



TFN Impact Report from The Marie Colvin Journalists' Network (MCJN)

Submitted 29 May 2024 by Philippa Nairn, MCJN Executive Director, pippa@mcjn.org

1. Name of your organisation

Marie Colvin Journalists' Network (MCJN)

2. Date of TFN event which you pitched at

17 May 2023

3. Name of the project TFN funded

Strengthening the resilience of local women journalists in the Arab world

4. Were you able to undertake your project as you outlined in the application? Yes/No

Yes

5. Can you describe and/or demonstrate the specific impact that TFN funding has had against your initial objectives?

We pitched for funding to strengthen the resilience of local women journalists in the Arab region, and we were blown away by the support received. TFN's flexible and generous support has been very timely, especially during the last seven months of war in Israel-Palestine, which continues to push local and regional journalists' stamina and perseverance to the limit, and which continues to have multifaceted repercussions across the region and indeed globally.

The specific objective stated in our application was "to fund the setup and delivery of support for journalists in need, such as psychological counselling and 1-2-1 mentorship", which are two key services that MCJN provides on an ongoing basis, and which are organised and managed by MCJN's Network Manager, Dima Hamdan.

Since pitching, we have set up and delivered individual psychological counselling for 13 women journalists in our Network, and a further five have begun receiving counselling in the last few months. This includes six Palestinians (five from Gaza), four Yemenis, three Egyptians, two Lebanese, one Syrian, one Moroccan and one Iraqi. The Network Manager has also set up and monitored 1-2-1 mentorship arrangements for

nine members (of whom four are Iraqi, three are Lebanese, one Moroccan and one Egyptian). A mentorship for a Gazan member had to be put on hold due to the war, and a further three mentorships are being set up currently. The Network Manager has also provided hours of guidance and individual support to dozens of members seeking her professional advice during periods of professional crisis (including situations of discrimination, harassment, and potential libel, amongst other scenarios). This has included listening to the testimonies and experiences of our many Gazan and Sudanese members who have been enduring (and reporting on) months of war, displacement, bereavement, violence and famine wreaking devastation on their own families and communities. Thanks to TFN funding, MCJN was able to step in and deliver some modest emergency financial assistance to five of our Gazan members in November to help them access basic shelter, food, water and electricity for them and their families when they were displaced while also trying to deliver the news to many different outlets around the world. More recently, and also thanks to TFN funds, we have been able to bring together a group of Cairo-based members (mostly Egyptians, plus one displaced journalist from Gaza) for peer support, solidarity and networking.

Throughout the last year MCJN has played a vital role in collecting and verifying information, and, most importantly, coordinating cases with other international organisations with greater means to assist. As a result, at least eight of our members from different countries across the Middle East and North Africa have received emergency assistance from third parties thanks to our intervention, coordination and referrals.

In August 2023 – just three months before the current Gaza war erupted – MCJN also successfully partnered with the International Federation of Journalists to deliver gender-sensitive safety training to a group of women journalists in Gaza and the West Bank. TFN's flexible funding enabled us to cover a shortfall from other project funding, and ensured these journalists gained vitally important knowledge and skills related to risk assessments, firearms, first aid and digital security.

Finally, TFN's funding continues to play a vital part in enabling us to prepare and plan for a longer-term future of assistance and empowerment for local women journalists in the Arab region. With the vast majority of our 330+ members being local freelancers – many of whom have been reporting on the wars and conflicts in Sudan and Gaza/Israel (or some related aspect) for much of the past year – TFN's support is helping us be ready for an anticipated increase of trauma support needs in the months ahead. For this, we are very grateful to The Funding Network and all the individual donors who provided financial support a year ago.

6. What portion of the project did TFN fund?

Most importantly, TFN funds enhanced MCJN's ability to cover the many critical hours of support the Network Manager provides our members. Financially, until end April '24, TFN funds covered 121 hours of the Network Manager's time, which has been absolutely essential to the successful delivery of our services during this time (approx. 10% of her hours in this period). This knowledgeable and empathetic human support – which is always harder to cover through standard project funding – can make a profound positive difference for individual members when they are facing professional challenges or crises, especially for the many in our network without workplace or union support systems.

Secondly, in October/November 2023, as the scale of the emergency situation in Gaza became clear, TFN's flexible funding was crucial in giving us the ability to directly support some of our members there whose situation was desperate. MCJN was able to provide modest emergency financial assistance to five Gazan members when needs were acute and the situation chaotic (but banks still functioned). Overall, TFN funds have contributed to 28% of the emergency financial assistance that MCJN has provided to our members in Gaza since 7 October 2023.

On the other hand, thanks to restricted funding received from other donors during this period, the actual costs of counselling sessions mentioned above were allocated to other grants.

7. How many direct beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?

53 women journalists were directly supported up the end of April '24, including 15 through direct activities covered by TFN funds, and more than 40 who benefitted from some other form of direct MCJN assistance, support or referrals organised by the Network Manager during the last year.

8. How many indirect beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?

At end April '24, MCJN had 331 members (and the Network continues to grow every month). TFN's flexible support is indirectly enabling MCJN to support all these women through a variety of ways (whether through counselling, mentoring, trainings, networking opportunities, individual advice, peer support sessions, emergency assistance or MCJN's Arabic-language digital resources).

9. Were you able to leverage further funding as a result of TFN support? Yes/No

It is difficult to answer this question with a simple Yes/No. While we do not know of specific instances where we have secured further funding directly as a result of TFN support, we have been successful in winning new funds since our pitch last year – and we have shared our pitch video with many interested parties. For example, we know that one of our international funders was very pleased to see our pitch video, and they did increase their funds to us in 2023, but it is not possible to say there was any direct link.

10. Did you receive any pro-bono support, volunteer offers or introductions as a result of the event? Yes/No

Yes, one of the TFN supporters provided some pro-bono financial and governance guidance, including advice in relation to recruiting a Treasurer/Finance Trustee to join the Board of Trustees.

11. How important was TFN funding in helping you achieve your objectives? We wouldn't have been able to achieve our objectives without TFN funding / We would have found it difficult to achieve our objectives without TFN funding / TFN funding was not essential as we would have been able to find alternative funding

It is difficult to select one answer here. While TFN funding may not have been essential in ensuring MCJN achieve our objectives within the last year (as we have been fortunate to secure other grants during this period), we strongly believe that TFN funding may prove to play an essential part in guaranteeing our small charity's ability to achieve our objectives in a more sustainable and longer-term way. This is critical for us as a small charity working to make positive social changes against the backdrop of many deep-seated systemic problems, which thus require a long-term, patient and multi-pronged approach.

12. Has the training you received from TFN better prepared you in pitching your organisation to potential funders? Yes/No

Yes

13. Has TFN increased your capacity to raise further funds? Yes/No

Yes, although as with question 9, it is not possible to identify a direct link or specific example. Undoubtedly the experience of applying and successfully pitching for TFN funding increased my personal and

professional confidence to present our cause in public, and the positive impact of this will continue to benefit MCJN in the long term.

14. Can you tell us any personal stories to highlight the value of the project?

Below is the story of Maya Gebeily and Yara El-Murr, two Lebanese members of our Network:

Maya Gebeily joined the Marie Colvin Journalists' Network (MCJN) as a member in 2017. She was working for AFP in Baghdad, Iraq, at the time, and soon was promoted to Deputy Bureau Chief. While receiving mentorship through MCJN, in 2021 she moved to the Thomson Reuters Foundation in Beirut, Lebanon. Then in 2022, Maya was made Bureau Chief for Reuters for Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. In 2022, Maya was invited to become a mentor within the Marie Colvin Journalists' Network and began providing mentorship to another up-and-coming Lebanese journalist, Yara El-Murr. Yara had joined MCJN earlier in 2022 as a freelance journalist working primarily with a Beirut-based independent media outlet called 'The Public Source'.

In 2023, Yara El-Murr was awarded the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist of the Year Award 2023 (at the Foreign Press Association Awards in London) and the Best Coverage of the MENA Region 2023 Award from the Arab and Middle East Journalists' Association (AMEJA) in the USA for her piece '[Intercepted by Sea](#)'. This three-part investigation was also shortlisted for the 2023 Fetisov Journalism Award in the 'Contribution to Civil Rights' category.

Both Maya and Yara have demonstrated particular interest and skill in investigating and reporting stories exposing human rights abuses and violations. Even after their mentorship formally concluded, Maya and Yara have continued to connect one another with other women journalists and practitioners in the region and beyond. Given that journalists from the region frequently relocate – whether looking for better opportunities, for security, or for more permissive environments to work in – both Maya and Yara have said that this type of lasting cross-border relationship, facilitated by MCJN, has played an important role in sustaining their professional satisfaction and longer-term career successes. Such bonds, that grow and strengthen beyond any time-limited activity and regardless of physical location, demonstrate MCJN's unique impact and role in fostering the careers of pioneering journalists such as Maya and Yara.

15. Can you please attach any relevant photos or short film clips which may relate to the project



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“Special thanks to the network who've been in constant contact with us since the war broke out, and for trying to help in any way you can.”

Sara Abbas
SUDAN

marie colvin journalists' network



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“Being part of this network gives me a sense of personal and professional safety. I feel that I am not alone.”

Layla Yammine
LEBANON



16. Since presenting at TFN, has your organisation undergone any other significant changes?

MCJN has now completed its first full year as a fully-independent organisation, with all expenditure processed directly by and through MCJN. The use of the cloud-based Xero accountancy software has been fully embedded, and accounts for 2022 were successfully uploaded to the Charity Commission in October 2023.

One new trustee joined our board (Dr. Aida Al-Kaisy), while the search for a Treasurer/Financial Trustee continues.

17. Do you have any other comments or feedback on the experience of the TFN process?

TFN is a unique experience – challenging, empowering and uniquely flexible and supportive. Thank you!