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Lindsay Aldrich  
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

Suzanne Fiederlein  
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

Jessica Rosati  
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

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Risk Education in Northern Jordan

In 2013 and 2014, the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University led a project funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) to provide explosive remnants of war risk education to Syrian refugees living in urban areas of northern Jordan. At the time, it was unclear whether the hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing the civil conflict and seeking refuge in neighboring countries would be able to return home in the near future, but there was still significant hope this would happen.

by Lindsay Aldrich, Suzanne Fiederlein and Jessica Rosati [ Center for International Stabilization and Recovery ]

Due to years of conflict and frequently reported use of conventional weapons by multiple actors, the humanitarian mine action community recognized that homes and communities inside Syria would most certainly be contaminated with explosive remnants of war (ERW). Returning civilians would face explosive hazards previously unknown to daily life in Syria. They would not have the necessary education and systems in place to help prevent injury and death from these hazards.

To prepare the displaced Syrians for encountering these new threats, if and when they would be able to return to Syria, CISR worked with two Jordanian organizations to conduct risk education (RE) programs in the city of Mafraq and surrounding areas. The project was designed to include multiple demographics and deliver sustainable, peer-to-peer messaging. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan’s national mine action authority, the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation (NCDR), led RE and train-the-trainer courses with groups of men and women, and a team from Life Line for Consultancy and Rehabilitation (LLCR) conducted arts-based RE workshops with children.

Train-the-trainer Risk Education

NCDR developed and led a series of five interactive workshops using a team-based coaching methodology to train 75 adult Syrian refugees (26 women and 49 men) equally representing the northern, central and southern areas of Syria. The participants learned RE safety messages and how to work in teams to effectively communicate these messages in the future among peers. The goal was to prepare civilian participants to serve as community resources of ERW safety information in order to extend the project’s reach beyond those refugees directly receiving the training by NCDR.

To recruit workshop participants, NCDR staff distributed invitations to Syrian refugees living in Al-Mafraq, and hosted informational meetings to present the program and answer questions. NCDR received more than 175 applications of interest from the target group. Using a selection process established in coordination with the Center for International Students working on the mural at Princess Alia Bint Al Hussein school. Photo courtesy of Kamel Sa’adi/LLCR.
Stabilization and Recovery (CISR), NCDR identified a pool of potential candidates from among the applicants and selected groups of 15 participants to attend one of the five, 13-day workshops offered between January and May 2014.

Each workshop utilized a coaching methodology to convey the RE messages to participants as well as to teach the trainees how to convey messages themselves and effectively present similar workshops to peers. Throughout each of the training workshops, the trainees displayed high levels of participation through discussion, group work, role-play activities and presentation-based learning.

During group learning activities, men and women worked together in teams to complete assignments, emphasizing the importance of co-ed collaboration to maximize the reach and overall effectiveness of future ERW safety activities within participants’ communities. At other times, such as during meals and breaks, participants tended to self-segregate based on gender. The flow of the workshop activities created an environment that respected individual comfort levels but encouraged workplace collaboration.

Arts-based Risk Education

LLCR is a Jordanian national nonprofit that assists survivors with physical, emotional and financial needs, while also striving to educate the public about persons with disabilities and landmine hazards through RE.²

LLCR worked closely alongside NCDR to arrange with government ministry officials, school administrators, staff and UNICEF officials the implementation of workshops in schools in the Al-Mafraq governorate. With UNICEF’s assistance, schools in Al-Mafraq have split schedules for Syrian and Jordanian children to accommodate the ongoing influx of Syrian refugee children in the Jordanian educational system.

Staff at LLCR combined their RE expertise with local arts teams recruited through the Remal Arts Center, which partnered with LLCR on the We Love Life project from 2009 to 2010. A team of artists experienced in creating murals joined LLCR to plan the workshops that combined RE sessions with art instruction focused on drawing and translating the RE messages into sketches and murals. A total of 25 RE workshops were held at three schools in Al-Mafraq governorate. The workshops

Training for adult Syrian refugees was held in March 2014. Participants learned about risk education and how to convey the messages among peers.

Photo courtesy of Lindsay Aldrich/CISR.
involved Jordanian students in the morning and Syrian students in the afternoon, working together to complete murals designed by students from each school.

LLCR conducted the workshops at two schools for 200 students each and at a third school for 100 students, with LLCR arts team members returning to the schools to conduct follow-up work on the murals after each set of workshops. The messages in the artwork promoted the overall meaning behind the RE workshops with phrases such as Be Safe and We Love Life, as well as other warnings about the dangers of ERW and landmines. A total of 400 girls and 100 boys between the ages of 10 and 17 participated in LLCR’s school art workshops. The murals containing the RE messages help share these messages among the broader population of students, teachers, administrators and families.

Practical school items, featuring artwork produced by students during the workshops, were turned into RE materials (sketchbooks, notebooks, stickers, wall calendars) and distributed to the schoolchildren shortly after the start of the 2014–2015 school year. The more than 20,000 school items distributed became a useful way to reinforce RE messages and provide children with persistent reminders based upon their own artwork, especially as the Jordanian education system requires sketchbooks and notebooks for everyday classroom use. LLCR also delivered 2015 wall calendars displaying the students’ RE artwork to local officials, school administrators, community groups and businesses to increase the scope and impact of the materials. NCDR continued to distribute materials during the school year and into the summer of 2015 as part of its ongoing RE in areas where the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan had settled outside of the official refugee camps.

Project Continuation and Legacy

Originally, an arts-celebration event was planned at the conclusion of the workshops for schoolchildren to share information about the arts project and distribute finished materials to students and the community. However, due to the changing context in Jordan at the...
time, the project team decided instead to build on the existing We Love Life website from the previous arts-based RE program to create a web space for sharing information and images about the current project. The website (http://bit.ly/1Eet4uU) explains how the workshops were organized and conducted, and shows the artwork and RE materials the children produced. By providing photos of the arts activities, artwork created by the children and arts-based RE materials online, other schools, teachers and practitioners can continue to access these resources and gain ideas for continuing this type of safety-awareness work to help protect children and communities in Jordan and other ERW-affected places. 

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The artwork was also used to design printed RE materials.

Photo courtesy of Kamel Sa’adi/LLCR.

Lindsay Aldrich joined CISR in 2013 as the senior project manager/program coordinator and has helped to manage projects involving disability rights, information management, mine risk education and senior management training. She holds a Master of Public Administration in public and nonprofit management from James Madison University and was the 2012–2013 Frasure-Kruzel-Drew Memorial Fellow for Humanitarian Demining in the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement at the U.S. Department of State. Prior to working in mine action, she managed educational and leadership programs in higher education and the private and nonprofit sectors.

Dr. Suzanne Fiederlein joined CISR in 1999, and served as senior research associate and victim-assistance team leader before becoming associate director in 2010. She has worked on projects related to victim assistance, mine risk education (managed the We Love Life ERW Awareness project in Jordan), mine action in Latin America, International Mine Action Standards and mine action casualty data systems. As coordinator of CISR’s management training, she directs the Senior Managers’ Course in ERW and Mine Action conducted at James Madison University (JMU) and in regional locations (Tajikistan and Vietnam). She received her doctorate in political science from the University of Arizona and has taught on the faculty of JMU and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Jessica Rosati joined CISR in May 2013 as a program assistant for its Senior Managers’ Course in ERW and Mine Action and is now the assistant program manager. She graduated from James Madison University (JMU) in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in global justice and policy, and a minor in humanitarian affairs. During her time at JMU, she held the position of leader for international networking and knowledge as an orientation guide and mentor for the international student population. Prior to CISR, she worked as an intern for JMU’s Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence and Human Rights Watch.

Jessica Rosati
Assistant Project Manager/Research Specialist
Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
Email: rosatijj@jmu.edu
Website: http://www.jmu.edu/cisr

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