

Putting Middle East Youth to Work: Partnering with Business to Turn a Youth Tsunami into an Asset

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Youth in Asilah, Morocco. Photo: Doug n Kristi Bermingham (www.flickr.com)

This event was hosted by Mitchell J. Nelson, Carnegie Council Friends Committee.

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Introduction

DAVID SPEEDIE: When Ron Bruder and I first started thinking about this session some time ago, I was going to make the statement in the beginning that this was a little bit off the beaten track of the U.S. Global Engagement Program. On further reflection, it occurred to me that this really is the essence of

positive engagement.

It's a case of a U.S.-founded organization working with individuals, institutions, communities, particularly the business community, and beyond, in places where we would like to see the effort made to train youth for education and employment.

Getting to the heart of that matter is surely what engagement is all about, in dealing with some pretty intractable issues and areas. Hence the title of tonight's talk: "Putting Middle East Youth to Work."

I have known Ron basically since this was a gleam in his eye. He and Jasmine are the two people you want to hear this evening, so without any more ado, I want to welcome Ron and Jasmine to the Council. This is one of the more interesting, if not downright inspirational, topics that we'll hear at the Council, or indeed in any forum.

Education for Employment Foundation, welcome to Carnegie Council.

Remarks

RONALD BRUDER: Thank you, David. Thank you, everybody, for coming out on this cold, miserable evening. It takes a lot of courage to be here.

I have been a serial entrepreneur for 30 years. I built shopping centers all over the United States, developed a methodology to buy environmentally tainted properties, and was the largest purchaser of those in the 1990s. And life was good, until 9/11 happened. I don't know where anybody else in this room was, but I was in Midtown by my office. My daughter was by the World Trade Center. She was in the editorial department at Scholastic and watched people jumping from the tower. It was traumatizing. It changed her forever. She and I after that spent many evenings talking about what happened, why it happened, and what could be done about it.

One of the companies that I started was in the pharmaceutical business. We were licensing technologies globally. There was a concept that there were many technologies out there that could serve a very good purpose, but there wasn't the capital and the business acumen. It took me, of all places, in the 1990s, to Belfast. We were doing business with both sides of the fence.

In those days, you couldn't do business openly with both sides. But our policy was that we were non-disclosive, totally confidential, so nobody knew who we were doing business with. We managed to do a good swatch of

business over five or six years. I saw all the hatred between the religious factions, and I foolishly thought that it would continue forever. Then, all of a sudden—in historical terms, a nanosecond—in about five years, people that were literally killing each other started to work together to make a killing.

I went back to Belfast. I missed it. I would have never guessed that I would see it in my lifetime. I spoke to people, and I asked them why they were no longer taking pleasure out of doing each other in. The answer that I got was that they were too busy. They were busy making a living, planning for their future, going on vacation, having money for their kids' education, and thinking about investments. That all came because unemployment dropped radically. The Celtic Tiger roared. GNP went up by four times over a five-year period. The societal changes from that were immense.

After 9/11, I looked at at the MENA region, Middle East, North Africa. I saw that what we really need there is a [Marshall Plan](#). What we need to do, as the U.S. did then, is embrace our enemies and rebuild their economies and make them our friends.

I started meeting with people that were a lot smarter than I in this area, such as [Lee Hamilton](#), of the [Baker-Hamilton Commission](#), [Moeen Qureshi](#), former prime minister of Pakistan, [Shibley Telhami](#), the Anwar Sadat Peace Professor, [Ellen Laipson](#), who runs the Stimson Foundation, and [Mokhtar Lamani](#), the ambassador to the OIC, Organization of the Islamic Conference. Mokhtar literally dropped what he was doing, and he and I went on the road for about three months to look at the problem and to figure out potential solutions. I also hired the Brookings Institution to give some insight.

What we learned was that the educational institutions in the region were not teaching what is needed in the workplace. People would go through, getting a reasonable education, but the skills they learned were not the skills that enabled them to get a job.

We do a lot of work in Amman and around Jordan. Unemployment for youth there is 12 percent. Unemployment, if you have a college degree, is 22 percent. Unemployment in the United States right now for college graduates is 5 percent, roughly half. There it's almost double. Why is that the case? The skills that the kids are learning there are not what is needed by the labor market.

So we set forth to try to bring answers. The way we have gone about it is pretty simple and straightforward. We go into these countries. We form stand-alone foundations in each country, the equivalent of a 501(c)(3). The board of that 501(c)(3) is leading industrialists from those countries. The staff in those countries are all local.

The challenge is to figure out where the jobs are and what tools are needed to educate youth and get them into the labor force. We are doing that now in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Gaza, and the West Bank. We have been operating for a little over four years. The first graduating class was June of 2006. The skills that we teach are the skills that we're told are needed. For instance, the first program we ever launched was in Jordan. We went to the education minister—a brilliant man, [Khaled Toukan](#), a towering figure in the country, MIT graduate.

After several meetings, and over an informal dinner, I said, "Khaled, if we could do just one thing only, what would we be teaching?"

He looked at me and he said, "Soft skills."

I didn't know what soft skills were. The good news is, my staff is a lot more understanding of this realm. I went back, and we found, through our educational director, probably the most powerful soft-skill program that is available. It was owned by McGraw-Hill.

Soft skills, for those that don't know, are how to write a résumé, critical thinking, leadership, how to behave in the workplace, how to work with others, how to speak, how to dress, what to say at work, what not to say at work, and a work ethic.

We have this program from McGraw-Hill that's 96 hours that we teach over a two- or three-month period. It is transforming. What it really does, which I didn't understand at all—I don't know that a lot of us did—is, in addition to giving the skills that the youth need, it gives them something more powerful: It gives them self-confidence.

These kids leave our program as self-fulfilling prophecies. They really believe that they can succeed and that they are very special because they are graduates of this program.

We launched it in Jordan at, I believe, Al-Isra University. We had an 85 percent success rate. That's pretty good, but they are university graduates. We then took it to a slum and we launched it through a neighborhood center. Again, we had an 85 percent success rate.

We now have taken that program and we have migrated it all over the Middle East. We sometimes teach it by itself and sometimes we teach it with other skills. For instance, we have a program in Jordan that is amazing. In order to qualify for this program, you need to have failed your high school exit exam. So these are kids that are really going nowhere. We teach them soft skills, so that they show up for work on time and they know how to behave in the workplace. Equally important, we teach them how to install and repair air conditioners. We have had a very high success rate there in doing that—once again, roughly 85 percent.

One of our board members in Jordan raised her hand about two years ago and said to us, "In Jordan, there's not a decent program in land surveying," handed us a check and said, "Build the course. We'll hire the first 40 graduates."

We're responsive to the needs of the labor market. There are people that come to us with concepts—one of the programs we were looking at was emergency medical technicians or para-veterinarians. We did a lot of homework and we found, at the end of the day, that it wasn't going to work; there weren't going to be the jobs.

We function in a marketplace where we look for jobs that we know exist. Oftentimes we work with employers, and the employers become our partners. They pay us fees for placing their graduates. They help us interview the graduates.

We do the location and the training. It's very collaborative and it's very effective.

We also work with our alumni afterwards. We have them continue to grow and expand. One of our key relationships is with [Manpower](#), which is one of the largest employers in the world. They are a \$22-billion-a-year company. We are fortunate in that the president of Manpower International [[David Arkless](#)] is on our board and is a very strong advocate of our work. One of the things that he provides, which has been phenomenal, is that all of our graduates, for free, can take courses that they teach to their clients for thousands of dollars. They have 3,600 courses online. Any graduate can just dial in and expand who they are and further themselves.

They also have assessment tools. Some of them started in, of all places, China. They can sit down with a potential student and tell him with the result of a test whether he should be an entrepreneur, or whether he should be a banker. The success rate of that is very high. There is tremendous correlation.

We have been able to make that Alumni Association, in some instances, self-sustaining. We are operating in Yemen, where we have had a tremendous amount of success. Our chairman is [Alwan Shaibani](#). He has raised over half a million dollars locally in Yemen to help fund our activities. The Alumni Association gets \$10 a month from every student, which doesn't sound like a lot, but the income in Yemen is an average of \$537 per year. That Alumni Association is now self-sustaining.

The challenge that we have is, we are told by the World Bank that by the year 2020, 100 million new jobs will be needed. We are in an area right now which has the largest youth bulge and the largest unemployment of youth in the world. Just to maintain the status quo, you need 100 million new jobs because of the tremendous population growth.

The work that we are doing, we believe, will have serious impact, not only in terms of the graduates—and the number of graduates we have had has been scaling up radically. Through last year, we had 1,000 graduates. This year we will have about 1,500 graduates. Next year we project 3,000 graduates, but we will be closer to 5,000. The 3,000 graduates are already lined up. Everything is in place for that. We seem to be getting new support elsewhere, and so my hope is that we'll do much more than that.

Equally important, some of the educational institutions are noticing what we're doing and looking to us for help. For instance, King Hassan II, the third-largest public university in Morocco, has come to us and said, "Our percentage of graduates who get jobs is not what it should be." Starting next year, we are working with them to radically increase the percentage of their youth that get jobs.

We're also looking to create whole new marketplaces. We just got a grant from the IFC, World Bank, to go forward and see if nursing is feasible in Yemen. In that region, there is a tremendous nursing shortage. It's our hope that we will build a world-class nursing school there and empower thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of women to join the labor force as very highly qualified nurses. We're working with Simmons College in Boston and with NYU [New York University] in New York, and we will create world-class nursing.

We are expanding and we are also struggling. These are not easy parts of the world to operate, but we have been very fortunate. Our local boards have bought into it. They have taken ownership, and they are enabling us to expand and become sustainable.

All of our five foundations—Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Gaza, and the West Bank—are now self-sustaining

from grants that they get on their own or that they get with our help, or fees that they are charging for placing graduates.

Also, because it has been recognized that our training courses are very powerful, we are now doing these courses and using some of the revenue from those to pay for some of the costs of dealing with the most needy.

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: Good evening. It's great to be here. I want to thank David Speedie and the Carnegie Council for having us here tonight and all of you for joining us.

I just want to make a couple of short remarks to provide a framework of what is distinctive about EFE.

The last time I was here at the Council, [Matthew Bishop](#), the New York Bureau chief of *The Economist*, who wrote a book called *Philanthrocapitalism*, gave a presentation. What he said is what is very distinctive about philanthrocapitalists—people like Ron Bruder and many others—is that they bring innovation and they are willing to take risks. That's really their contribution to international development projects.

The innovation is twofold. One is the way we do our work. As you have seen, we incubate and launch national foundations. We create a network of locally run organizations. We don't open up branch offices. We don't go in as Americans and run the projects in these countries. We really incubate and provide seed funding, technical knowhow, ongoing oversight, and management support, to really help people in the region build their own foundations. The boards of directors come from those countries. The staff who run the entities are Egyptian, Yemeni, and Palestinian. We are partners based on mutual respect and understanding. We provide them with tools and support, but they run their foundations because they know their countries best.

That's very key for both sustainability and scale. Because we have national business leaders and education leaders who run these foundations, they are able to bring in their networks in their countries. They are able to attract funding from local government sources, foundations in their own countries, and international donors. They're also highly scalable, because they're building on local networks. These projects aren't short-term; they are there for decades, and hopefully longer, to come.

The other innovation is that this is very much a demand-driven model. There are many organizations that train youth and provide employability training to prepare youth for the job market. This is not new. What's different is our methodology, and in the way we engage companies. We first start with the companies. We understand their hiring needs. We talk to them about the specific skills-based competencies they need from fresh graduates, to be willing to hire them.

For example, a recent [PwC/Maktoum Foundation report](#) that polled 600 Arab CEOs in the region asked them what skills they are looking for from fresh graduates. The CEOs talked about communication skills, teamwork, leadership, analytical skills, language skills, innovation, capability to innovate, and IT awareness. These are the nine top skills required by Arab CEOs recruiting. In the universities there, they teach one major thing, apart from technical competencies, and that is rote memorization. They do not teach communication, teamwork, leadership, innovation, and creativity.

This is this education gap we talk about that we're stepping into. We want to provide these kinds of skills in a very interactive, role play-based pedagogy that we are very used to here in the United States, but that does not exist in public schools in these countries. People who can afford to go to school abroad or to private schools certainly get exposure to these skills, but not the young people with limited opportunity whom we're working with.

This demand-driven approach and providing these same Arab CEOs, who have also said that they do not engage with the education system, to help prepare the workforce—they don't necessarily know how to do it. There aren't enough venues to do that.

We provide a platform for companies to tell us their training needs, to work with us to adapt curricula, to come into our classrooms as guest speakers to share their experiences and inspire young people. We promote social mobility by helping young people get access to these corporate leaders as mentors and to learn from them.

We measure success by our placement rate, not by the number of students we train or by the amount of training that we provide. We have an internal target of 85 percent job placement for all of our graduates. We also make sure that they are retained on the job. We provide a lot of support to them as alumni for ongoing personal and professional development, as well as community engagement. We are very close to the thousands of young people in our network.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I have a question about attitudes towards entrepreneurship in the Middle East. I've been listening to

a book on tape called [The History of the Middle East](#) by a British historian, which I've been doing for about 18 months, when I have the stomach for this very long and rather dry account.

One of the ideas that came out of this was that the exploitation by the British and the French colonial powers in the Middle East—the setting-up of factories and exploiting the locals in a rather difficult way—has created attitudes among the elites in the Arab world against business and against entrepreneurship. I was wondering, as Jasmine was talking about the lack of skills, leadership skills, why it is in the schools there have not considered those things important.

My question is, to those of you who are working in the Middle East, is this a real barrier to progress, attitudes that have been handed down through generations now—a holdover from the French and British colonial period?

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: Thank you for that question. They've polled youth in the Arab world, and across the board, about 30 percent of young people would like to start their own businesses. We have met many entrepreneurial people. I don't mean to contradict this author, but from my own personal, anecdotal experience, and from reading these polls, there's a great spirit of entrepreneurship that's still alive and well in the region.

The problem, especially for young people, is access to capital, access to incubation, mentors, networks, and opportunity.

There's also a poll done by Gallup that showed that young people in the Middle East, if they have worked for at least one year in a job, they are much more likely to become entrepreneurs and to be successful. Young people who cannot get jobs don't have that link to become successful entrepreneurs.

So from my point of view, the issue is not so much attitude; it's opportunity.

RONALD BRUDER: I would like to just add one comment. There is some relevance to what you're saying. In some of the countries that we operate in, I speak to youth and there is a tremendous desire by a large number of them to go to work for government, at much lower salaries and with no real future. But it gives them the perceived prestige and perceived security. The joke in Egypt, for instance, is that the Egyptian government has this bloated bureaucracy, and you pretend to go to work for the government and the government pretends to pay you. It's sort of a difficult situation.

There is not, in many instances, a willingness to take risks, although that seems to be changing. The work that we do facilitates that change.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That quote about pretending to work and pretending to pay was also prevalent in the late days of the Soviet Union. I don't want to be too gloomy.

QUESTION: Are there opportunities for you to work with local schools or do you have to set up your own organization?

RONALD BRUDER: We do not set up our own organization. We find that a much more efficient deployment of capital is to bring in master trainers and to train existing teachers there and then go home, but continue to monitor and work with those trainers. You won't go to the region and find any EFE schools. You will find EFE programs becoming more and more prevalent. But we work with existing institutions of all stripes.

I was on the phone this morning. We have a program that has been very successful in the West Bank. We take youth and we teach engineers—there's a plethora of engineers in the West Bank, but there is a very strong paucity of jobs for engineers. We have built a curriculum in Colorado State University, and we trained 18 instructors in the West Bank to teach construction management. It's a very powerful curriculum. There are jobs available for construction managers. We worked through the engineers' association for that.

We have another program, also in the West Bank, where we are teaching business English, we are teaching soft skills, and we are teaching the mini-MBA program that we have built at Maryland University. Some of it we do directly at our offices. For instance, the business English we farm out.

So it's a combination. We don't have the capital, quite frankly, or the interest in building our own institutions. If we are going to effectuate large-scale change, it's better facilitated by working with the existing institutions and having them be the beneficiaries or our methodology and our curriculum.

QUESTION: Thank you for the presentation. In it you highlighted some of the big problems that are facing the region—the high unemployment that already exists there, the weaknesses in the education system, and this demographic issue which indicates that there is going to be a greater number of people in this age group as the years go by. In your dealings with the United Nations and the Arab League and governments out there, have you

got any reason to think that the problem isn't going to do anything but get a whole lot worse?

RONALD BRUDER: I have to be optimistic to do this work. If I didn't think we were providing solutions, I would stay in the United States and build more shopping centers. There's a growing awareness of the needs of the labor market and the needs of the educational system to align themselves with those needs.

I am optimistic. I see changes. I see the work we're doing expanding, being taken up by us, as well as being taken up by others. I believe the challenge will be met, and we'll be a part of that.

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: If I could add to that, we're seeing that there are a number of donors rallying around this cause of youth employment. There are \$100 million- and billion-dollar funds that are being set up by Arabs and others, in Europe and the United States, to focus on this issue, as well as a number of multinational companies that are really getting engaged, to promote both entrepreneurship and direct job placement. There has been an emerging consensus and more momentum in the past couple of years to devote significant capital and create significant partnerships.

QUESTIONER: From what you're saying, is all the work that's being done there by private groups, like yourself, and private capital? Is none of it being done by the actual governments?

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: Multilateral agencies, like the ILO [International Labour Organization] and the United Nations, are involved, and the World Bank.

Government involvement depends on the country. What we are trying to do is present a model that works to the governments, so that the public institutions, with government support, can scale up. In Morocco and Jordan, we are creating a partnership with ministries.

What we have to do is present successful models that work and that can be taken to scale. Then we find that a number of governments are very interested in going to scale, with the support of organizations like the ILO and the United Nations. In other countries, the governments may be less interested. There's a range.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Let me ask Ron a question that's a bit along the lines of the first question about contextual and historical barriers or things that may intrude and make the situation even more difficult for you.

In reading about your mini-MBA training program in the West Bank and Gaza, you say that as of February 2008, 100 percent of the pilot class from Gaza is employed. The second and third classes are in the job-placement process. Overall, 33 percent of graduates have been placed. This rate is due, in part, to the closed border in Gaza and the delay in obtaining work visas for Palestinians to work abroad.

This must fall into the category of frustration for you—the eager young minds, but the mega political context literally providing a barrier.

RONALD BRUDER: Four days ago, I was in the West Bank. The good news is that there are more opportunities for citizens of Gaza to get out than there were two or three months ago. There seems to be more of an opening in the Egyptian side. We are scurrying right now to take our graduates from Gaza and move them into, mostly, the Gulf.

We had a course there that we launched in 2008, and there is a strategic partnership with a Palestinian organization called [CCC](#) [Consolidated Contractors Company]. CCC is the largest construction company in the Middle East. The head of it is a gentleman by the name of [Samer Khoury](#). Samer operates out of Athens and employs 174,000 people. He's a member of our board in the United States, and he's a very strong proponent of our work. In 2008, he came to us and said, "There are all these accountants graduating in Gaza, but they don't have work skills. When they leave school, they really don't have the necessary skills to be of any value."

Together with his staff and our staff, we built this mini-MBA program. It was highly successful. I remember the first time, in 2008, that Samer came over for a board meeting. We went through all the niceties. We had breakfast and exchanged family situations, et cetera. At the end, I said, "Samer, how do you feel about the quality of our graduates? Are we getting the job done?"

He said, "It's amazing. For whatever reason, this mini-MBA that you're teaching them enables them to think."

What it does is, it takes them through eight quarters of a business cycle, and they have to solve problems. These kids never really had to solve problems before. They learned out-of-the-box thinking. They learned critical thinking. They learned problem solving. It was a huge advantage, and our graduates in the Gulf are doing quite well.

In terms of sustainability, those youth are giving back 10 percent of their salary after they leave and go to work in the Gulf. It's amazing. I was in Egypt also last week. These are poor kids, and they are not starting off with very high salaries, but 60 percent of our graduates in the Egyptian programs are giving back voluntarily funds to our Cairo office so that the next group can be the beneficiaries.

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: David, if I could add to that, it has been frustrating in the past two years to not be able to continue to place young people in Gaza. But it also shows the strength of our model, which is that we haven't shut down and left. There are organizations that have to do that because the government funding or other funding sources end as a result of the situation there, and they shut down and leave. But because this is a Palestinian EFE organization, based in the region, run by Palestinians, it's there to stay, and we can wait this out until there are greater opportunities to place young people in jobs within Gaza and outside.

RONALD BRUDER: One of our [board members](#), Hashim Shawa, runs the Bank of Palestine. He's our board member in the West Bank, but he also has branches in Gaza. While Gaza has been sealed and we couldn't get people out and create new jobs, he knew of all these very highly qualified teachers that we had in Gaza and he hired us to train his existing staff in the program. We used all the profit from that to subsidize some of the work we're doing in the West Bank. So we continued to improve the quality of labor, we made money, we generated revenue, and we enhanced the work we're doing in the West Bank.

QUESTION: My question is on accessibility. I know here in the States there are many programs open to students. However, if you don't take that extra initiative to go see your adviser or go talk to your mentor or sit down with your professor, you don't know about the opportunities that are often out there for you.

How accessible are your programs to people in the Middle East, especially youth? Do you go out and seek them? Do they have to seek you? Is it through schools only? I was just wondering if you could elaborate on that a little more.

RONALD BRUDER: Basically, we're looking for youth that are the most disadvantaged. Also we're looking for youth that are most motivated. For instance, when we started our operation in Gaza and we opened for business, nobody came. The reason nobody came is that they did not believe that the graduates would actually get decent-paying jobs. As soon as our first graduating class went off to the Gulf and started making, by their standards, pretty serious money, we were besieged.

When we launch a new program, it depends on the program, the country, and the demographic we're looking for. For instance, we have a sales program that we built in Morocco. The largest company in Morocco, who is on our board, said, "We need something about sales." Fifty-five percent of those graduates are female. We focused our recruiting towards women, which we do, quite frankly, heavily throughout the region, because we believe that you can make a much stronger social change by educating a woman than a man. Forty percent of our graduates in Yemen are women, which is an off-the-charts number and took a lot of work to achieve.

We're open to everybody. We're not elitist. We sometimes advertise. We want people to be motivated. Sometimes we'll charge 50 pounds, \$10, so they have some skin in the game and they take the course seriously. We use whatever methodology we think is appropriate for the youth that we are trying to bring into that program.

QUESTION: The work you do, is it concentrated on large urban environments or is it also spread out throughout the more regional parts of whatever country you're working in?

RONALD BRUDER: That's a good question. If you had asked the question last year, we would not have been spread out. We would have just stayed in the main city environments, because, quite frankly, it's easier. But one of the things that has happened in the last year is, as we have grown, we have taken challenges to go to the more rural areas. We are doing so more and more, at a very fast clip.

A year ago we were really focused on the cities, because we couldn't do everything for everybody, and we wanted to impact as many youth as possible. Now, through requests from donors or just because we see the need, we have been moving out into the rural areas. For instance, we started in Sana'a in Yemen. I never thought we would go beyond Sana'a. We're now in Taizz and we're opening an office next year in Aden.

We're spreading out rapidly in these countries, because the need is there.

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: In the West Bank, since the beginning, our strategy was always to get people drawn from the entire region into our program. The training actually took place in Ramallah initially, but we brought in and paid transportation stipends to bring students from Nablus and Hebron and all over. Because of the fragmentation of the country, we wanted to make sure that people outside of Ramallah did have access. So that was always part of our strategy in the Palestinian territories in the West Bank.

DAVID SPEEDIE: A question on modalities. Speak just a little bit more about going into Yemen, for example, and setting up a staff, a board, recruiting board. How long did that take?

RONALD BRUDER: It was much easier than I expected, for a few reasons. One is, by the time we went into Yemen—and we've been in Yemen about two years—we had a track record from other countries. When you go in with a track record, life is easier.

Secondly, we have strategic partnerships. I mentioned CCC. They're the 13th-largest construction company in the world, and clearly the largest dominant construction company in the region. The gentleman that ran the CCC office in Yemen was told that this his priority was to get us organized, to introduce us to the right people, to throw dinner parties, to introduce us to the ambassadors, and to move things forward.

When we started, we also had an advantage. We had a grant of \$288,000 from the [Middle East Partnership Initiative](#). One of our staff had gone there prior to my actually going to Yemen and had laid the groundwork, so we started to have some infrastructure in place.

I went there and gave a PowerPoint presentation and explained what we were doing, why we were doing it, and how we thought it could help. I basically said, "The good news is we have \$288,000, and we can spend it in Yemen, but we need \$144,000 from Yemeni money. We want to know that you believe in this."

I said, "I'm getting on a plane later today, and unless I see a show of hands that there's some interest, we are not coming back."

People raised hands, and they meant it. We raised \$50,000, then \$124,000, and then a half a million dollars. More money keeps going in.

We found Alwan Shaibani who runs Yemeni airlines, the DHL franchise, and the Hertz franchise. He's 72 years old, he thinks; he's not sure—approximately.

He's a wonderful human being. If you ask him what his passion is and what he does nowadays, it's YEFE. He has taken the foundation and grown it to where it is, with our help and support. But it has done much better and much quicker because we have been able to find people like that.

JASMINE NAHHAS DI FLORIO: Going back in time, when we first started in Gaza and Morocco, for example, we didn't have a brand name. We didn't have matching funds. We didn't have anything on the ground—no track record, nothing. It took literally ten visits to Morocco, ten flights, four of us, many cups of tea and a lot of discussion, to gain trust. It was all about trust. What people liked was that the model was new, that we were not looking to set up a branch office, that we were looking to have our partners serve on the board and control the entity—with matching funds from us, but to have them really be in control.

It took a lot of visits. We spent one to two years just flying to these countries and talking to people. That again is where an individual like Ron, who was able to underwrite that investment, which a typical donor would not ever do, was really essential.

Once we built the first four, then Yemen was much easier. Now going into new countries will be much easier. I just came back from Algeria, where we're not yet present. There is tremendous interest. Because we now have a methodology and clarity in terms of how we roll this out and a track record in other countries, it would only take six months to set up the board and to find the business leaders and education leaders. But at first, it was at least two years.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That leads to just one final question. I don't think it's an understatement to say that this isn't exactly front-page news in terms of public perception in even the elite press in this country, what's going on in Yemen. For most people, Yemen—to the extent they know anything, they know that the [USS Cole](#) was bombed there, with loss of American life, a few years ago. It's now being portrayed quite frequently as a quasi-functional state.

Is this word getting out, that there are these positive things going on? Obviously, your circles know it.

RONALD BRUDER: I have a daughter who is a journalism professor at Columbia, and she always likes to say, if it bleeds, it leads. Well, this isn't bleeding news. This, we think, is good news, and therefore it's not as exciting for the press to pick up.

Sometimes we kid internally that we are the best-kept secret around, because we're doing work in all these countries and we're having impact, and yet the world doesn't know about us. We are making efforts to change

that.

DAVID SPEEDIE: You certainly are. And just to bring it full-circle, it's a remarkable program. I can't think of anything else that's such a genuine engagement that involves academic institutions, government agencies, international organizations, local business leaders, and, of course, the communities where the need is greatest.

Jasmine Nahhas di Florio and Ron Bruder, congratulations and many thanks for being here.

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