

[DisasterReady.org](#): Remote learning / Remote working in times of COVID & beyond

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Cornerstone OnDemand (CSOD) is a talent management software company. At the CSOD Foundation, our focus is leveraging the company learning technology and ecosystem to support the capacity building of the NonProfit and Aid sectors. Our mission is to develop, engage and empower staff globally, and foster a culture of life-long learning at the organisational level.

[Disasterready.org](#): the story

In late July 2010, floods in Pakistan caused by heavy monsoon affected more than 20M people, leaving many families homeless and with food and water in short supplies. We got a call from our Foundation partner Save the Children (SC) US. With thousands of children impacted, SC needed to train thousands of aid workers to deal with the scale and enormity of the crisis. In just a few days, we launched an online learning platform for SC staff, volunteers and new recruits on the ground to take courses before deploying to the effected regions in Pakistan.

Out of this response, we realized that there were thousands of humanitarian workers across the globe with the same training needs and limitation to access high quality, relevant and readily available online learning content. Or even any training at all for many humanitarians working on remote areas. We were in a unique position as a software company to address this need for “**just in time learning**” and so we brought together an advisory committee of leading aid organizations and leveraged CSOD LMS (Learning Management System) to deliver the best online learning resources to all humanitarians at no cost (may they be employees or volunteers) and empower each of them to do what they do best: save lives, rebuilt communities and restore hope.

When it comes to content, the point is not to reinvent the wheel. So we work on curating **engaging** online courses, **compelling** videos, **informative** documents from a wide range of partners from the NonProfit sector (UN agencies, INGOs like SC, Oxfam, etc.) and outside (training and eLearning experts). We ensure we adapt to meet the needs in terms of topics and formats (leadership & management, foundational principles for humanitarian sector, certifications, etc.) and of adult learning trends (mobile ready, micro-learning, etc.).

We know that to attract and engage learner, contextualised content is “king”! Curation and co-creation (our ways of working) then requires a key element: **collaboration**! That collaboration that is also key to bring this learning to locations with access and mobility issues.

Mobile Guides

In order to offer a unique collection of content and fill gaps on topics not covered, in addition to the resources we curate from our partners as mentioned previously, we launched a new range of resources last year in collaboration with many Subject Matter Experts from our ecosystem: our Mobile Guides. They are performance enhancing tools – or, as our learners described it, like spending 15 mins with an expert!

These are micro-learning resources so they are not replacing in-depth training. They are a way to refresh/update knowledge, get an overview on some key topics, access tools and tips, infographics and guidelines in just a few click and scroll. In short: a source of knowledge “**just-on-time**” at point of need. Ready to Go Mobile Guides, with a downloadable PDF included with the course, are designed specifically for mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) to support learners on the go.

Something aid workers can use for capacity building on the ground even without continued Wi-Fi: learners download the pdf and use them in training/Capacity Building workshop.

The collection is available in English, Arabic and for part of it in French – and we regularly add to it.

Learning Playlist: COVID19 and beyond

In order to support our learners with the current pandemic, we have launched a new collection of short, engaging resources grouped in **easy-to-navigate playlists**, with content from top training providers and health specialists (ex: WHO and the Konterra Group for mental health).

Some of these donations come from Content Partners of the Company so **a word of warning**: some feels “corporate” or mention tips that might feel disconnected to the working environment for many of you. However, you can still extract and adjust many of these tips. Explore this with a group of teammates and discuss to see what makes sense and how it can be adapted and adopted.

Some tips from these courses:

- Create a routine and keep a structure when working remotely whilst being flexible, for yourself and with your team.
- Get to access online learning around the best time of the day in terms of bandwidth.
- Communicate and use the different tools out there to best fit your situation. And Keep colleagues/teams posted regularly. Besides emails, you can check on each other on texts, whatsapp, Skype, etc. And explore digital tools to change and edits documents.
- Use video in meeting when possible to still feel connected. Of course, always adapt to cultural practices! Beware of assumptions and stereotypes. Seek inputs from your colleagues, on what is most appropriate and suitable and culturally sensitive.
- Allows for extra time to connect for everyone, and for tech issue – as a presenter/facilitator, try to have someone with you to check dialogue box for questions/issues. Records when possible if useful.
- Provide a written summary of key points and follow up actions (who for what).

Collaboration on the ground: ISHA

The first anti-government protests began in 2011 during the Arab Uprisings. 9 years later, more than 580,000 people have been killed. And well over half of the country’s pre-war population of 22 million has been put in need of humanitarian assistance, whether they remained in the country or have escaped across the borders. With our partners International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps, we have launched a first-of-its kind learning portal for aid workers in Syria and surrounding countries. Our learners are physicians, nurses, teachers, bakers whose lives got turned upside down and stayed in Syria and work to rebuild their country. Through DisasterReady, they can take critical professional development training contextualized and in their native language and train to become humanitarian aid workers.

We worked in a consortium led by Mercy Corps and the International Rescue Committee (with funding from USAID) on a targeted learning program for aid workers in and around Syria. Our 2 INGOs partners had teams and local partners in the region who identified the target groups through their wider capacity building programs and we played the role of their partner for digital learning and content creation (providing DisasterReady as the learning platform; the instructional design expertise, with our team and partners; the creation and translation of contextualised content).

We did several Training Needs Analysis at the start to ensure we would provide the content needed (format i.e. mobile ready and micro; access i.e. mobile and low bandwidth/offline player; contextualization incl. translation and images/examples; topics and themes)

ISHA (Investing in Syrian Humanitarian Action) was launched in Dec 2016, and despite the myriad obstacles to delivering training in this region, today more than 19,000 learners have participated in the Investing in Syrian Humanitarian Action (ISHA) program via DisasterReady and have registered for more than 87,000 learning resources. Through sector-specific learning pathways and courses in Arabic and English, local humanitarians, volunteers, and refugee learners are developing the essential skills needed to provide vital assistance across Syria + Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey. And of course the content is accessible to anyone in the world – this is an open platform for everyone to use.

We are not on the front line ourselves but our partners are. So we also work with Mercy Corps in Zataari Refugee Camp. Our model is based on blended learning approach: in the learning center, Syrian refugees are finding a safe space to build knowledge, ideas, hope, and skills for future jobs through tablets loaded with “offline” learning set up by partners and facilitators on the ground. The tablets were donated by CSOD to the center that manages them, and offers sessions for the refugees and facilitates conversation and peer learning in face to face. Participants also take courses offline on the Cornerstone Mobile app for those who have smartphones. Most participants to these programs have previous NGO experience and they have improved it through working or getting various trainings with different NGOs inside the camp. Due to COVID however, the activity is on hold as the learning center closed in March.

Refugee Workplace Development Program in Uganda

We at DisasterReady, in partnership with Telecomm4Good and Humentum, are also developing the Refugee Workforce Development Program (RWDP). Starting with a pilot in the Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda, this project aims to provide education and job readiness skills to prepare refugees to work in the humanitarian and development sector. The program also includes creation of a job board to connect refugees to open positions. To a group of people who do not typically have access to learning due to location and circumstance, this project will have a large impact on this community.

Nakivale is one of the oldest refugee settlements in Uganda. It was opened in 1958 and officially established as a settlement in 1960. The settlement has been a long-standing host to more than 100,000 refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. Although some amenities have been made available, many refugees struggle to afford basic items and have serious issues integrating fully into the host community.

A key amenity that is lacking in Nakivale is education. According to UNHCR, “Many children and youth [in Nakivale] do not attend school due to high school fees for secondary school, overcrowding, and long travel distances to schools. For girls who drop out of school, early pregnancy and marriage is common...Lack of financial institutions in the settlement impedes refugees’ ability to effectively manage money and save. Most people use mobile money, but weak network coverage in the settlement makes this method unreliable.” The gap in education and employment readiness in Nakivale is stark. According to SINA, who has been working with refugees since 2006, “Uganda has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. In combination with one of the fastest growing populations, the country has a massive need for the creation of new employment

opportunities. An estimated 700,000 new entrants join the Ugandan labor market each year and compete for the only 12,000 available formal jobs.”

We have been working toward roll-out in 2020 – initially planned in March but the current pandemic has delayed this start as we cannot bring people together to share tablets and learning sessions.

The objectives of the program are to:

- Train and prepare** refugees as an untapped workforce to work in humanitarian aid or development
- Connect** skilled refugees with NGOs who need to fill positions requiring those skills
- Address barriers of access** to technology and learning amongst refugees

Roles of each partner:

- DisasterReady: provide learning platform & training curriculum
- Humentum: ensure NGO engagement
- Telecom4Good: program coordination (NGOs and participants), technology & infrastructure

From our perspective, we want to make sure we keep RWDP learners from getting overwhelmed or lost in the library of the platform so we are leveraging the technology and our expertise in engaging user experience to help them with instructions and learning paths for them to complete, within the open portal.

Since the program is preparing an untapped workforce for not just getting a job in the sector but sustaining and thriving in it, we think it is important for the learners to have access to all the content in DisasterReady after they finish the program. That way they continue to build their skills and knowledge through continuous learning with access to a portal they will already know how to use.