

Karlsruhe, 16 June 2015

Northern Iraq: Childhood in a refugee camp

9 year-old Sherin*clings to the emergency pedagogue. Since the volunteer German team from the Friends of Waldorf Education has been working in the refugee camp, she rarely leaves the side of the mission leader. The emergency pedagogue could only guess at all that the Yazidi girl, who fled from the Sinjar-mountain region, has had to endure. She wouldn't speak about it.

To help children like Sherin long-term with the processing of their terrible experiences, the Friends of Waldorf Education in cooperation with UNICEF, have installed nine local pedagogues and set up a local office in northern Iraq. A volunteer German team was on site from the 29th of May until the 12th of June to train the local team. The emergency pedagogical team was made up of experienced art therapists, experiential pedagogues, Waldorf preschool teachers and a teacher for special needs.

In the mornings, the emergency pedagogical team together with the local team could work with about 770 traumatised children in four UNICEF schools. At the same time, the work with the children served as part of the practical training of the local pedagogues. In preparatory and follow-up discussions the workshops were discussed and analysed. Bit by bit, the direction of the therapeutic offerings was transferred into the hands of the Iraqi colleagues. In the afternoons, the training of the local team was continued in workshops designed to deepen understanding of the methods used. The traumatisation of the local team was also discussed and attended to using emergency pedagogical methods.

After the terrible experiences of fleeing from their homes, the living conditions in the refugee camp are for all residents additionally burdensome. With temperatures of up to 45 degrees Celsius, the heat in the tents was early in the morning already intolerable. But the residents have nowhere else to go, no cooling down. Running water and electricity are only sporadically available. In the absence of perspectives for the future, the refugees can't break free from their victim roles. The teachers of the UNICEF schools themselves feel powerless. For this reason, further training in the methods of emergency pedagogy was also offered to them. Here, the teacher's basic knowledge, gained during the last mission in March of this year, could be built upon. For many of the teachers, how to deal with their pupils' aggressive and destructive behaviour was of utmost importance. In workshops, the teachers received explanations for the trauma related behavioural changes of the children and possible pedagogical solutions were discussed. That way the teachers were themselves strengthened and they were able to achieve more stable lessons.

Also parents were offered advisement. Over 100 mothers and fathers were informed about the effects of traumatisation on their children, about possible stress reactions and how to provide a supportive and stabilizing approach.

After the completion of the German team's emergency pedagogical mission, the work was then taken over by the local pedagogues. They will be supported in the future by a project leader, who will coordinate the work on the ground.

*name changed

Emergency Pedagogy: pedagogical first aid

After violent events, emotional wounds come in addition to physical ones; most weigh heavily on the soul. Many of the affected lose their inner balance and become ill with post-traumatic stress disorders. The Friends of Waldorf Education work with Waldorf pedagogical methods and related forms of therapy, in order to support the processing of terrible experiences. At the same time the self healing power of those affected is activated. To this end, experiential pedagogical exercises help to strengthen trust in one's self and one's fellow human beings. Movement games dissolve inner torpor. Painting therapy exercises create non-verbal expression opportunities, through which distance from the terrible experiences can be created.

Emergency pedagogy of the Friends of Waldorf Education has been active in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq since 2013. In the scope of countless operations worldwide many children have already been helped to process their traumatic experiences and so called trauma related disorders have been eased.

Press Contact:

Clara Krug
Public Relations for Emergency Pedagogy
Tel.: 0721-354806 183
Fax: 0721-354806 180
E-Mail: c.krug@freunde-waldorf.de
Website: www.freunde-waldorf.de

Account for Donations

GLS Bank Bochum
BLZ 430 609 67
Account 800 800 700
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*The **Friends of Waldorf Education** is worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they advocate for Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe organizes and supervises international volunteer services worldwide. Since summer 2011 it is possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions through the association.*

Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education are active in the area of emergency pedagogy. Following the outbreak of a war or a natural disaster, they worked with psychologically traumatized children and adolescents in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013), the Philippines (2013-2015), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), and Nepal (2015).

Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners

Freunde der Erziehungskunst
Rudolf Steiners e.V.
Neisser Str. 10
D-76139 Karlsruhe

Tel: +49 (0)721 354806-144
Fax: +49 (0)721 354806-180
notfallpaedagogik@freunde-waldorf.de
www.freunde-waldorf.de



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