



## WE USED TO WATCH THE NEWS AND CRY – IRAQ

Following Saddam’s Anfal campaign, which led to the displacement of a large number of Kurds, collective settlements were established in the area of Suleimaniyah Governorate in the Northeast of Iraq. Since then, Iraq has witnessed several more conflicts, with the latest one being the war in, and around Syria. This has been keeping the context extremely volatile and hence, the number of refugees and Internal Displaced People (IDPs) is significantly increased. In the same area, three community centres were established by DKH (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe) and REACH (Rehabilitation Education and Community’s Health) in 2014.

The three Community Centres are part of the DKH Psychosocial Program, which is facilitated together with the national development NGO, REACH. At the start of the project in 2014, DKH was the only actor in the region working in Psychosocial Support. However, through the coordination with local authorities, the project was developed and aided by the provision of free space, land and buildings.

Beside Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees, the target population also includes the host community. The three Community Centres focus on to apply a **holistic approach to psychosocial support**, activities, for instance including basic trainings, awareness-raising sessions and referral systems. Along with a psychosocial approach, key focus of the project has also been to have a strong community-based approach, defined by **cooperation and participation of target groups, including the local community**. Furthermore, by acting as a safe place, the Community Centres have allowed the emergence of a real “community feel”, which in turn both **promotes a feeling of safety** as well as **a sense of belonging** to the centre. This resulted in an atmosphere where people have been able to communicate and collaborate. The community-based approach is also highlighted through activities **focusing on empowering** the target population **and increasing self-sustainability**.

The psychosocial and community based approach is a response to the identified challenges which affect the psychosocial wellbeing of the targeted population, for instance lack of trust, unemployment, separation, violence, Gender-Based Violence, loss of hope, distress, cultural restrictions, and other factors connected to protection. Also, the language barrier is negatively affect the social inte-



reaction. Accordingly, the aim of the project is to link activities to specific areas of psychosocial wellbeing. For instance, the cognitive area has been targeted through **awareness raising on positive coping** in psychosocial support sessions, focusing on **empowering beneficiaries to own awareness of their strengths**, and providing a sense of meaning by nurturing and developing skills. The ultimate goal of this activity is **encouraging people to think about short- and long-term goals** and hence, promoting **resilience**.

Another example that promotes occupational well-being and provides a sense of meaningfulness is the provision of space, courses and training to acquire knowledge, develop skills, explore hobbies and discover talents. Through support in Curriculum Vitae writing, the opportunity was also given for beneficiaries to apply for work opportunities with the newly skills gained. This has among other things increase to the possibility for several women to join hairdressing salons or start their own small sewing shop.

## Lessons learned

Community Centres enable the implementation of a Community Based Psychosocial Approach through offering free and safe spaces to the community and individuals within it to interact and develop. Considering that a large number of the target population is Internal displaced people (IDPs); one of the Community Centers functions is to provide a sense of belonging, and it needs to be highlighted. At the same time, the engagement and participation of the community constitute a sustainability factor which supports the maintenance of the community centres.

## ACT Regional Psychosocial Community of Practice in Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA)

You have just read a good practice of Community Based Psychosocial support, from the ACT Regional community of practice in Middle East and Northern Africa.

The Regional Psychosocial Community of Practice (PS CoP) is a group of people joined together by common issues of working in the field of community based psychosocial support, as part of the ACT Alliance humanitarian response to emergency and disaster situations that took place in a given place in the region. Through the regional Community of Practice, the aim is to strengthen the capacities and practices of community based psychosocial support of ACT members, by sharing good practices appropriate to local cultures, share expertise and experiences.

### How to join and get in touch

For ACT Members in Middle East and North Africa who are interested to join the PS CoP or want to know about the PS CoP in the region, they can communicate with Nader Abu Amsha, the chair for the MENA region PS CoP. **For more information contact:**

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