

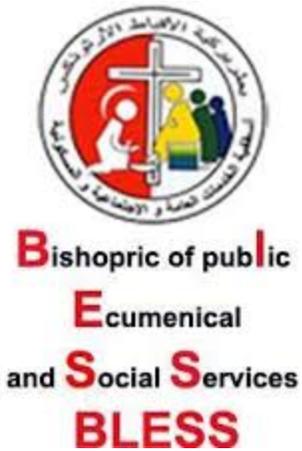
Nardien Sadik

Lumos Final Report



Cairo, Egypt

While beginning to reflect on the experience I had in Cairo, Egypt for the past 6 months, the strongest feeling I have is that of gratitude towards the Lumos foundation for allowing a first generation immigrant the opportunity to go back to her family's home country and help those who are in need from my Coptic community. It is with great pride that I tell everyone about the amazing opportunity that I was afforded as it was truly a remarkable and life changing experience.



Starting with my experience while applying to Lumos I felt that it was a bit of a daunting task to choose a country, find a trustworthy nonprofit organization, find human rights work that I could actually help with, while also finding housing and creating a realistic budget. It took many hours of research and careful planning. The issues that I continued to run into included being unable to find nonprofits who had enough work for 6 months, or being unable to find a nonprofit that didn't require a J.D. for the kind of work that I wanted to do. Specifically with BLESS, the nonprofit did not openly advertise all the different kinds of aid that was offered for the safety of the communities they were attempting to help so I was not aware of all the different ways I could help before fully committing. The process of meeting with my manager and talking about our goals for the 6 months I would be in Egypt was relatively easy as my manager was fluent in English and great at communicating expectations. The interview process to work at BLESS was also smooth, I had a bit of trouble explaining the concept of Lumos in the interview but otherwise it was accepted with no further problems. The biggest stress I had during the entire process of applying was the proposal because I simply didn't know what to expect and kept overthinking if I had done all that was needed. This turned



out to be overthinking on my part because the proposal and subsequent questions were straightforward and the decision turnaround time was quick which was very appreciated.



The next thing I would like to discuss is the expectation of what my project would be versus what actually happened, and what I learned throughout this whole process. Before arriving in Egypt I thought I knew what to expect as I have been to Egypt before and was in constant communications with BLESS throughout the entire process. As much as I know, I still don't think anything except actually experiencing Egypt for 6 months could have truly prepared me for the culture shock and the complete integration into a whole new country. Starting with work, the kind of

work that I had proposed to BLESS was writing legal proposals to advocate for more rights for Copts in Egypt. While I did write proposals for the Copts in Egypt, I also advocated for migrants and refugees coming into Egypt from Gaza and Sudan to be protected and given resources needed for survival.





In addition, I wrote a speech for His Holiness Pope Tawadros the 2nd addressing the Ecumenical Conference for Migrants in the Middle East which was incredible and not something I could have ever guessed I would get to do. I also worked on a campaign for the United Nations fight against Female Genital Mutilation which again was not what I was expecting but was such an amazing opportunity that truly taught me so much about Human Rights advocacy. I worked my expected hours of Monday to Friday from 8am to 3 pm and

while we did get a lot of work completed it took me a while to get oriented with the constant Arabic, and the culture of working after eating a meal together. I was not always sure what the expectation of me was as the assignments were often asked as if they were a favor between friends and informal in nature, but eventually I started getting the hang of things. I think the most fulfilling thing about my work with BLESS was definitely the impact we had on the communities we were serving. One example that really stuck with me is getting to meet the Sudanese refugees in





person and hearing their stories of not only survival but how BLESS gave them a second home in Egypt and a future to look forward to. It was heartwarming to know our work was making a real difference in these people's lives.

I do also want to touch on the cultural differences and social issues that I was exposed to as this is perhaps the most shocking thing. Before going to Egypt I was warned about the harassment of girls in the street and how common and blatant it was. I had

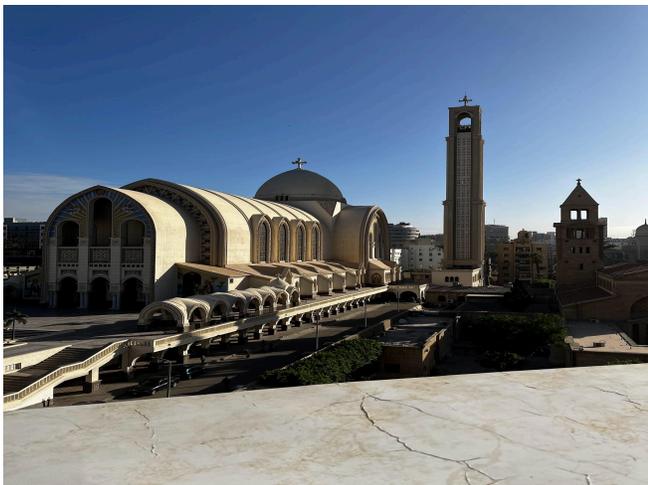
this in the back of my mind as I wanted to be safe and make sure I was well aware of my surroundings, ensuring there were always people around if God forbid I needed to scream for help. I thankfully never had to do that, but there were quite a few times where I would be catcalled in the streets multiple times a day. If I kept my head down and didn't acknowledge it nothing would come out of it, but it took time to learn to conceal my shock and disgust.

Another thing that I had no true grasp on before going to Egypt was the poverty and how many people struggle with it. The people I was working with all got paid around 5,000 Egyptian Pounds per month. To give some perspective, that is about 100 dollars a month to live on (give or take 1,000



pounds due to inflation and the constantly fluctuating price of the dollar). The average price of food can be anywhere from 250 Egyptian pounds per sandwich to 1000 Egyptian pounds for a meal out (price of the plate pictured above). As you can see from the prices, these working class people with college degrees could barely afford the price of food let alone entertainment or really anything other than the necessities. I think witnessing this allowed me to better understand why so many Egyptian youth want to flee from Egypt and go to another country with a more stable economy. They see their hard work as useless as no matter what degree they obtain or what job they have, the cost of living coupled with crippling inflation renders their hard work useless. When people found out I was from America they often asked me how life was here, and wanted to inform me that they saw me as the lucky one who got out. It was often heartbreaking to hear their struggles and be able to offer nothing but prayers in return. Though there was a lot of moments where I felt guilty for living in the States while people who looked just like me, grew up where my parents were from, and spoke the same language as us were stuck in Egypt with no

hope of leaving, there were also moments where I thought I could move to Egypt because of how lively it was.



While in Egypt I discovered the joys of fresh mango juice, a walkable city, and a friendly environment. I found social hubs in churches, befriended co-servants in the church service I joined, and watched my spiritual life come alive. I visited as many churches as possible throughout the 6 months, read as many books as I could find in a little street library I

discovered by chance while taking a walk, and fell in love with being alone. I grew in independence and felt that I could rely on myself to figure things out. I really value the time I spent in Egypt because it felt like my real life was on pause and for 6 months I was free to spend time learning about myself and enjoy the quiet before the chaos of life's responsibilities came crashing back. Not having a routine outside of work was a blessing because it forced me to be brave and go try new things, and discover new places. Every choice I made in Egypt was because I truly wanted to do it, and not out of obligation and that felt amazing. I also grew to be



confident in my Arabic which opened the door for deeper friendships to be formed and more cultural experiences to be experienced.



Overall my Lumos experience was life changing, although at times the challenges were tough the benefits of self discovery far outweighed the hard things. I will say though the hardest challenge was leaving my fiance for 6 months while abroad, but even with that and the strains it put on our relationship I would without a doubt do it all over again if given the chance. I loved helping the Coptic community in Cairo and consider it a second home. I am forever grateful for this experience and cannot express my gratitude enough to those who helped me get to go!

As this report comes to an end I want to leave the future Lumos travelers some advice, give yourself credit for

what you've accomplished and make the most of every moment. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity, you put in the work to get to where you are, now soak in each moment. Go explore everything, try new foods, talk to the locals, don't stay in your apartment waiting for the exciting thing to happen, go find the memories and be present in those moments! I also recommend taking a lot of pictures and journaling to see how much you change throughout your Lumos experience, I bet it will shock you.