric (PH) to mention that we'd like to take questions from the mic so that they can have it as part of their recording as well. So feel free to line up if you have any questions. (APPLAUSE)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Hi. That was wonderful. That was really, really powerful. I have a question about what we can do-- here to help-- Collat-- Collateral Repair Project specifically. Are there specific things we can do on this side of the--

AMANDA LANE:

There are so--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

--world?

AMANDA LANE:

--many things. It's hard because I'm in Jordan. And I struggle to really reach out and let people know. I mean, I feel like these stories-- you know, are-- are so important that people hear how we're working, what we're doing. We are always looking for people to like our Facebook page, to share our post, those kinds of things. Those are, like, easy no-brainers. Particularly because we're funded mainly by individual donors.

You know, like, around 70% of our funding last year came in from individual donors or monthly donors who gave us, you know, anywhere from $10, $15, to, you know, a few hundred dollars a month. So, yes, getting the word out-- is-- is huge for us because we're not able to getting grants. People-- you know, funders, the foundations don't want to give money to feed people. So we rely on individuals and people giving monthly to be able to feed people.

I was going to mention also-- social media is huge for us because we're in Jordan. Our outreach is through social media. I don't know if you guys are aware about Facebook and their new horrible algorithm that seems to prioritize people's kind of friendships and personal posts, but they're not prioritizing-- you know, foundations, or organizations, or things like that. So we have in the past, like, since December seen our audience, people regularly seeing our post by about 90%. So our funding and getting the word out is-- is quite a challenge for us. So, yeah, th-- those are very easy things. You know, liking our page, sharing a post, commenting on a post. We figured out that that's-- kind of a good way to game the system. Yeah. Thanks for the question.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Hi. Thank you for your presentation. So I have a few interrelated questions. You mentioned that the Jordanian system prioritizes Syrian refugees. Can you please talk more about how

that occurs and why that occurs? And in terms of your organization, how does your assistance change based on the refugee's national origin? And related to that, what sorts of different challenges are you seeing people from different countries having? Like, what are some more common challenges for each-- region and-- country?

AMANDA LANE:

Oh my gosh. I think we have to stop there for a minute 'cause I'm gonna forget if you're asking more. Let-- let me-- let me speak to those. First question was-- was prioritizing Syrians, right?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Yes.

AMANDA LANE:

Okay. You know, the Syrian refugee numbers are huge and-- got much more international attention from donors-- you know, from-- from large organizations. So the funding has-- you know, just kind of largely went to the Syrian population. At the time when Syrian refugees started coming in-- to Jordan, there were-- there was already a somewhat long-term Iraqi refugee situation.

And so it's just part of kind of the funding cycle and the way that those shift-- based on what refugee populations are in need. You asked-- your question was about the Jordanian government. And that really doesn't apply to the Jordanian government because the Jordanian government is essentially hosting but not-- you know, not funding these initiatives. The-- the funding is coming from-- you know, donor countries around the world giving mostly via the U.N. and then larger international organizations that are coming in with their own kind of, you know, missions and-- and lands. And I've already forgotten your second question I'm sorry to say.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

How does assistance change based on--

AMANDA LANE:

Based on nationality. Well, it's interesting. Because it actually has not hugely for us recently. We have been very small. And we've been growing quite steadily in the past, you know, three-- well, in the past five years. But because we were running on such a shoestring, we really decided to prioritize food security.

As we are starting to have more funding and have more staff capacity, we're moving to more of a case management. I mean, we've always prioriti-- we looked at, "Okay, we give food vouchers. That's what we do. We don't give cash. We don't have that kind of money." As we begin to grow, and have more staff, and can handle larger-- you know, just larger funds and things like that, we're starting to look at medical needs, legal needs-- you know, protection needs, and things like that.

But it varies. I wouldn't say that any particular national group has one area that we prioritize. I mean, across the board there-- there are refugees who struggle to make ends meet, and don't have an income, and, you know, need to be able to pay rent, and stuff like that. A lot of mental health issues, you know? Stress, depression-- trauma, that kind of stuff. Yeah. So it's-- it's quite similar across the board.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Okay. Thank you for that. So my follow-up questions are regarding the food vouchers. How does the food voucher program work-- in terms of how does that interact with the local economy? How are people using--

AMANDA LANE:

Oh yeah. Good question.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

--the different-- vouchers?

AMANDA LANE:

So we are giving people vouchers. We're not giving people cash. They can take a voucher. They can go-- we have a local supermarket in-- next-- closed to the center where we are where the vast majority of the refu-- refugees we serve America living. They can go, and they can shop throughout the month for what they need. It's kinda great 'cause we're putting money into the local economy doing that.

We also are helping a Sudanese popul-- so we're actually getting ready to open a center to reach the Sudanese, Somalis, and Yemenis. We've realized that nobody is serving them at all. And they're too far away that they can't get to our center. So we have another grocery store in their neighborhood that we will soon also be opening another center to be able to reach them in the-- the same approach that we have many-- you know, we're going to start smaller but most of the same activities that we have at our current center.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Okay. Thank you. And my other question is about-- the Sudanese and Somali refugees. So can you talk a little bit about the-- slavery that's happening in Jordan-- regarding-- African immigrants? And how are you helping these-- immigrants who are in slave-like conditions?

AMANDA LANE:

I don't know a whole lot about slavery. I think we find that there--

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

Or indentured servants basically.

AMANDA LANE:

I don't know a lot about that actually. And I-- I'd be interested in talking to you after to d-- to know a little bit more about what you know. This is kind of a work in progress for us. We've done-- we have been giving food support to particularly Sudanese for the past two years. And now as we g-- begin-- in planning to open our center, we had done an assessment. We are really surprised at, you know, just how difficult it is for them.

Because they're generally not getting monthly support. We often see, like, two and three families living in, like, a two-room apartment. We've realized that we're giving a food voucher to a family, and it might be, like, $50 a month, and they're sharing it with other families. So, you know, their nutrition needs are not fully met. I mean, the-- it's-- it's very difficult.

Coupled with-- quite a bit of racism in Jordan. So kids-- you know, mothers tell us that they're not comfortable letting their kids out on the street to play. They're getting bullied and sometimes beaten up. So-- so we're looking at creating a safe space for-- for kids. That's one of our-- our primary things. We don't see the Sudanese actually working a lot. So that's why I'm kind of interested in-- in your take on that. But, yeah, I would love to talk to you more about that.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

And my last question is regarding your positionality. Are you American?

AMANDA LANE:

Yeah, I am.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #1:

How do people interact with you in terms of your national origin given that, you know, the U.S. has destabilized many of these countries?

AMANDA LANE:

Yeah, it's a great question. So-- I have lived in Jordan twice. I lived in Jordan once for seven years-- when I went over with my Jordanian boyfriend who then-- who is now my Jordanian husband. And-- I speak Arabic. And I was-- kind of surprised to find myself living in the Middle East for seven years that first time. And then we went back. And that was s-- seven years ago we-- we returned.

When we went back, the Iraq-- this newer Iraq war had started. And so I got interested in getting involved with the Collateral Repair Project primarily because of that. I felt like as an American that I wanted to get involved in helping Iraqi refugees that, you know, our country had been involved in, you know, making their situation untenable. So-- yeah, I mean, it's a good question. I don't know. I-- I don't feel that I have struggles navigating it. But, yeah, I don't know how I could answer that better. But I do feel that it helps that I speak Arabic. I do feel that it helps that I'm working in a very grassroots way. And that's what I'm comfortable doing. And-- yeah, it's been great. Yes? Next.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #2:

Cool. Thanks for your presentation. It's been really enlightening. My question is-- so I was wondering if you could clarify. Since-- you mentioned a lot of these refugees have trouble paying rent. And I know you guys give them food vouchers. But then since they're not able to work legally, how do they overcome other financial challenges of just paying rent, paying for other basic needs?

AMANDA LANE:

Right. Yeah, it's tough. Obviously it's tough. So, yeah, we-- we don't have the money to pay f-- rent for people. It's sadly just not going to happen. What we do see is that it's pretty standard-- for people to have, say, a relative who lives in another country who might send 100 or $200 every, say, I don't know, two and a half or three months.

People are really trying to patch it together, and they're struggling. It's very common for people to be behind in rent. It's interesting though because even while people might be behind in rent, landlords in general are somewhat forgiving. If somebody comes and says, "My landlord is threatening to kick me out," then, you know, we usually-- I'll call up CAIR. Like, CAIR International has-- might cover, you know, two or three months of rent. So, you know, we often refer people or just, like, try and sort things out for people. But, yeah, it's-- we-- and-- and people will-- it's hard because, you know, if you are a refugee and you're

caught working, you run the risk of, you know, being put in jail or being deported back to your home country. You know, it's-- it's dicey. And a lot of people, especially people with families, don't want to risk that.

I mean, you know, it makes sense. That being said, there are a lot of some kind of-- you know, often some little short-term things. Like, there are some Iraqis in our community, for example, who help with a catering-- a catering thing. But it's-- you know, it's a one-off. Or, you know, it doesn't happen very often. So people are very much trying to patch it together. And, yeah, that's how it works in general.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #3:

First of all, thank you so much.

AMANDA LANE:

Oh, my pleasure.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #3:

I loved hearing really about the, like, holistic nature of the programs and particularly the inclusivity. But to that I think it kind of had me wondering if you could speak to-- and you touched on this a little bit now. But the targeting criteria at-- at assessment stage and then perhaps whether that vulnerability criteria has shifted over the course of the crisis or you've had to kind of recalibrate that-- given that you're serving all-- all nationalities. And then to that also now that you're kind of adopting more of a case management system, what the network of partners for referrals were like.

AMANDA LANE:

Could you say that last--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #3:

What the network of partners for referrals-- is kind of like for you guys.

AMANDA LANE:

All of this is kind of in process. This moving to case manage-- management. Because we really-- our capacity. We-- you know, up until about a year ago we struggled with capacity. And we're very much like, "All right. Let's go." And, you know-- for us it was very important because we, you know, have such a small budget that I was really important to us

to spend the time to really identify and make sure that we're helping the people who need it most.

So for us, it-- it looks like people come in. They register with us. It used to be that we would have registration days. Like, a couple times a week people would come in and we would just be inundated with people. And my staff would be down and, you know, kind of doing a quick minute-- you know, like, five-minute assessment on their tablets. I was quite chaotic.

Now, we-- people can just come to us at any time. We pull in their information. We've started moving-- we're really trying to move to-- to be much more data driven. I mean, we have been. But we're now, you know, doing this much better. So we-- we wills engineer people. We've started a new assessment because, like I said, we were really prioritizing food security. And so looking at the vulnerability assessment framework and, you know, the stuff that the U.N. has-- has and many of the organizations adopted.

But now, we've started looking at other areas as well in a more in-depth way. So medical stuff. You know, potential family violence, family protection issues. Things like that. And so that is all part of-- you know, people who come in for the five-minute quickie-- you know-- it's not really quickie. It's-- and it's more like 10, 15 minutes to be honest.

But yeah. And then we-- we look and we see-- 'cause we have so many people, right? So we want to be sure that-- you know, the people that kind of seem to be the most extremely vulnerable from that we then set up do a phone call with. We do a phone call. And then if they still kind of rise to the top as extremely vulnerable, then we do a home visit. And we are, you know, just inundated with families that we need to-- to visit in the home. But as we further refine that, we're looking to-- you know, we're thinking, "Okay, well, somebody might actually not necessarily be struggling with food security.

"But they might have a kid who has asthma who needs to have drugs every month," or, you know, things like that. So we're starting to look at how-- as we have more funds and as we hope to get more funds, how to begin shifting that to be able to more pinpoint and-- and serve people in a more-- in a more, you know, appropriate way. I hope that helps.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #3:

Yeah, no. Beautiful. Thank you.

FEMALE VOICE:

Do you think we can do the last two questions together (UNINTEL PHRASE)?

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #4:

Hi. Thank you for coming to speak with us. My question for you is twofold. First of all, related to the previous question, what are your numbers like in terms of at any given time, you know, how many food vouchers are you giving out?

AMANDA LANE:

Yeah, right.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #4:

Who's coming for programming?

AMANDA LANE:

I'm glad asked you that.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #4:

And how much that shifts? And my second question is you spoke to this idea of, you know, people come in to your center. They come out more empowered. You're not necessarily operating in a situation where you're then reintegrating people into society, granted that they are refugees and this might not be what we traditionally consider their society. Especially with these limitations on their work. So as people get involved whether in volunteer ways or, you know, you see these changes that are positive, beneficial to their life-- what do next steps look like for them? And what role do you have in that?

AMANDA LANE:

Right, yeah. That's a great and very tough question. Let me start with the numbers first. We have over 4,000 refugee families registered with us. And we are seeing between-- like around 150, 175 unique visits in our center every day. in terms of our-- our assistance, we're giving-- like, last month we gave out-- over 475 families recently food vouchers from us. And that's kind of where we're at. I mean, it's just about what kind of funds we have in.

Every quarter we try to bump it up and, you know, bring in the money so that we're able to do that. As to your question about what this means, I mean, I feel it-- it's hard. Because, you know, I-- I feel like, okay, this is-- this is a touchy-feely message. You know? We're, like, helping people, and they're becoming empowered. But, like, in the meantime, they have this very difficult existence and nobody knows what the future holds. It's a tough one. I don't know. I don't know.

We're trying to hedge our bets is probably not the best way to-- to talk about it. But the-- you know, for example, I did not mention th-- you know, I mentioned that refugees in Jordan are largely forbidden by law to work. And, you know, that is the vast majority of refugees are forbidden by law to work. There has been a change in the past few years in which donor countries and-- the U.N. have been working with g-- the governments in the primary host countries, in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, to get the right for refugees to work.

And a few years ago-- and I can't remember the-- I'm blanking on the quota number. But-- but I think it was 40,000 Syrian refugees a few years ago-- it was decided that Jordan would be allowed-- or that Jordan would grant work permits to up to 40,000 Syr-- Syrian refugees. Only Syrian refugees. Important to note that as well. But it had to be in certain sectors. So in manufacturing, in-- construction, in-- what was the other?

Manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. And-- sadly that has, you know, started rolling out. But it rolled out in a very, you know-- not very impressive way. The numbers are not there. There are not that many people with work permits in Jordan. And-- yeah, and many of them-- like, what we've seen is that they've gone just into the refugee camps and pulled people out to go work in kind of substandard manufacturing-- you know, places-- where, you know, th-- there are a number of Chinese and-- and Asian workers who have come in.

And, you know, the situation is-- is not-- the working conditions are not good. That being said-- you know, there's going to be a conference just next month in Brussels to-- to push that forward. And I've seen the position papers. And, you know, everybody's pushing for this. The Jordanian government I think is very much inclined-- to help figure this out, but it's gonna take a while. It's gonna take a while for-- larger numbers I think to be able to-- for this to be facilitated for a larger number.

So as I said, hedging our bets, we now-- we do vocational training-- in a number of different things that are somewhat under-the-radar things like beautician skills for women-- and barbering skills for men. We've started, like, cell phone repair for men. We have a women's craft collective, which isn't so much vocational but a way for people to have a source of income. I don't know. Because really the key is being able to work and to be able to provide for your family. And that's a big question mark still sadly. Yes.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER #5:

Hello. Thank you very much for your presentation. You mentioned that you are also offering English classes. And-- I was working in Turkey with refugees a couple of years ago. And we were also offering English classes. But as we were doing it, we realized that the refugees wouldn't be able to use it in any way, like, in the short term and also, like, were struggling with many other things.

It was really, like, a couple of hours a week wouldn't really change much about, like, their learning the language. So we realized that it wasn't really useful and applicable in the short term to learn the language. And in the long term they wouldn't be able to remember it. So I

was wondering in Jordan, like, what's the utility of teaching English and not maybe-- classes, like, where they could learn other skills which are more applicable in the short term.

AMANDA LANE:

Sure. Yeah, it's a good question. Our English class is our biggest program at CRP. Everybody wants to take English classes. And I've always had kind of mixed feelings about it because I think a lot of people are like, "I want to take an English class because I want to get resettled-- to America or to Canada." And the reality is less than 1% of them are going to be resettled to a third country.

However, there is great enthusiasm. People want to learn English. And so when I talk about this whole kind of community that we've built and-- it's not really about learning English. People are thrilled to be learning skills. They're thrilled-- like, super thrilled to be learning skills. I've realized that English is an amazing tool for our teens.

We have lots of teens who are not in school. And this is a huge challenge for us. But interestingly, they're thr-- they're so interested in learning English. They're interested in learning computers. We're trying to get them to get their basic literacy and numeracy. We gotta do that. But it's interesting because even with these kids who have been out of school for years, they have-- a lot of them have very basic literacy and numeracy skills.

So getting 'a class together with a bunch of teens to do math, we can't do that. Like, we have to find a better way because they're embarrassed. I mean, to be in a classroom with their-- with their, you know, first and second-grade math skills or, you know, poor Arabic skills, that's-- that's not going to work. But English we see is an amazing thing 'cause they all come in, and they take English class, and they're so into it. And they're all starting at the same level.

So it's a way for them to start loving learning. And they certainly use it a lot at our center. We have tons of-- interns and volunteers who come to us who are English speaking. Jordan-- there-- there are many ways to be using English in Jordan. But it's interesting because I hear again and again from refugees, "Oh yeah. I love coming because I'm learning something."

And I think when you're not working and you don't have a way to take care of your family-- it's a way to feel like you're get-- you know, you're start-- you're starting to improve yourself, to make yourself more useful in some way. I don't know. I know that it's very popular. And because people want it so much, we're not gonna stop doing it. So yeah. Thank you all for coming out. (APPLAUSE) It's been a pleasure.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *