**The Play to Love, Play to Learn Project**

**Annika Kastetter and Mayss Al Alami**

**Amman, Jordan: June 1st- August 11th**

**Context**

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring states and around the world. According to 2016 UNHCR reports, Jordan has absorbed approximately 656,000 documented Syrian refugees, with the number of undocumented Syrians estimated to exceed 600,000. While the political and social climate in Jordan offers greater stability and safety for Syrians, opportunity for prosperity is limited. Once in Jordan, many Syrians report facing rampant discrimination, harassment, and exploitation. Discrimination has a disproportionate affect on Syrian children who—still bearing the lifelong wounds of conflict—often find themselves bullied and harassed in Jordanian schools. As a result, many Syrian children do not attend school and are deprived of essential intellectual development. The discord between many Syrian and Jordanian youth transpiring in school settings threatens the livelihoods of Syrian children and hinders opportunities for Syrian youth to obtain a meaningful education. The increasing ‘education gap’ facing Syrian youth in Jordan will generate significant long-term consequences; most notably, it will be more difficult for younger Syrian generations to serve as active participants in rebuilding the Syrian state when the conflict subsides. Thus, it is essential to engage in grassroots initiatives to foster an atmosphere of peace and inclusion in Jordanian schools to bolster retention rates among Syrian students and to secure hope for the future of Syria and its people.

**Project Vision**

In order to foster peace between Syrian and Jordanian youth, our project aims to use soccer as a tool of reconciliation through a five-week long youth soccer camp. Soccer is integral to both Syrian and Jordanian culture, and youth in both countries regularly participate in the sport. Thus, soccer will serve as an effective platform to bring Syrian and Jordanian youth together to develop essential skills such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and leadership. In addition, we believe that participation in the soccer camp will cultivate a sense of unity, empowerment, and compassion between Syrian and Jordanian students, while serving as an enjoyable leisure outlet for young Syrians who, for the last six years, have been surrounded by war and conflict. Through building relationships with their fellow students on the soccer field, it is our hope that Syrian students will feel safer and more empowered in their academic communities and will continue to pursue educational opportunities in Jordanian schools.

**Local Partnerships**

To implement the five-week long youth soccer camp, we will utilize local partnerships with: Humanitarian Family Aid (HFA), a grassroots NGO located in Amman that serves underrepresented refugee communities; Amman F.C., a local soccer club in Amman that is willing to offer their soccer facilities and staff for the camp; Abdullah Abu Zamaa and Khader Eid Shaibat, two local soccer coaches (one male and one female) with experience in coaching youth from marginalized backgrounds; and a local school in Amman that currently accommodates both Syrian and Jordanian students. Amman F.C., where the camp will take place, is centrally located in Amman, Jordan. Educational classroom sessions will also be held in Amman, F.C. facilities. HFA, which regularly conducts projects that bring members of refugee communities across Amman together for activities like “Play Days” and “Sports Days,” will offer logistical support in coordinating the transportation of students to and from the camp. In addition, we will partner with local UNHCR representatives to teach classroom sessions on the importance of unity, acceptance, and tolerance.

**Project implementation**

The project will be implemented over a period of ten weeks. The first five weeks will be dedicated to on the ground outreach and planning. We will use this time to finalize and confirm connections with NGOs, coaches, participating students, soccer field bookings, and other logistics. The soccer camp will take place during the last five weeks. We aim to have a total of thirty Syrian and Jordanian participants—fifteen boys and fifteen girls.

The first week of the camp will be an orientation week where the students, parents, coaches, and all other individuals will get to know one another. During this week, we will also communicate the purpose of the camp, and what we hope the students will be able gain from it. First week lessons will incorporate classroom sessions on the importance of unity, teamwork, and respect as well as general teambuilding activities.

Soccer practices will commence in the second week and will continue until the end of the fourth week. Coaches will lead practices and activities will be recorded and observed by future camp conductors. During ‘practice’ weeks we will also implement educational segments to complement practices, reinforcing the importance of camaraderie, teamwork, and sportsmanship on and off the field.

In the fifth week of the camp, we will hold a final soccer tournament, and host a celebratory farewell gathering to thank all participating students, parents, coaches, and organizations. We will also hold a meeting with coaches and NGO representatives before our departure to discuss the plan for the future implementation and sustainability of this project.

**Sustainability**

While we believe the soccer camp will foster immediate benefits during the five weeks, we aim to create a sustainable plan to enable local organizations and individuals to implement the camp again in the future. We hope to utilize the train-the-trainer model, where experienced coaches, local school staff, and NGO representatives, will learn about the nature of the project over the span of ten weeks and will continue it after our departure. We also hope to further strengthen our connections with local NGOs and partners during the ten weeks of planning and implementation to foster reliable partnerships for the future. Finally, we will draft a descriptive operation manual of the project, providing trained individuals with a detailed guide for hosting future camps. In addition, we hope to provide first-year camp participants with the opportunity to serve as ‘youth coaching staff’ for future camps.

**Our Qualifications**

Mayss Al Alami is a third-generation Palestinian refugee and a native Arabic speaker. She was born and raised in Jordan, and is very experienced with the culture. Mayss is an Economics and International Affairs major with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa. Mayss gained experience working on grassroots projects during her internship with Amnesty International, a human rights organizations, where she was able to focus specifically on the Middle East region. During Summer 2016, Mayss worked in Jordan with International Relief and Development (IRD), an organization that works with Syrian refugees in the Za’tari camp in Jordan and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Syrian villages.

Annika Kastetter is a Political Science major with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa.  Annika has acquired extensive experience in the field of international development and foreign policy through an internship in Udaipur, India where she, in partnership with a labor rights NGO, implemented a sustainable grassroots project aimed at improving migrant workers’ rights awareness and women’s empowerment using ‘Asset Based Community Development’ and ‘Training of Trainers’ models.  Annika has also participated in an internship with the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and most recently worked in Amman, Jordan with a labor rights NGO and an aid-delivery NGO that serves underrepresented refugee communities across Amman.  Annika is also an intermediate Arabic speaker who has played soccer her whole life—including six years on a nationally ranked team in the United States.

**Safety**

We recognize the increased turmoil and violence that has affected the Middle East since the Arab Spring of 2010. Jordan, however, remains an exception in the region and has not experienced any revolutions or violence that would threaten our safety and the safety of camp participants. Thus far, there are no indications that conditions in Jordan will change by the summer of 2017.  Nonetheless, due to our extensive experiences on the ground, our broad network of reliable contacts, and our family connections in Jordan, we have a strong foundation of support in case of an emergency.