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Introduction:

This summer I had the privilege of interning at The Council on American-Islamic Relations at their New York Chapter (CAIR-NY) as the Outreach and Community Program Organizing Intern. CAIR-NY is the USA's largest Muslim Civil Rights and Advocacy Organization, having worked for the last 25 years to defend the constitution. The New York chapter is one of the busiest and most dynamic of CAIR's thirty-five nationwide affiliates, defending, representing, and educating nearly one million Muslims in the New York area.

In the last 12 weeks, I've worked alongside CAIR-NY's small, yet passionate team in their little office in the Financial District. I've emailed and called countless Mosques, Schools and Organizations, I have recorded Online Workshops differentiating Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents, I've ordered buttons and leaflets and vests containing CAIR logos, I've done long hours of inventory and organized master contact lists containing hundreds upon hundreds of contacts encompassing New York State, I've gone with CAIR to City Council meetings for the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes and joined other Civil Rights organizations on the streets to protest and demand better living conditions for New Yorkers. However, the highlight of my summer without a doubt has been getting to know and learning from the caring, hard-working and humble individuals who work at CAIR-NY. This small team, consisting of 10 individuals, somehow caters to the 1 million Muslims living in New York State. Each individual has their own set of beliefs, own definition of hate, own ideas about how a non-profit can be most effective - and yet, come together cohesively, sometimes chaotically - to serve the people of New York. This following report consists of various interviews I conducted with the team at CAIR-NY throughout the summer. In them one hears the challenges, the rewards, the goals, the fears and aspirations that make up these individuals and how they approach the work that they do in CAIR-NY. I have refrained from using any names in this report, and rather refer to people by their positions at CAIR-NY. Following are the 7 interviews I was able to have over the summer - some were recurring and done in multiple parts, while a few were done through one singular

interview. These were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees. While some questions were scripted, others emerged organically in conversation.

Interview 1: Executive Director

“For CAIR to be successful is ultimately for it to not be needed. A good day is a quiet day.”

Q. What is your definition of hate?

E.D: It's a learned response - we know it when we see it. Nobody is born hating other people - it can come from a place of anger, ignorance, of fear. You have hate that's perpetuated by individuals, but then you have systematic hate - policies and systems that are biased and discriminatory - personally instigated by the system. It doesn't happen in a bubble. People are more likely to hate when they see systems of power also doing it against others.

Q. How do you think we must confront this hate and begin finding solutions?

E.D: I've come to the realization that you have to start from within. By recognizing, confronting and improving ourselves. People need to be aware and know what resources are available. When there's no accountability - then the issues perpetuate. The targets of hate need to be at the forefront of these movements - and people are afraid of making themselves and loved ones targets. People are afraid of any harm that can come in their way. Empowering our own communities from within - education wise, politically, There has to be an unapologetic mindset.

Q. What is the most fulfilling aspect of your role as Executive Director?

E.D: The most fulfilling part of working at CAIR New York is seeing the growth the community has gone through - we've grown in various ways. We've started to come out of this shell of trying to always appease others. And we've learned that sometimes defiance is necessary to stand up for oneself. The internal growth of the organization and how it's been able to help the community more and more - since we're a community based organization. When we hear these stories it's not just about the individual we've won a case for, but it's also the reverberations of that success within society. When there's a win it's a win for the entire community. And sometimes the impact that we have is generational.

Q.What would you say is the most difficult aspect of your role?

E.D: The most difficult aspect of the job is to build that capacity. If money was no object for us - we'd have a much stronger organization. Even though we have still grown a lot, the demand still outweighs what we're able to provide for the community. The second thing that has been difficult is to change people's mindsets - we're finding large swathes of the community who only celebrate elected officials instead of holding them accountable. We're still quite slow to hold people accountable, whether that's elected officials, employers or law enforcement.

Q. In recent times there's been quite a few Muslim non-profits that have popped up across New York. Do you ever see them as competitors or threats?

E.D: First of all I don't think there's anyone who does exactly what we do - we're the only civil rights legal advocacy organization in New York. Others might do advocacy work but it's mostly social advocacy, but not quite within the breadth of work that CAIR New York does, and does well. And the second thing, having a lot of organizations is a good thing since there's so much work to be done. And especially if we do it together. It only becomes a bad thing if we're competing against each other. I wouldn't call that a threat necessarily .. Just sometimes a sad reality.

Q. With a job of this scope - what does clocking out look like for you?

E.D: There is no clock out for me.. Period. It's ridiculous to think. I get calls, texts, emails all the time - even on holidays. We're always the first line of response when something happens. Especially in my executive director role which is public facing. I give my phone number out like its candy. Once you're enveloped in this world, injustice around you becomes more apparent - even if you're just watching a show or movie. People see it as a work life balance - and I see what they're saying because sometimes you need to be able to pull away and relax the mind - but at the same time, generally speaking, the temporary way of this life was meant for us to work. And I mean in some way - to help and to be productive. Even if it's planting a seed and planting a tree. So I guess I see my life in that way - I don't like being unproductive, I don't like too much leisure. If I'm not contributing much, then it's not a life worth living. Leisure is good too because

it allows you rest so you can be more productive. But when it isn't productive, it's a problem in and of itself.

Q. What does success look like for CAIR New York?

E.D: For CAIR to be successful is ultimately for it to not be needed. A good day is a quiet day. As an organization - growing our capacity so we can serve our community more. Proactively to prevent things from happening, and retroactively success means holding people accountable.

Interview 2: Paralegal

Q. How did you first hear about CAIR?

P: My father was the one who introduced me to CAIR. This was post-October 7th. We saw the Palestinian advocacy that CAIR NY was doing. At the time seeing how the population was reacting to what had happened, and a lot of the mixed messaging that was happening... It was heart warming to see that there were companies and organizations that were actually standing up for the right cause.

Q. What are your tasks in your role as CAIR's Paralegal?

P: So um, as a paralegal I serve a variety of tasks but my daily ones are monitoring the new requests that we receive. For the most part I'll be the one to screen them, so I'm usually the first contact for the community member. I look at what legal services they require. If it is a matter that is within my scope of work, I'll speak to my team about it and the attorneys take it on from there. On the administrative side, case management, taking care of files that are uploaded, litigation support, obtaining camera footage, reviewing them to make sure they're accurate - kind of being the second eye for the attorneys. I also assist with complaint forms - what that looks like - in relation to immigration matters - if someone has been stopped multiple times at the airport and a community member submits a complaint against TSA, if an individual is trying to sue like the NYPD, I would help walk community members through the process. Completing N400s, supervised by our legal team. I also help draft advocacy letters. For the most part this has been in regards to school related issues, such as when students are unable to pray at school - just to remind the school of their legal obligations.

Q. What would you say is your definition of hate? And has that definition evolved at all since starting working for CAIR?

P: I feel like for me hate is motivated by negative and uninformed biases. I feel like the types of requests we mostly receive are defined by islamophobia and xenophobia. People will reach out to say - I've been told to go back to my country. Hijabi's unfortunately are some of the prime targets. They'll be walking around minding their business and will essentially have someone attack them for their religious identity - sometimes this can be physical attacks, such as spitting on them, pulling their hijab off, jumping them.

I think what has changed since working at CAIR is seeing how prevalent it is. Obviously as a Muslim I am no stranger to that idea of people being subject to bias incidents simply due to ignorance. I guess I didn't realise how often these events were happening. It's baffling to me that we're in 2026 and people feel comfortable to spew hateful words to Muslims who are simply minding their business. I think alongside religious identity, something that has surprised me post October 7th is how triggered others become when they see a Palestinian motif. Whether it be the flag or keffiyeh or olive or watermelon badge. Anything that resembles Palestine kind of just sets them off - and I guess the violence that comes out of that is something I still cannot wrap my head around. It can honestly be both emotional or physical or even both kinds of violence.

Q. Do you think you're able to have a separation between your work life and personal life?

P: I feel like because of the nature of the work that we do, there really is no room for separation. Because a lot of the issues that our communities face are very real. I've actually made the decision to wear the hijab only a few months ago. As confident as I can be in my decision, there's always this underlying fear aspect because of everything that I have seen at my work. Unfortunately the hijab always draws attention, and I guess this is something I've been more cognizant of when I'm outside these days - like oh my god I'm the only hijabi here. I guess I question how people are perceiving me - but then obviously I try not to get too into that. My priority is my own well being and my safety. And I think today specifically wearing a keffiyeh print hijab (laughs) I felt like I was a walking target while coming to work. At times in my own neighbourhood where there are community members that are zionists, I do feel stares coming my way, even though I'm not doing anything - I'm not approaching them with any hate or negative

takes of my own. But at the same time, because of the work that we do I have been inspired by hijabis and the stuff that they've been through and their continued resilience. It kind of helps with my feelings of fear.

When I first started it was very hard, because there was no separation. People would say stay off ur phone, but I couldn't because those headlines are beneficial for the work I do. People being fired, people being brutalized, the way university admin were dealing with students, I felt like I always had to be in the know so I could be there for people reaching out. My second year working - Trump came in and having to work with his new immigration laws was so difficult. A lot of people were reaching out in crisis mode and it felt very much like a rapid response, especially because our legal team is such a small team - it felt like a lot.

Q: Is there any academia or scholarship that inspires the work that you do? This could be anything from books, articles, podcasts or media of any sort that has heavily impacted how you understand Islamophobia.

P: Edward Said's Orientalism. I read it in my intro to Islam class, and reading it and just - of course resonating with its message. Of how the west categorizes anything that's unfamiliar, different or 'the other'. I guess in a way that messaging has sort of shaped me. I feel like I've always been someone who has been impacted by injustices that have occurred, which doesn't morally sit right with me. So that has led me to push forward in the advocacy route - while also acknowledging my privilege of being born in the US and being able to get an education here, being able to you know - um, I guess what came to mind is being able to separate myself, if that makes sense. My culture is a good chunk of my identity but it's different in the sense that I'm not navigating the US in a survival mentality - I feel like I don't have to assimilate myself, which is a privilege in itself. Growing up I went to school with so many people of color. I never had this external peer pressure of - oh u have to act this way.

Q: Where do we begin this advocacy work? What are the first steps?

P: I think that work has already started through the works of CAIR New York and other organizations. Just in terms of spreading accurate awareness of what Islamophobia is, what biases are, and how those show up in day to day life. Providing the community with tools and

resources. Like hosting CAIR's bystander interventions trainings. On the legal end - a way that's been beneficial is giving community members the confidence to understand that their claims and voices are worthy to be heard - because that is an issue we see a lot, that community members are worried about their concerns being disregarded. By just lending an emphatic ear we encourage community members to file reports. We'll intervene on behalf of community members if the circumstances need us to. A step in the right direction is getting people informed and educated. From community members up to elected officials. I think the problem is that if policies were enforced like they were supposed to - I would hope that a lot of these incidents wouldn't occur. I guess it's unfortunate that in office itself some of our elected officials have biases themselves. Now with Mamdani obviously there's more help - in terms of having that representation, and his recent administration as well - like appointing more Muslims in office, or just people in general who are not discriminatory.

Q. How do you measure success in your role?

P: I feel like in my job success can be measured in various ways, I think in the smallest ways, a meaningful or rewarding part of the job is when im able to have calls with community members and they express that they feel heard or acknowledged, because often times our community members will reach out to us in crisis mode - when they feel they've exhausted all other options. So to be able to be there for them and to direct them in the right place, I try to have some hope, and I hope that my role is beneficial to them. Other successes are like advocacy letters I've written, and how some schools have actually created designated prayer spaces - when administrations admit that they shouldn't have denied students their right to practice their religions.

Interview 3: Grants Manager

Q. How did you come into this role of Grants Manager?

GM: I didn't even know this position even existed. I didn't know anything about non-profits in college. I didn't understand how fundraising or grants worked - it required me to learn a lot very quickly. Especially without extensive professional training. 40% of grants support the organization. 60% comes from individual donors. We're trying to increase our grant funding, so

we can do more for the communities we serve. So we can increase the amount of people we serve and services we offer.

Q. What is your definition of hate?

GM: I feel like hate often stems from not knowing or understanding. It's something that people learn from their environment or in some way shape or form are indoctrinated to feel that way. I think it's pretty much learned. As much capacity as you have to hate - you can also love someone that much. One needs education to have a more developed perspective, and actually understand others. Hating someone equals ignorance, lack of education or being sheltered in a way. At the end of the day - it takes so much to hate anything. You can use that same energy to understand others and not hate.

Q. What does it mean for you to be a non-Muslim working in a Muslim Civil Rights Organization?

GM: I've had people be Islamophobic to me even though I'm not Muslim just because I'm brown. So many of my friends are Muslim. Even though I'm not Muslim and don't have the same fears as someone who might be Muslim, I still have so much understanding of how those people feel, because simply by being brown I've faced so much of that. If my Muslim friends are affected by hate, it impacts me. I should therefore have some kind of stake in improving conditions for Muslims. Making sure people are more educated and informed.

Q. Is there any academia or scholarship that influences the work that you do?

GM: Not to plug CAIR New York - but there's this report called 'Feeling the Hate' report where they surveyed a bunch of school kids about Islamophobia and hate. Those numbers were so shocking to me - I hadn't known the scale to which they were impacting kids in school. Having a quantifiable number like that is very powerful to back up how prevalent these things are. That report was very eye opening to me. That informs a lot of the work I do - the grants I write and proposals I send are all influenced by that. That's like a report made by Muslims for Muslims to educate a lot of institutions outside the Muslim community - like teachers and school administrations. I don't think anyone puts any effort into reports about how Muslims are affected

by Islamophobia. I think it's important that we keep doing that work and keep building that data. To make institutions more aware of islamophobia and their impact on Muslim communities.

Interview 4: Community Program Organizer

Q. What is your favorite aspect of working in an Outreach position?

CPM: I enjoy going to the schools. I come from a family of educators who work in schools. I do see and understand why people like to work with the youth in daily life. We could take it a little bit easier when talking to the youth.. They're open to asking 'silly questions' or questions they're more serious about. Older crowds don't ask as many questions, and maybe that's because they feel like they're supposed to know all the answers. I've seen such positive results from the children themselves. We've given combatting islamophobia workshops in public schools on a younger level and there is dialogue between younger students. In one class there was a hijabi student, and a non-muslim student in that classroom asked 'why do we need to do this? Why is this necessary for us to know?' And we kind of got to hear personally from the hijabi student, and she kind of expressed how she knows and has been through these kinds of discrimination as well. She said that just because you've not faced something doesn't mean it doesn't exist. And here I expanded how it's important to understand other people's struggles to be able to face discrimination in other places as well .

Q. What would you say is the most difficult aspect of your job?

CPM: It's kind of just being aware or cautious of what type of crowd or environment I'm entering, although we do a lot of work with Muslim organizations or Islamic schools we also try to work with non-Muslim schools and organizations and I have given.. When working with organizations that aren't Muslim-based, I do have to think about different ways that I would approach work as there might be Islamophobes in the crowd. I have to break down a lot of things - compared to how I'd speak to Muslims. Once, I gave a workshop to faculty at a public school and one of them reported me, with the New York Times reaching out to want to interview me about how we're pushing views on children and if we would continue to do this throughout New York City schools. If I'd done the interview I would've asked what I'd said specifically to have them believe that I was pushing Islamic views on these students. I would personally not ever do

an interview with them because I truly believe that whatever I would say most likely would have been twisted. And I didn't want to waste my time on a paper that is so openly Islamophobic.

Q. How do you believe we can find solutions to this rampant Islamophobia?

CPM: I do think it starts with the classrooms, which is why I like the work that I do. Actually - it starts at home even. Just by me coming to school that one day it might not change anything, but maybe they'll remember the workshops that we gave. I think children are naturally meant to be pure-hearted, and it's their lived experiences that make them lose their ability to care for others - how to properly care for others. So we need to set those examples - like bad things might happen but we do not have to become bad people because of them, and that definitely needs to be taught and learned at a young age.

Q. What would you say some of CAIR's strengths are?

CPM: I could start with.. I would say for the most part our community does come together very easily. If you find one Muslim, you're likely to find others. So we're able to work and collaborate with a lot of people who specifically don't just work with Muslim organizations but in non-Muslim ones. Muslims in non-Muslim environments. The relationship between us Muslims is very strong I think, we have this bond that helps us along the way.

Q. What would you say some of CAIR's weaknesses are?

CPM: A lot of our work, whether it's lawyers or outreach - the work that we provide is free and specifically for outreach, the way that we give these workshops is through the grants that we apply for. So feeling not super secure with the grants - once your grant is up you can reapply only so many times. So finding the right programs - especially in such a competitive city where there are other organizations that do similar work. And also donations - most of our donations go towards the legal work, since that is also free. With donations, there is only so much we can do to pay the legal team. Also our team is very small - it's like one person per department. Especially in Ramadan - there's only so much one person can do. I think a stronger staff - more people on hand would be helpful. It's a very, very small organization. I think this environment - it goes at a very fast pace. One day you focus on the gala, one day you deal with Ramadan, one

day it's about how so many people are dealing with FBI at their house - so it can all feel like a lot. So our team kind of does it all - we definitely take on a lot more than we should, but we still get it done. So it could get a little hectic.

Q. Do you think you've faced any challenges because of your gender in this outreach role?

CPM: My gender plays a role within the Muslim community. I haven't really felt much discrimination about my gender beyond the Muslim community. Especially through emails - no one really knows whether it's a guy or a girl when I'm emailing them. But yeah I've definitely been denied from giving a workshop because I'm not a man - because they need a brother. Unfortunately there's only auctions on the brother's side - that's why we have *(names a different team member who is a man)*. I would say - unfortunately I can only deal with females in the Muslim world.

Q. Would you say you have a good work / personal life balance?

CPM: It's difficult in the field that we do to have a balanced work..life balance. I specifically went into this field because I find it fulfilling and wanted to do work that I wanted to believe in. I understand wanting to clock out at 5, but there's definitely times when I operate like that - but that's because I know I'll get back to work when I can. I think dealing with the issues that we're dealing with on a day to day basis can be depressing and sad. But I'm definitely passionate. I want to do it - I want to continue to do it. I used to actively be at Palestinian events all the time and never missed a PYM event - but that was also when I was a student and wanted to be a part of something bigger than being a student. But now that I'm consistently working at a field where I'm doing that work 9 to 5 – it is constantly on my mind. I'm thinking, oh i know this person who was arrested by ICE - can I connect them to a lawyer? Oh you're a teacher - can we provide a workshop at your school where it might be typical to do so? Like going into public schools that are majority white - like how can we bring these ideas into them? I bring this up because I have been asked by children - like its so easy for children to ask questions - they have no issue asking me where do I come from, or what my name means- and that kind of - having an ethnic name and being a Palestinian-American, I do want to talk about it in these educational environments where I can have these conversations.

Interview 5: Fund Development Coordinator

Q. Could you tell me a little bit about your role as Fund Development Coordinator and about how you began working for CAIR?

FDC: I've worked at CAIR since November, before that I was working for MAS Youth center - which is the first Muslim Youth center in the country. I have worked in the community since I was 16, so I've been working with community based organisations since 2019. I've always worked in community facing positions - operations, finance, administration development - things like that. I worked for the city for a little bit in the law development, I worked at Arab American Association - I was in finance operations there. Before that I was interning with them for advocacy civil engagement - so we were doing food stamps, and application systems, things like that.

I work in the fund development department here. Helping bring private funds into the organisation. The goal behind it and why it's different to grants is - the money that comes from grants is restricted money - we get paid to do things, versus the money that I bring in is unrestricted money - you have to be able to convince people that there is a big problem and we have the solution to solve the problem. It's basically sales with ethics. You have to connect with communities, it's a lot of exposure and awareness and letting people know we exist - letting them know that we need their money to keep going and that we all need to work together.

Q. How reliant is CAIR as an organization on these funds coming in?

FDC: If you don't have money you don't have programs. We are trying to solve a problem, but we can only solve those problems if we pay people to do so. Without development and grants the work doesn't happen. If people don't get paid, people don't work, it is also the biggest way to expand. If we apply and fundraise at a higher level, we get to expand the team, we get to help more people, we get to increase our impact. If your impact isn't really matching what people are paying for - people will stop paying you. You have an unwritten contract with your donors. If we are not upholding that responsibility, we are not doing that work. You are going back on your word in that case. Which is why the ethics of fundraising gets really nuanced.

Q. What is your definition of hate?

FDC: You could say, like, prejudice against somebody for the wrong reasons - it's feeling a certain way about somebody with no reason except that's just how you feel. I think you can have subconscious hate but also conscious hate. I guess this is the nurture versus nature argument. So I guess disliking somebody for no apparent reason. The hate that's against Muslims is the same thing it's been since post 9/11. It won't change - because there's nothing to change. The hate that Muslims face is not backed by anything - and it won't change, because the definition of hate that they have is an absence of understanding, of ignorance. If you're ignorant - then your attitude to hate won't change, it's a complete lack of understanding.

Interview 6: Communications Coordinator

Q. Tell me a little bit about your role and how you started working at CAIR.

CC: I'm originally from Texas, so I was born in Houston, moved around Texas and ended back in Texas. Around 13,14 I got involved with an organization called Young Muslims or YM and we would do a few events with CAIR Texas. So I was pretty familiar with the work CAIR does. While I was in this non-profit I joined the social media team - and I got familiar with (*names someone who used to work at CAIR-NY*). I worked in comms and I was moving to New York so I reached out to her again. I applied to Cair and (*name*) referred me. That's how I applied for the position, and alhamdulillah that's how I got the position and ended up working at CAIR. I'm Comms so that means I handle the public-facing image of CAIR. This includes social media, our websites - generally the media and journalists. I do have non-profit experience with YM but not paid non-profit work. With CAIR I feel like there's more of that 9 to 5 structure and that formality - but some things are urgent and need to be addressed immediately. We should not be striving for justice just from 9 to 5, but I feel like usually when it's after 5 I just check out.

Q. What are some challenges you face in your role?

CC: I think risk taking and growth is difficult in this role, given that we're such a small team and I'm the only one who does comms and marketing. Prior to coming to this role I'd only had a couple of years of experience, so that was definitely a challenge. So since I'm the only comms person here, so no one's mentoring me. I feel like if I was to take a risk or take a risk in general, if the results are bad it kind of discourages me to make mistakes and growing.

Q. What is your definition of hate and has it changed at all since working at CAIR?

CC: I would say hate is like...Are we talking about the act of hate or the emotion of hate? I'd say maybe a negative or implicit bias against somebody maybe because of someone's identity or background.. It doesn't necessarily have to be something that's explicit. Someone can hate something without being vocal about it whereas someone else can be very vocal about hating something. I don't think my definition has changed since working here, I think it's expanded. Like what is a hate crime versus what is biased. I have a more informed understanding of what hate is now. I think I also feel more strongly now that I work at CAIR.

Q. Is there any Scholarship, Academia or Media that influences the work that you do?

CC: I think for me, I think ... growing up I didn't really hear people talking about religion and identity and discrimination. People would think.. If someone's religious they're not discriminatory. You can be someone who is devoted to God but you should also be able to show concern and rage about what's happening in our community. Something that altered my brain chemistry is the concept of Islam, and Muslims... there's an emphasis on community, there's an emphasis on congregation, how can we be teaching about congregation and community but when something's happening in our backyard and you're quiet? I saw Imam Omar Suleiman speaking in a clip, and I was like wow like, the way he's speaking about it and the way he's addressing it - he speaks so eloquently and calmly. Another thing I think, I was reading this book called Beyond Bilal - and the whole point of the book was to highlight Muslims in history who were important. If you ask another Muslim who was an important Black Muslim in history people go real quiet. I think that was kind of eye-opening for me. Fighting my own ignorance, recognizing it and doing something about it as well.

Q. What role does money and funding play in the work that you are able to do?

CC: I think money plays a huge role in terms of resources and reach, but also like - typically when we market and we do comms work, a lot of it can be for brand awareness. I think we've finally got brand awareness but we don't have capacity. A lot of times we have to send people away with referrals because we do not have capacity. So now we ask ourselves what is the

purpose of marketing and comms? I think for us now it is to fundraise and have more grants so we can increase our legal capacity.

Q. Where do you think we go from here? What are our next steps?

CC: I would say awareness, and I think ... not in the sense of like oh, everyone should know who CAIR is, but in the sense of everyone should know not only when they're being treated unjustly but also when they're treating others unjustly. Some people don't think they're problematic but actually they are. If we were able to identify our own problems, we'd be more likely to call others out too. I feel like once you identify the problem within yourself, you can work towards solving it. People need to hold themselves accountable - but because they can't organisations like us exist. Because people with power can't hold people accountable we're out here on the streets of New York hoping we can defend people.

Interview 7: NYC Civic Corps Volunteer Management Member

(This interview was conducted after the Civic Corps Management Member was officially done with their year contract of working at CAIR.)

Q: Can you talk to me about what your responsibilities were as the Civic Corps Volunteer Management member?

VMM: My main role was volunteer management so I had to manage our volunteer network which consists of 100 people. I had to have meetings with incoming volunteers. It would kind of be like an orientation. I would organize for volunteers to come whenever we needed them. If we needed help for workshops or something. And then I would also help the outreach team. I would reach out to Islamic schools or mosques to schedule workshops. I gave like 25 workshops. Before you came we had to give a lot. Every now and then if *(name)* needed help with grants I'd help them, I'd make canva projects sometimes, *(a graphic design platform used for making social media posts, posters, visual content, etc)*, I would help the comms team too. I enjoyed the public facing aspect of the role. I liked being in the community and having a job that requires you to be out of the office. But there were definitely aspects of the job I didn't like. I like technical aspects like data analytics - so I think that was lacking for me.

Q. Is there any scholarship, academia or media that inspires the work that you do?

VMM: I think Mohammad el-Kurd. He's a Palestinian author, poet, and journalist from Jerusalem. He has a book called Perfect Victim. He talks a lot about trying to be the perfect victim, trying to censor yourself - it can be possible that we don't realise what we're doing. He made me realise how I talk about things - what I learnt through him informs my conversations. A lot of people when they talk about Palestine and Gaza and the genocide - they say 300,000 people were killed in Gaza - half of them women and children, but by doing that you're greenlighting the death of men. So he tries to highlight that - we should think of what we say. How that can actually do more good for the cause than we think, in an effort to humanise people we further dehumanise them.

Q. In your opinion, how do we begin addressing these casual forms of Islamophobia?

VMM: I think um.. I think a big part of .. a big factor that contributes to Islamophobia is Hollywood and the media. Those are two big sectors that are extremely Islamophobic and reaches a lot of people. They need to drastically change how they approach Islam and speak about things. While we can do work on the ground and teach kids about Islamophobia - which is good, majority of America and the western world have never met a Muslim before, they don't know what it actually means. The only thing that forms their perception of Islam is the media that they consume and that must change. It's kind of crazy how movies and Hollywood can affect so much - it's propaganda. It's kind of crazy how successful Hollywood has been in generating Islamophobia. Step 2 - having more organizations like CAIR New York. I do think the OPHC (Office for the prevention of Hate Crimes) grant - talking to youth, like us - we weren't going to communities that hate Muslims we were going to Muslim schools, but maybe if we went to less Muslim neighbourhoods and taught them that would be very effective.

Q. What does success in your role look like for you?

VMM: I would measure success in my role by how many new communities we spoke to, how many new schools we went to, new communities that we tapped into. I think the goal of outreach is to meet more people, to reach more communities. Instead of reaching out to the same people. I

would measure success by how many new organizations, non-profits, neighborhoods we spoke to. Like that... right? That's how I would measure success.

Q. What would you say was the most rewarding part of your job?

VMM: I think definitely what was the most rewarding was giving these workshops to youth. Once I went to MUNA (Muslim Ummah of North America) and I gave the sisters a workshop and then to the brothers. I was giving middle schoolers workshops and they'd be so shocked - like woah is this still happening ? Like I guess racism is a bizarre concept to understand. But I guess that was the most rewarding. Definitely speaking to the youth.

Conclusion:

A non-profit is characterized by the people who run it. It is made up of their dreams, their ambitions, their experiences and their visions for a shared future. It is not impersonal in the least, and is only made possible through an insane amount of teamwork. In my short time at CAIR, I was incredibly impressed by the efforts made by its small team. I was also made hyper-aware of the challenges civil rights organizations like CAIR face - such as the looming threat of reduced funds, not having enough capacity and feeling hopeless in the face of what on some days felt like an endless cycle of hate crimes and Islamophobia. I learnt valuable skills from my time with the CAIR team - patience, hardwork, drive and most importantly hope. With as many bomb threats, hate crimes and bias incident reports we'd receive on a daily basis, we would also receive kind words of gratitude, volunteer interest from youth and be able to connect with the broader New York Community. As I write this at the end of my summer internship, I am grateful to the team at CAIR for welcoming me into their workspace and for taking the time to speak with me about their lives. I am thankful to the Bard Center for the Study of Hate for this opportunity and always carry with me the lessons I learnt from my time at CAIR.