

Social work field placement brings Syrian crisis to life

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Tulane University social work graduate student Sam Sahl (middle row, second from left) conducts trainings with team leaders and case managers from the child protection team with International Medical Corps in Irbid, Jordan. (Photo by Melinda Flynn)

When Tulane University [School of Social Work](#) master's student Sam Sahl walks across the Dixon Hall stage on Friday (Dec. 11) with the rest of her 83-person graduating class, it will be the end of a long but rewarding fall semester that began in Amman, Jordan.

Sahl spent the semester working with International Medical Corps, an international nongovernmental organization working primarily with Syrian refugees in that area.

“The most rewarding part was meeting and working with so many incredible and inspiring people at IMC,” Sahl said. “Many Jordanians view Syrian refugees with the same fear, distrust, and even animosity that individuals in the U.S. and European countries hold against them.

“However, the Jordanian Child Protection case workers see the refugees as human beings, the same as them, who deserve respect and support. They have a very difficult job and not enough support or praise, but they don't give up.”

Sahl, who earned her bachelor's from Tulane in anthropology and international development, said the work was challenging.

“The most challenging thing was the lack of change, or success that I was able to see,” Sahl said. “I was only in Jordan for three months, and that change can take a long time ? greater societal change, and also change in individual cases ? so part of my work involved encouraging the case workers and helping them see the positive impact they had on their clients' lives that wasn't always reflected in the numbers they reported.”

Sahl said the experience brought a human element to the crisis.

“There is a lot of fear in the world right now, and understandably so, but Syrian refugees are victims, not criminals or terrorists. They were middle-class and working-class citizens, just like you and me, who were living under an extremely oppressive government, denied basic rights that Americans wouldn't dream of giving up.”

Joseph Halm is marketing and communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.