

The Unity Circle Project

Experiences
of Iraqi
Children and
Parents Living
in Amman,
Jordan



Participating Organizations

International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD)

The International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), located at the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria, brings children's rights to life as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the context of development using innovative research, education and capacity building that draws on the strengths of children, their families, communities and culture. We develop creative strategies to complex problems, shaping a world where children's rights become a lived reality within the daily lives of children who need them most, and the systems that affect them. We have worked within Canada and internationally for over 15 years in partnership with organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), national and local governments, other NGOs, and professionals from various disciplines and regions. IICRD has an extensive network of experts and practitioners that it draws upon to tailor expertise to the initiatives it undertakes.

Relief International - Schools Online (RI-SOL)

Since 1990, Relief International - Schools Online (RI-SOL) has been responding to humanitarian crises and providing development services worldwide, combining long and short-term interventions and covering a range of sectors, with a strong emphasis on education and community development through capacity building. RI-SOL has broad experience in the Middle Eastern region, with extensive operations in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine dating back to 2001. In Jordan, RI-SOL has been implementing connectivity projects that improve access to information and provide interactive training courses that enhance educational resources. Throughout the years RI-SOL promoted civic education through democracy building and peace and conflict resolution projects and implemented activities aiming at increasing the life skills and improving the employability of youth and women. Since 2007 RI-SOL has increased its outreach into the large Iraqi community in Jordan providing flexible responses to community needs, including greater quality and access to education and social development opportunities.

Save the Children

Save the Children is the leading independent organization creating lasting change in the lives of children in need in the United States and around the world. Recognized for our commitment to accountability, innovation and collaboration,

our work takes us into the heart of communities, where we help children and families help themselves. Save the Children established the Jordan country office in 1985 with a special focus on children and families. Since then, our programs have contributed to both social and economic development, and have positively impacted the lives of more than one million Jordanian women, children and youth. The recent influx of Iraqis into Jordan has added to the vulnerability of both Jordanian and Iraqi children and families. Save the Children has been named the Education Focal Point for Iraqis in Jordan by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is the Chair of the Psychosocial and Mental Health Coordinating Group. Save the Children works with a range of international, national and local organizations in Jordan to ensure the protection and well-being of these vulnerable children. Our efforts to improve youth livelihoods, access to quality education and economic opportunities for poor women in Jordan have been recognized internationally and continue to result in real and lasting change for the communities in which we work.

The following organizations contributed financially to the Unity Circle Project:

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) was established in 1968 to administer the bulk of Canada's official development assistance (ODA) program. CIDA's aim is to reduce poverty, promote human rights, and support sustainable development. The measure of its success lies in its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Canada's broader international policy objectives. CIDA's priorities are poverty reduction, democratic governance, private sector development, health, basic education, equality between women and men, and environmental sustainability. It works in concert with its development partners, fragile states and countries in crisis, selected countries and regions, and the Canadian population and institutions.

UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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Martha Nelems
Associate, International Institute for Child Rights and Development

Executive Summary

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by American-led coalition forces, thousands of Iraqi children and their families have fled to Jordan.¹ The need for specialized services for this community is clear. In addition to their many difficult experiences of the war in Iraq, these children and their families also face a number of challenges and risks to their well-being, associated with their displacement from their home, communities and country - including economic hardship, discrimination, violence, and the effects of social, cultural and religious isolation. While there are some wealthy Iraqi families living in West Amman, the majority live in poorer parts of East Amman.² Iraqi children and youth in Jordan experience these challenges and risks to their well-being in a range of distinct ways.

To date, international development programming for Iraqi children in Jordan has focused largely on access to education, as well as the provision of basic healthcare and other forms of humanitarian assistance. After the Jordanian government allowed Iraqi children to enter their schools in August 2007, thousands of Iraqi girls and boys registered for the 2007/2008 school year.³ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are now shifting their focus from education to "child protection."

However, there is a lack of consensus on what child protection means in practice. For many in Jordan, it refers to child abuse - domestic violence at home, beatings at school and sexual violence. Some NGOs also include "psycho-social" components within their child protection definition. Very few in Jordan think of child protection in the broad way that UNICEF defines it - as pertaining to violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and the effects of conflict.⁴

The Unity Circle Project started in October 2007 with the primary goal of assessing the situation of Iraqi children and their families living in Amman, Jordan, through the use of a child-centred, participatory approach, and working closely with these children to improve their situation. A collaborative effort between the International Institute for Child Rights and Development

(IICRD) at the Canadian-based University of Victoria, Save the Children, and Relief International-Schools Online (RI-SOL), the project was conducted with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and UNICEF. The recommendations emerging from this project are intended to provide guidance to those engaged in policy development and children's programming for Iraqi children and their families living in Jordan.

The Unity Circle project is situated within a broader context of child rights research being conducted by an international consortium of research institutions, the International Child Protection and Rights Consortium (ICPRC). Made up of researchers from IICRD, Oxford University, the University of California Davis, and UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center, the ICPRC aims to build an evidence base through participatory engagement with children that will strengthen our understanding of children's rights, and thereby contribute to the development of maximally effective child protection policy and programming. The genuine participation of children underpins the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. However, in practice, the most frequent pitfall within both national and international efforts to protect children is their tendency towards a generic or overly

1. The Jordanian government suggests that there are between 450,000 and 500,000 Iraqis in Jordan based on mobile phone subscriptions and immigration figures. However, in a survey in May 2007, the Norwegian Institute for Applied sciences (Fafo) counted 161,000 Iraqis in Jordan as part of a report on the characteristics of Iraqis in Jordan, completed together with the Department of Statistics.
2. The Iraqis in Jordan are an urban-based population, mostly living in Amman and other cities. As such, they are not living in refugee camps, but in Jordanian neighbourhoods.
3. For the 2007/2008 school year, the Jordanian Ministry of Education reported 20,600 Iraqi students enrolled in public schools, and 4,000 in private schools.
4. UNICEF, 2006

universalized response to problems with locally-specific characteristics - due to a lack of input from children themselves. The ICPRC was established in 2006 to address such pitfalls.

The Unity Circle project with Iraqi children in Jordan is an example of the CRC's principle of child participation in operation. Given donors' genuine desire to support children's rights as articulated in the CRC, this local-level project upholds the principles agreed on at an international level.

The project was guided by three key questions aimed at building a better understanding of the challenges and risks that Iraqi girls and boys face, as well as their 'resilience' or capacity to respond to and overcome these challenges:

- What are the challenges to well-being facing Iraqi children in Amman, Jordan?
- What coping strategies are children using to respond to these challenges?
- What positive coping mechanisms or strengths of Iraqi children and their families can be encouraged and built upon in developing and improving programming interventions?

Using a participatory approach,⁵ the Unity Circle project worked with Iraqi children living in Amman, Jordan, to identify the risks or challenges they face and the strategies they have developed to cope with their experience of the war in Iraq and their present circumstances in Jordan - from their perspectives and rooted in their own personal experiences. Approximately 96 Iraqi children participated in the project, meeting at least 11 times together over several months.⁶ The project reveals much about the reality of Iraqi children's lives - previously not fully understood except by the children themselves. The findings also illuminate the strengths and resources that are available to Iraqi children and their parents.

The Iraqi girls and boys that took part in the Unity Circle project identified and discussed a wide range of 'challenges' or 'risks' to their well-being. A number of the key challenges or risks they identified relate directly to their experience of the war in Iraq - including the deaths of parents and loved ones, missing relatives, and witnessing violence or destruction first-hand in Iraq. Some boys shared their experience of having been kidnapped, and their sense of helplessness to either stop the war in Iraq or protect their family from violence.

A significant number of challenges related to their family's displacement from Iraq to Jordan were also identified by the children. Starting with what many children described as an arduous journey from Iraq to Jordan, Iraqi girls and boys then faced numerous challenges associated with the loss of their physical and social environments. These losses pertain to virtually every area of their lives: loss of peer and family networks, loss of places of worship, loss of financial security, and loss of gardens and recreational opportunities.

A majority of Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project stated that their parents can also pose a challenge to them - in the form of parents' restrictions on their children's movement and friendships. Many Iraqi children also have anxious or depressed parents who the children feel are often unable to focus on them.

Their new 'home' in Jordan poses challenges to all of the Iraqi children living in East Amman - from safety issues related to traffic, to overt discrimination and violence experienced both in their neighbourhoods and schools. Other education-related challenges include the difficulty some Iraqi children have in understanding the Jordanian dialect of Arabic and the school curriculum, the poor quality of some teaching, and in some cases, the inability to go to school.

While the above challenges were discussed by children of all ages, Iraqi youth (boys and girls aged 14-17) raised additional issues such as frustration at their inability to work and contribute to the family income. Iraqi youth also identified additional educational challenges: While some Iraqi youth were unable to attend school due to responsibilities at home, others found the experience of being in classrooms with much younger cohorts to be highly de-moralizing and painful. The lack of privacy in their homes in Amman was an additional problem specific to Iraqi youth.

Some key differences were observed between children living in the poorer (East) and wealthier (West) districts of Amman. More specifically, while all children shared difficult experiences related to the war in Iraq, the loss of family and peer networks, and the restrictions on their freedom of movement, Iraqi children living in West Amman generally considered their schools as supportive environments. Although they identified some discrimination against them by their Jordanian peers, they observed that they did not experience this with their teachers and/or principals, and stated that they did not experience violence in schools or in their neighbourhoods. Further, although the Iraqi children in West Amman have greater financial security than their peers in East Amman, they also have significant anxiety about the safety of their fathers and elder brothers who are often working in Iraq or traveling between Iraq and Jordan.

While Iraqi girls and boys shared much in common in terms of the challenges they face, they observed some key differences based on gender. Although shared by all children, both girls and boys recognized the particular helplessness that many of the boys felt in not being able to stop the war in Iraq or protect their mothers and sisters from witnessing violence or from being taken away for questioning by American forces. Something that was exclusively experienced by Iraqi boys in the Unity Circle project was that of having been kidnapped.⁷ Meanwhile, both boys and girls recognized that the over-

protectiveness of their parents was particularly intense for girls - contributing to greater isolation and boredom for them. The lack of freedom also extended to girls' ability to participate in religious life. While most children experienced the lack of opportunity to participate in religious life to be a significant challenge, girls had even less access - with most Iraqi girls never having visited a mosque or church in Amman. Finally, while Iraqi girls and boys both experience violence, they have slightly different experiences of it. While Iraqi boys described being punched and kicked by Jordanian boys, Iraqi girls reported having their hair pulled by Jordanian girls.

The violence and discrimination experienced by Iraqi children in East Amman neighbourhoods and schools was the issue which most dominated discussions throughout the Unity Circle project. After this issue, the other challenges were considered equally important to Iraqi girls and boys. For example, the lack of Iraqi and Jordanian friends in Amman was as distressing to Iraqi children as their financial insecurity. Likewise, the dangerous traffic in Amman was as anxiety producing to some Iraqi children as were their memories of violence in Iraq.

Iraqi parents in the Unity Circle project expressed worry about many of the same challenges that the children did. Parents also identified some specific challenges that they felt they faced in their role as parents.⁸ These included not feeling empowered as parents, the inability to teach children important values and appropriate behaviour when in such a difficult context themselves, over-protectiveness, and concern about the consequences of lying to their children. Some parents also admitted to the use of violence within their homes.

The project clearly showed that Iraqi girls and boys are proactive in trying to solve their problems. The children participating in the project identified a range of both positive and negative coping mechanisms that they employed to respond to the challenges they face. Understanding these perceptions is very important in identifying entry points

5. The Unity Circle project utilized the Triple A Child Rights and Community Development Process (Triple A), a qualitative research methodology originally used by UNICEF as a rapid assessment tool and adapted by the IICRD in 1994. The approach is also rooted in a Child Rights Ecology, which supports the identification of gaps, and hence, the targeting of efforts towards filling gaps and building or strengthening bridges across and within the different spheres of children's lives. These approaches are outlined in the "Methodology" section of this report.

6. Some of the groups of children formed through this project have continued to meet since the project's completion.

7. Several of the boys involved in this project were kidnapped in Iraq and held for ransom.

8. Identifying challenges to the well-being of Iraqi parents in Amman was beyond the scope of this project. However, during the Unity Circle project Iraqi parents identified specific challenges to them in their role as parents.

through which to engage children and their communities in discussions on appropriate child protection strategies.

Coping strategies that children identified as positive included cooperating and spending time with their families, contributing economically if possible, participating in centre activities, trying to integrate into Jordanian life, being optimistic about the future, patriotic about Iraq, helping others, engaging in problem solving, and building and maintaining relations with friends and family both in Jordan and elsewhere. Youth identified a series of additional coping strategies that they deemed to be positive, including exercising, engaging in artistry, negotiating with parents for greater freedom, avoiding asking parents for help, seeking solitude and protecting the family and younger Iraqis.

The majority of children identified caution as a negative coping strategy. As a behavior, it was employed by a minority of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project. Caution was considered by the children to be undesirable given the importance of courage in their culture, but for some of the children, it was identified as a necessary survival strategy given their current situation in Jordan. In addition, youth identified emotional withdrawal, pessimism about the future, and a fixation on past events as negative coping strategies.

Sometimes Iraqi children and their parents disagreed about whether coping mechanisms are positive or negative. For example, many Iraqi children in Amman are adopting a Jordanian accent in public spaces in order to escape detection as an Iraqi. Although the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project unanimously agree that this is a useful strategy, their parents are uniformly dismayed and fear it will result in their children being ashamed to be Iraqi. Other 'strategies' deemed to be positive by some of the children but negative by their parents included lying, joining with other Iraqis for protection and/or using force, and refusing to talk about difficult experiences.

The project findings provide critical insight for agencies programming support for Iraqi children and their families in Jordan - especially where those agencies have not had the opportunity to talk directly and in depth to these children. The stories and experiences of the Iraqi children that participated in the project also suggest that agencies re-visit their programming priorities with a critical view to the general assumptions underlying these priorities. In addition, the project demonstrates that a multi-pronged approach to programming that addresses a range of aspects of children's lives may be needed in order to truly address the well-being of these children.

Based on the findings of this project, IICRD, Save the Children and RI-SOL make a series of recommendations - divided into "General Principles to guide all programming for Iraqi children" and "Sector-Specific Recommendations." The former are recommended for all agencies or entities with programming aimed at benefiting Iraqi children in Jordan. While ideally, such principles would be adhered to at the program or project design stage, the integration of these principles at any time into existing programming can strengthen and enhance program effectiveness. The latter are designed for NGOs and United Nations agencies working in the education and psycho-social sectors, often in close partnership with the Jordanian Government.

These recommendations set out how to better meet the needs identified by Iraqi children and their families. They are not a simple appeal to do more. We believe that by acknowledging the specific challenges Iraqi children live with, the many coping mechanisms they employ, and by fully identifying the many strengths that can be utilized, more effective programming for Iraqis in Jordan is possible.

The following provides a brief overview of the categories of recommendations included in the report. Please see the final section of this report for a full elaboration of the recommendations.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAMMING WITH IRAQI CHILDREN IN AMMAN:

1. Listen and talk to Iraqi children
2. Build on children's strengths
3. Involve Iraqi parents more

SECTOR-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION SECTOR:

1. Address violence
2. Address discrimination
3. Work to prevent drop-out and support enrolment

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SECTOR:

1. Support Iraqi children to process difficult experiences and challenges in both Iraq and Jordan
2. Support the strengthening of family, cultural and religious bonds
3. Contribute to Iraqi children's sense of agency⁹
4. Support the development of peer networks
5. Build opportunities for children to exercise, be creative and access nature
6. Ensure safety
7. Create youth-specific programming
8. Support Iraqi adult volunteers
9. Build local capacity

Two key themes emerged from the Unity Circle project. The first is that Iraqi children have experienced considerable challenges and risks to their well-being as a result of the war in Iraq and their situation in Jordan - including exposure to extreme violence in Iraq, the death of and separation from family members, discrimination and violence in Jordan, restricted freedom by over-protective parents, social isolation, and a longing for religious and cultural traditions that connect with them with their home. However, the second, equally important finding is that Iraqi children cannot be portrayed only as victims. Iraqi girls and boys are proactive in the midst of adversity and have developed a wide range of coping mechanisms to respond to the problems they face. Iraqi children are in many ways the 'glue' that continues to hold their families and community together and provide hope for the future. We believe that the key to the success of child protection policies and programming for Iraqi children in Jordan rests with our ability to work in meaningful partnerships with them.

9. Child agency highlights how a child constantly responds to and impacts the world around them, including playing a role in his/her own protection and the protection of others. It calls attention to the opportunities available for children to be involved in child protection policies and interventions. (Blanchet-Cohen, 2008).

1. Introduction

This report is about the findings of the Unity Circle Project, which started in October 2007 as a collaborative effort between the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), Save the Children, and Relief International-Schools Online (RI-SOL). This project was conducted with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and UNICEF.

Using a participatory approach, the Unity Circle project worked with Iraqi children living in Amman, Jordan, to identify the challenges they face and the strategies they have developed to cope with their experience of the war in Iraq and their present circumstances in Jordan - from their perspectives and rooted in their own personal experiences.

The name of this project arose from a "unity circle" game conducted with Iraqi children - in which a circular rope was used to unite all participants into one supportive whole. The title also embodies the commitment of the project members to work collaboratively with Iraqi children and their families to create positive change in children's day-to-day lives and to strengthen ties between Iraqis and the Jordanian community.

The project reveals much about the reality of Iraqi children's lives - previously not fully understood - except by the children themselves. The findings also illuminate the strengths and resources that are available to Iraqi children and their parents. These findings provide critical insight for agencies programming support to Iraqi children and their families in Jordan - especially where those agencies have not had the opportunity to talk directly and in depth with these children. The findings can also help support 'outsiders' to ensure their interventions are culturally sensitive, well targeted and as effective as possible. As such, they support agencies' adherence to a 'do no harm' policy.

Based on a fuller understanding of Iraqi children's lives, IICRD, Save the Children and RI-SOL make a series of recommendations, included at the end of this report. The recommendations are divided into "General Principles to guide all programming for Iraqi children" and "Sector-Specific Recommendations" designed for NGOs and United Nations agencies working in the education and psycho-social sectors. These recommendations set out how to better meet the needs identified by Iraqi children and their families. They are not a simple appeal to do more. We believe that by acknowledging the specific challenges Iraqi children live with, the many coping mechanisms they employ, and by fully identifying the many strengths that can be utilized, more effective programming for Iraqis in Jordan is possible.

A "problem tree" drawn by a group of Iraqi girls and boys aged 11-17. Text on the drawing: "Goal is the group name. The problem is not being able to practice hobbies in a group. The root causes of problem: lack of space to practice hobbies, lack of time to practice hobbies, not enough people to play with, not enough money to provide for the necessary equipment, no trainers. Possible solutions: there is a place to play in Queen Zein centre, there is co-ordination among the group to find a time suitable to everyone, every person has the responsibility to invite five people to come to this activity."



2. From Global to Local - Linking the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Situation of Iraqi Children in Jordan

International Context: Child Rights and Child Protection

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. It delineates the rights of all girls and boys under the age of 18, to life, survival, development, protection and participation in decisions about their lives. Child protection is understood as referring to those girls and boys living in situations of adversity and who require special measures to support their development.

A key principle articulated in the CRC is to adopt a holistic approach to the issues for children living in adversity through genuine participation of children themselves.¹⁰ A participatory approach aims to ensure that the particular local context of children informs all programming and interventions. In practice, however, this principle is not always upheld. Indeed, the most frequent pitfall within both national and international efforts to protect children is their tendency towards a generic or overly universalized response to problems having locally-specific characteristics - due to a lack of input from children themselves. Under pressure to deliver large-scale programming within tight timelines, policy makers and program administrators sometimes act without sufficiently understanding either the challenges as actually experienced by the children they aim to support, or the practical implications of remedies they seek to apply. In programming for children confronted

by adversities as diverse as HIV/AIDS epidemics, armed conflict, civil unrest, natural disasters, hazardous work, trafficking, street-living, and familial abuse and neglect, among others, imposing generic solutions does not always fit the situation, and can be not only wasteful, but catastrophic for the very children intended to benefit.¹¹

The International Child Protection and Rights Consortium (ICPRC) was established in 2006 to address such pitfalls and to help ensure programming is maximally effective. The Consortium includes researchers from the IICRD at the Canadian-based University of Victoria, Oxford University, the University of California Davis, and UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center. The goal of the ICPRC is to strengthen the evidence base contributing to a better understanding of the impact of children's rights and assisting in implementing child protection policy and programming. This is achieved through pursuing

collaborative research, developing capacity building and monitoring tools, and studying innovation in programming and policy. The ICPRC is particularly interested in better linking research, policy and practice in support of children in especially difficult circumstances.

Key themes in the research of the International Child Protection and Rights Consortium (ICPRC) include: drawing together current social science research on children's development in relation to risk and protective mechanisms; better understanding the context of child protection; exploring children's agency,¹² or meaningful participation; and, creating an evidence base for the implementation of the CRC.

Commenced in October 2007, the IICRD-led Unity Circle project with Iraqi children in Jordan is an example of the CRC's principle of child participation in operation. Given donors' genuine desire to support children's rights as articulated in the CRC, this local-level project upholds the principles agreed on at an international level.

National Context: Iraqi Children in Jordan

Thousands of Iraqi children and their families have fled to Jordan since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by American-led coalition forces. The Jordanian government suggests that there are between 450,000 and 500,000 Iraqis in Jordan based on mobile phone subscriptions and immigration figures. In a survey conducted in May 2007, the Norwegian Institute for Applied Sciences (FAFO) counted 161,000 Iraqis in Jordan as part of a report on the characteristics of Iraqis in Jordan, completed together with the Department of Statistics. In short, the exact number of Iraqis living in Jordan remains unknown, although the need for ongoing and specialized services remains clear.

The Iraqis in Jordan are an urban-based population, mostly living in Amman and other cities such as Zarka, Irbid, and Karak. As such, they are not living in refugee camps, but in Jordanian neighbourhoods. In Amman, large numbers of Iraqis are living in the poorer, eastern part of the city. There are also wealthier Iraqi families living in West Amman, whose material needs are largely met, but who still feel a large degree of social isolation due to their displacement from Iraq.

To date, international development programming for Iraqi children in Jordan has focused largely on access to education, as well as the provision of basic healthcare and other forms of humanitarian assistance. After the Jordanian government allowed Iraqi children to enter their schools in August 2007, thousands of Iraqi girls and boys registered for the 2007/2008 school year.¹³ For the 2008/2009 school year, the government has continued to accept Iraqi students into their schools, and have also waived school fees for all Jordanian and Iraqi children. NGOs are now shifting their focus from access to education to "child protection". However, there is a lack of consensus on what child protection means in practice. For many in Jordan, it refers to child abuse - domestic violence at home, beatings at school and sexual violence. Some NGOs also include "psycho-social" components within their child protection definition. Very few in Jordan think of child protection in the broad way in which it is currently defined by UNICEF to include: violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and the effects of conflict.¹⁴

10. Article 6 (right to life, survival and development) and Article 12 (right to meaningful participation).

11. "Rethinking Child Protection from A Rights Perspective: Some Observations for Discussion", ICPRC paper by Susan Bissell, Jo Boyden, Philip Cook and William Myers.

12. Child agency highlights how a child constantly responds to and impacts the world around them, including playing a role in his/her own protection and the protection of others. It calls attention to the opportunities available for children to be involved in child protection policies and interventions. (Blanchet-Cohen, 2008).

13. For the 2007/2008 school year, the Jordanian Ministry of Education reported 20,600 Iraqi students enrolled in public schools and 4,000 in private schools.

14. UNICEF, 2006

3. Research Team Composition, Demographics of Child Participants, and Methodology

Research Team Composition

Each of the local research teams included one or two Iraqi volunteers, one Jordanian volunteer,¹⁵ along with one staff member from Save the Children or RI-SOL acting as coordinator. The use of Iraqi volunteers was extremely important in gaining the trust of Iraqi parents, and in better understanding the cultural nuances of information shared by Iraqi children. The involvement of Jordanian volunteers provided children with a living example of cooperation between Iraqis and Jordanians.

IICRD members held two training sessions on the methodological approach with local team members in Amman on November 12-15, 2007 and March 2-5, 2008. A lead researcher representing IICRD participated in over half of the assessment sessions with the children and their parents, and provided ongoing support and consistency to the local research teams.

Identifying Participants

Recognizing that many Iraqi families are in Jordan illegally and are fearful of their addresses being recorded, research teams did not go 'door to door' to recruit children for the research process. Sampling was achieved through the use of a purposive snowball strategy - whereby Iraqi children already known to Save the Children and RI-SOL through other programs were invited to join the project first, and then these children and their parents were asked to identify other potential participants from the Iraqi community, such as neighbours, friends or relatives.

15. Iraqi and Jordanian volunteers received a stipend from Save the Children and RI-SOL to cover the cost of food and transportation.

Demographics of Children Participating

The Unity Circle project sample included approximately 96 girls and boys,¹⁶ ages 5-18, in 6 groups in East Amman and 1 group in West Amman. 56% were girls and 44% were boys. Many of the participants were from Baghdad, but other cities and rural areas of Iraq were represented as well. All of the groups included a mixture of Sunni, Shiite, Christian and Mandaean Sabean¹⁷ girls and boys. There was economic diversity within each group, as well as between groups. The majority of the children in this project came to Jordan in the last five years, a few came more than five years ago, and a small minority were born in Jordan. Two of the groups were held exclusively with children attending charity-run schools, whose enrollment fees were covered by Save the Children,¹⁸ and many of the children in the other groups held at NGO centres attend government-run schools.

Iraqi girls and boys were initially divided into two age groups of 11-14 and 14-17. However, most of the groups stretched considerably beyond this age bracket when children brought younger or older siblings along with them. For the purposes of this report, children aged 14-17 are referred to as "youth."¹⁹ Two groups were girls only and one group was boys only.¹⁹ The other groups were mixed girls and boys.

Overall, it is our belief that the groups provide a fairly representative sampling of Iraqi children living in Amman. Thus, the general conclusions of this research are relevant and apply to many Iraqi children living in Amman - not just the children involved in the project.

Chart 1: Overview of Child Participants

Group	Age Range	Girls	Boys	Total
Group 1: School in Jebal Al Hussein	11-14	12	0	12
Group 2: School in Jebal Al Hussein	11-14	0	12	12
Group 3: RI-SOL's community learning and action centre, Jebal Nasser	6-15	16	6	22
Group 4: RI-SOL's community learning and action centre, Jebal Nasser	5-16	5	10	15
Group 5: Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development, Al-Hashmi Al-Shamali	11-17	6	9	15
Group 6: Community Centres Association, Hayy Nazzal	12 - 17	10	1	11
Group 7: Zaha Cultural Centre, Greater Amman Municipality, Khalda	11-14	5	4	9
Total	5-17	54	42	96

16. As the number of total participants fluctuated at each of the meetings held, this number is the average number of children that was consistently present in the 11 meetings held during the assessment and analysis phases of the project.

17. The Mandaean Sabeans originate in southern Iraq and the Iranian province of Khuzestan, though most of them have now left Iraq for Jordan or Syria due to persecution and war. They are a monotheistic religion and revere the teachings of John the Baptist. Less than 3% of the Iraqis in Jordan belong to the Sabean religion.

18. Please note that starting in the 2008-2009 school year, the Jordanian government has waived school fees for all Jordanian and Iraqi children.

19. The girls group at the Community Centre Association included one boy who was present because he was being looked after by his older sister. He was welcomed as a full participant in all of the sessions.

Research Methodology

PURPOSE

The primary goal of the Unity Circle project was to assess the situation of Iraqi children and their families living in Amman, Jordan. A secondary goal was to make recommendations to guide policy development and programming for Iraqi children and families in Jordan.

KEY QUESTIONS

The project was guided by three key questions aimed at building a better understanding of the challenges and risks that Iraqi girls and boys face, as well as their 'resilience' or capacity to respond to and overcome these challenges:²⁰

- What are the challenges to well-being facing Iraqi children in Amman, Jordan?
- What coping strategies are children using to respond to these challenges?
- What positive coping mechanisms or strengths of Iraqi children and their families can be encouraged and built upon in developing and improving programming interventions?

TRIPLE A APPROACH

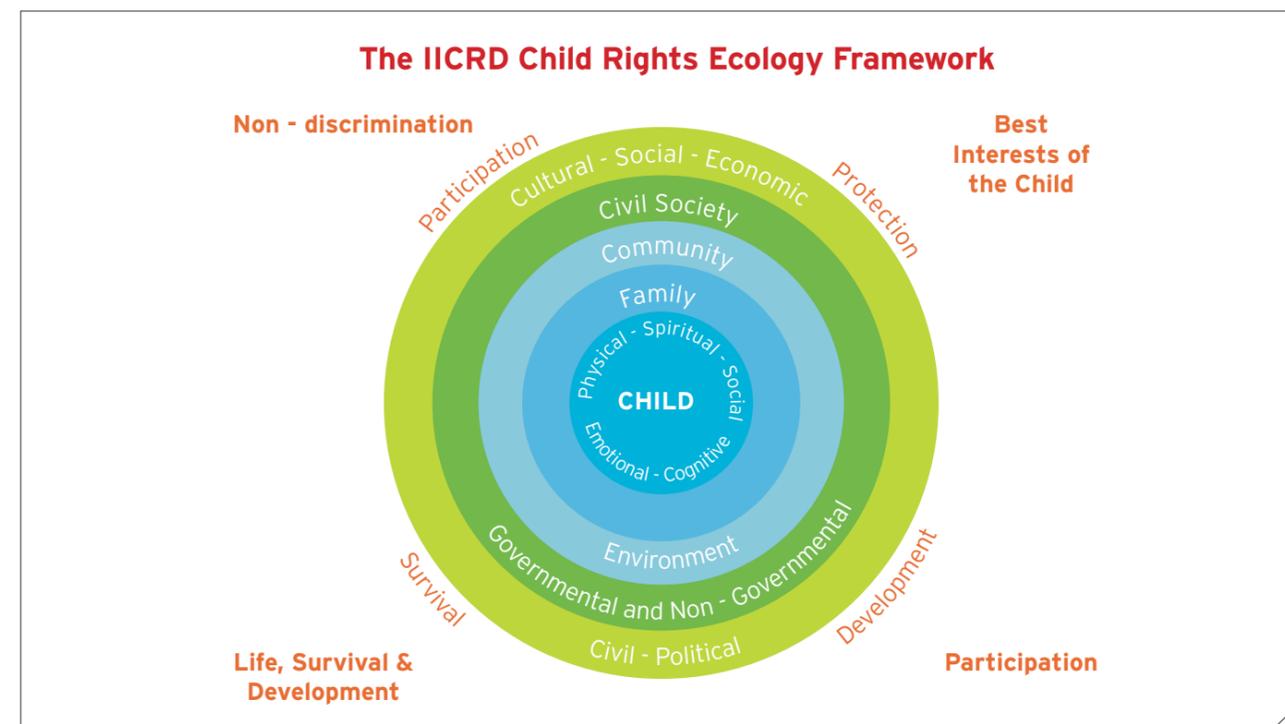
In order to address the above questions, the Unity Circle project used a qualitative research methodology developed by the IICRD known as the Triple A Child Rights and Community Development Process (Triple A). Originally used by UNICEF as a rapid assessment tool and adapted by the IICRD in 1994, the Triple A process seeks to create positive, sustainable change in all levels of children's lives.

Designed to support children's rights implementation through child-centred and culturally contextualized participatory research tools, the Triple A approach follows a phased approach consisting of an assessment of local risks/challenges and protective mechanisms for children, followed by a critical analysis of this information from local stakeholders (children, care providers, local leaders), which ultimately results in a series of actions (programs, capacity development, monitoring, advocacy interventions) that put children's experience of risk and protection at the centre of decision making.

The approach endorses a range of experiential activities - such as community mapping, drawing and poetry - as well as more traditional qualitative approaches - such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews to elicit information from children and parents in a way which is minimally intrusive and maximally effective in encouraging honest descriptions by the participants about the reality of their lives. Children's activities are also designed to be joyful and to encourage positive self-identity, and pride in one's family and culture, thus supporting children's psycho-social recovery. As such, the Triple A process provides an alternative to formal questionnaires, which are notoriously ineffective in eliciting real insights into respondents' lives - especially for children. An overview of how this approach was applied to the Unity Circle project is elaborated on below.

A CHILD RIGHTS ECOLOGY

The Triple A approach draws on a holistic understanding of the complex range of factors that influence and affect children's lives: a child rights ecology. The figure (right) illustrates these various factors.



The Child Rights Ecology recognizes the many factors that contribute to the realization (or lack of realization) of the rights of each child by placing the child at the centre of a series of circles that represent:

- Children's inner world (emotional, spiritual, cognitive)
- Children's outer world (physical, social, behavioral)
- Other children and youth
- Family
- Community, natural and built environment
- Civil society, government and non-governmental organizations
- Cultural, social, economic, civil and political context

The Child Rights Ecology demonstrates how the child contributes to his/her social reality, while simultaneously being affected and served by it, highlighting the interconnectedness of child development and societal well-being. Rooting the Triple A approach in the Child Rights Ecology helps identify gaps, and hence, supports the targeting of efforts towards filling these gaps and building or strengthening bridges across and within the different spheres of children's lives.

THE TRIPLE A APPROACH & THE UNITY CIRCLE PROJECT

ASSESSMENT:

The Assessment stage involved five meetings with each group of children over several weeks. Creative activities were used such as drawing and painting, social mapping, drama, and poetry. The goal of these sessions was to learn about Iraqi children's daily lives, their values, relationships, responsibilities, and the challenges they face in Jordan, as well as their positive and negative coping mechanisms for dealing with these challenges. Researchers also held separate discussions with the parents of the children involved in the research process.

20. According to current research, a child's level of resilience is determined by their individual capacity to draw support from the protective mechanisms present in their unique local context to respond to various challenges or risks.

Chart 2: Assessment Phase

Session	Description
1. Building Unity Together	An introductory meeting with children and their families.
2. Social Mapping	Children make drawings of the important places and people in their communities, as well as perceived risks.
3. Focus Group Discussion	Children discuss their key relationships, their responsibilities and other daily activities, and threats to these relationships and responsibilities.
4. The River Journey	Through painting and poetry, children explore 'the flow of their lives', including their past in Iraq, their present in Amman, and their future. The activity uses guided narrative to explore children's perceptions of their lives, including significant events, places, people, and connections to both the natural and spiritual world.
5. Focus Group with Parents	A discussion of the challenges to children's well-being and the various coping mechanisms rooted in family, cultural and community strengths.

ANALYSIS:

Upon completing the assessment stage, an analysis was done by the research teams. Each group reviewed what they had learned from children and parents and developed a list of challenges and strengths. As strengths were not always as obvious as challenges, research teams spent time analyzing the strengths that were implicit in children's coping strategies. The list of challenges and strengths were then presented to the children and their parents for feedback and revision.

It is important to note that the use of the term 'challenge' is not intended to imply that difficulties should or can always be overcome. For example, the death of a parent is not considered to be a problem that should be overcome, but as an event, which - while traumatic and grief-inducing in and of itself - can also set into motion a number of other challenges and risks to a child's well-being. For example, anxiety or fears resulting from the death of a parent can significantly disturb a child's sleep, constituting a considerable challenge to a child's well-being and development. Other potential challenges resulting from a parental death include economic hardship - especially where the death is of a father responsible for economically supporting the family. It is these challenges which occur as the result of the death of the parent that could be addressed through programming.

ACTION:

The final Action phase was designed as an important opportunity for children to identify and develop small, creative activities, which they felt addressed the challenges they were facing. In this project, the action phase began with each group of children voting on the key challenge they wanted to address - something that was both important to the group of children and also realistic for them to address given their own strengths and the availability of resources. Children were encouraged to look critically at the root causes of their problems by drawing a 'problem tree' with the trunk of the tree symbolizing the key challenge they selected, the roots of the palm tree representing the causes of that challenge, and the fruits representing possible solutions to the root challenge. Children then worked with either Save the Children or RI-SOL to carry out a plan of action to improve their well-being. These action plans rely heavily on the strengths and resources identified throughout the process.

The action plans fall into three different categories:

- **Learning** (to teach or build capacity for children and youth);
- **Advocacy** (to improve the situation of Iraqi children);
- **Monitoring** (to provide feedback on how programming can benefit children's daily lives).

Chart 3: Analysis and Action Phase

Session	Description
6. Strengths and Challenges Chart	Discussion with children about the challenges and strengths.
7. Problem Trees	Drawing of the problem tree to look at the root causes of problems and their solutions.
8. Meeting with Children and Parents	Parents are informed about the process and asked for their feedback and involvement in taking action.
9. Facilitating Child-Led Action Plans	An action plan is developed with children to respond to a key challenge.
10. Gathering Support	Children discuss how they will involve family and the broader community in their Action Plan.
11. Celebrating the Launch of the Action Plan	An event is held to celebrate the children and their work with their families and Save the Children or RI-SOL.

Adhering to a participatory research process, children were encouraged to have ownership over the sessions - they were responsible for developing a list of rules for their interactions, and encouraged to adapt the sessions when necessary. In one example of this participatory approach, one youth group decided they did not want to draw separately but instead to talk together in a group about their past experiences in Iraq.

Rules for the group developed by boys at a school in Jebal Al Hussein

- respect the younger ones
- be honest with yourself and tell the truth
- respect the questions whatever they are
- don't insult each other
- be creative
- love each other
- use your intelligence
- unity in the group

Ethical considerations

In keeping with ethical guidelines for working with children, each team spoke with the Iraqi participants about the goals of the project, and told them that their involvement was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time.²¹ Iraqi girls and boys were also encouraged not to divulge personal information that other children shared in group sessions, and it was made clear that staff could not guarantee total privacy in the sessions. In addition, children never wrote their names on the artwork they produced, but instead wrote their age and sex. Although the assessment findings were shared with Iraqi parents, the teams were careful never to link specific comments to individual children.

21. This was not a single conversation but rather, an ongoing discussion conducted throughout the Unity Circle project.

4a. Project Findings: The Challenges and Risks Facing Iraqi Children in Amman - The Perspectives of the Children and their Parents

Children's Perspectives on their Challenges

The Iraqi girls and boys that took part in the Unity Circle project discussed a wide range of 'challenges' or 'risks' to their well-being, which have posed real difficulties for them. Some of the key challenges or risks they identified relate directly to their experience of the war in Iraq - including the deaths of parents and loved ones, missing relatives, and witnessing violence or destruction first-hand in Iraq. Some boys shared their experience of having been kidnapped, and their sense of helplessness to either stop the war in Iraq or protect their family from violence.

A significant number of challenges arose for both Iraqi girls and boys with their family's displacement from Iraq to Jordan. Starting with what many children described as an arduous journey from Iraq to Jordan, Iraqi girls and boys then faced numerous challenges associated with the loss of their physical and social environments. These losses pertain to virtually every area of their lives: loss of peer and family networks, loss of their places of worship, loss of financial security, and loss of gardens and recreational opportunities.

Having their whole family together in Amman is a luxury that many Iraqi children do not have. However, a majority of Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project stated that their parents also pose a challenge to them - in the form

of restrictions on their movement and friendships. Many Iraqi children also have anxious or depressed parents who the children feel are often unable to focus on them.

Their new 'home' in Jordan poses challenges to all of the Iraqi children living in East Amman - from safety issues related to traffic, to overt discrimination and violence experienced both in their neighbourhoods and in their schools. Other education-related challenges include the difficulty some Iraqi children have in understanding the Jordanian dialect of Arabic and the school curriculum, the poor quality of some teaching, and in some cases, the inability to go to school.



This is a picture of the River Jordan and a road running through it representing the boy's journey in life with the book characters Harry Potter and Voldemort engaging in a battle above. Boy age 14, describing his artwork: "I went to see the Harry Potter movie with my friend. It was a special trip. I like going to movies. It means a lot to me. I love this movie. Harry is good and Voldemort is bad. This drawing means that good always wins against evil - just like Harry Potter."

While the above challenges were discussed by children of all ages, Iraqi youth (boys and girls aged 14-17) raised additional issues such as frustration at their inability to work and contribute to the family income. Iraqi youth also identified additional educational challenges. While some Iraqi youth were unable to attend school due to responsibilities at home, others found the experience of being in classrooms with much younger cohorts to be highly de-moralizing and painful. The lack of privacy in their homes in Amman was a final problem specific to Iraqi youth.

The Iraqi children living in West Amman generally considered their schools as supportive environments. Although there is some discrimination against them by their Jordanian peers, there is none from their teachers and principals. Nor is there violence against them in schools or in their neighbourhoods. What Iraqi girls and boys in West Amman do struggle with is their difficult experiences of the war in Iraq and the same loss of family

and peer networks experienced by the Iraqi children in East Amman. Iraqi girls and boys in West Amman also have many of the same restrictions on their freedom of movement. Although the Iraqi children in West Amman have greater financial security than their peers in East Amman, they also have significant anxiety about the safety of their fathers and elder brothers who are often working in Iraq and traveling between Iraq and Jordan.

The violence and discrimination experienced by Iraqi children in East Amman neighbourhoods and schools was the issue which most dominated discussions throughout the Unity Circle project. After this issue, the other challenges were considered equally important to Iraqi girls and boys. For example, the lack of Iraqi and Jordanian friends in Amman was as distressing to Iraqi children as their financial insecurity. Likewise, the dangerous traffic in Amman was as anxiety producing to some Iraqi children as were their memories of violence in Iraq.

A Gendered Perspective:

Iraqi girls and boys living in Amman have much in common in terms of challenges they face. However, some key differences were observed by the children themselves about how they each experience these challenges.

Group play as described by a young girl: **“ The children in the play are pretending to be an Iraqi family. The baby is crying. The mother tries to help the baby. The American soldiers arrive and they take the mother away. The young boy tries to defend her and to keep her safe. He cannot.”**

While an experience shared by all children, both girls and boys recognized the particular helplessness that many of the boys felt in not being able to stop the war in Iraq or protect their mothers and sisters from witnessing violence or from being taken away for questioning by American forces. This regret was closely linked to the boys' desire to be courageous – courage being an incredibly important Iraqi value. Boys also frequently expressed the conviction that they should go back to Iraq to find missing persons.

Something that was exclusively experienced by Iraqi boys in the Unity Circle project was that of having been kidnapped. Several of the boys involved in this project were kidnapped in Iraq and held for ransom. Some of the boys had very difficult experiences when they were kidnapped that continue to bother them. Other boys are worried about the repercussions of their kidnapping – their family's departure for Jordan and their subsequent poverty. Many of the boys who were kidnapped do not want to talk to their parents about their specific experiences because they want to protect them from further sadness.

Boys at school in Jebal Al Hussein:
“ We can go outside but my sisters stay inside, either at our house or at my neighbours. They play cards and listen to songs. I play soccer outside. I chat on the internet. My sisters are on the computer but don't chat on the internet.”

Meanwhile, both boys and girls recognized that the over-protectiveness of their parents was particularly intense for girls. Girls complained of having been kept indoors more frequently – facing greater isolation and boredom. Older girls were especially desperate to have more freedom and leave their homes more frequently.

The lack of freedom also extended to girls' ability to participate in religious life. While most children experienced the lack of opportunity to participate in religious life to be a significant challenge, girls had even less access – with most Iraqi girls never having visited a mosque or church in Amman.

Older boys were found to often have more freedom than girls or younger boys – some older boys are allowed to leave their home unsupervised 2 or 3 afternoons a week. However, not all older boys are given this freedom, especially if one or more of their siblings were killed in Iraq. Related to this, older Iraqi boys were found to be the most likely to have friends in Amman – and the most likely to have both Iraqi and Jordanian friends.

Finally, while Iraqi girls and boys both experience violence, they have slightly different experiences of it. While Iraqi boys described being punched and kicked by Jordanian boys, Iraqi girls reported having their hair pulled by Jordanian girls.

This page provides an overview of the many challenges identified by Iraqi children participating in the project. The challenges are grouped into themes, and each specific challenge within these themes is elaborated upon below.

Experience of War:

- Death of family members
- Kidnapping
- Witness to violent events
- Uncertainty about missing family members
- Helplessness to stop the war in Iraq or to protect one's family from violence
- Difficult and dangerous journey from Iraq to Jordan

Displacement from Iraq to Jordan, and the Loss of Physical Environment, Religious Context, Social Context and Financial Security:

- Loss of social networks and lack of community events
- Inability to visit mosques and churches regularly or at all
- Loss of natural places in Iraq and limited access to gardens in Jordan
- Boredom and lack of recreation
- Poverty and significantly reduced family income
- Lack of continuity in housing

Family Relations:

- Family separation
- Unhappy parents
- Overprotective parents

Peer Relations:

- Miss old friends and lack new friends

Physical Threats and Discrimination in Jordan:

- Destruction of personal property
- Dangerous traffic
- Violence and discrimination

Education:

- Violence and discrimination at school
- Poor quality teaching
- Difficulty understanding new school curriculum and Jordanian dialect of Arabic
- Not attending school

Challenges Specific to Iraqi Youth (ages 14 - 17):

- Inability to work and contribute to family income
- In class with younger students
- Lack of privacy

EXPERIENCE OF WAR IN IRAQ

Many of the challenges identified by Iraqi girls and boys relate directly to their experience of war in Iraq. Iraqi children identified the following experiences of war as the most significant to them.

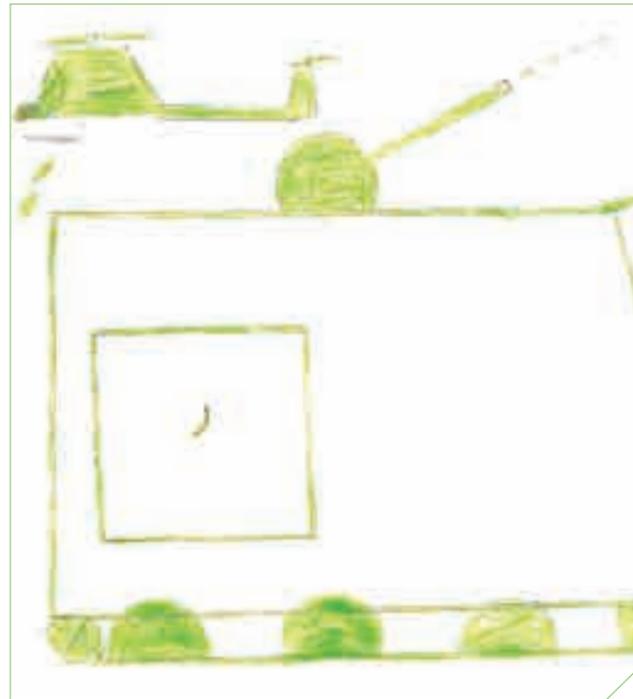
Death of Family Members

Girl, age 6: **“Children go to the play area [in Amman shopping mall] with their mother and father. But I only have a mother. I am missing my father. He is dead in Iraq. They kidnapped him, then they told my uncle ‘come and we will tell you about your brother’. They killed my uncle too.”**

Boy, age 12, describing his artwork (right):

“I remember they came with their tanks and I was with a group of people. A helicopter came at two in the morning and I lost my uncle. That helicopter killed my uncle. I don’t want to say too much more. I want to go back to Iraq and live peacefully.”

Many Iraqi girls and boys have immediate or extended family members who were killed in Iraq. The children miss these people terribly, and expressed all of the ‘normal’ feelings of grief associated with death. The challenge for children is how to process this grief. The death of a father or another male head of the household can also result in economic crisis. The loss of the main ‘breadwinner’ can be a particular burden for boys who feel they should provide for their siblings and mothers. However, older girls, especially eldest children, may also share great anxiety about their family finances.



Boy, age 12.



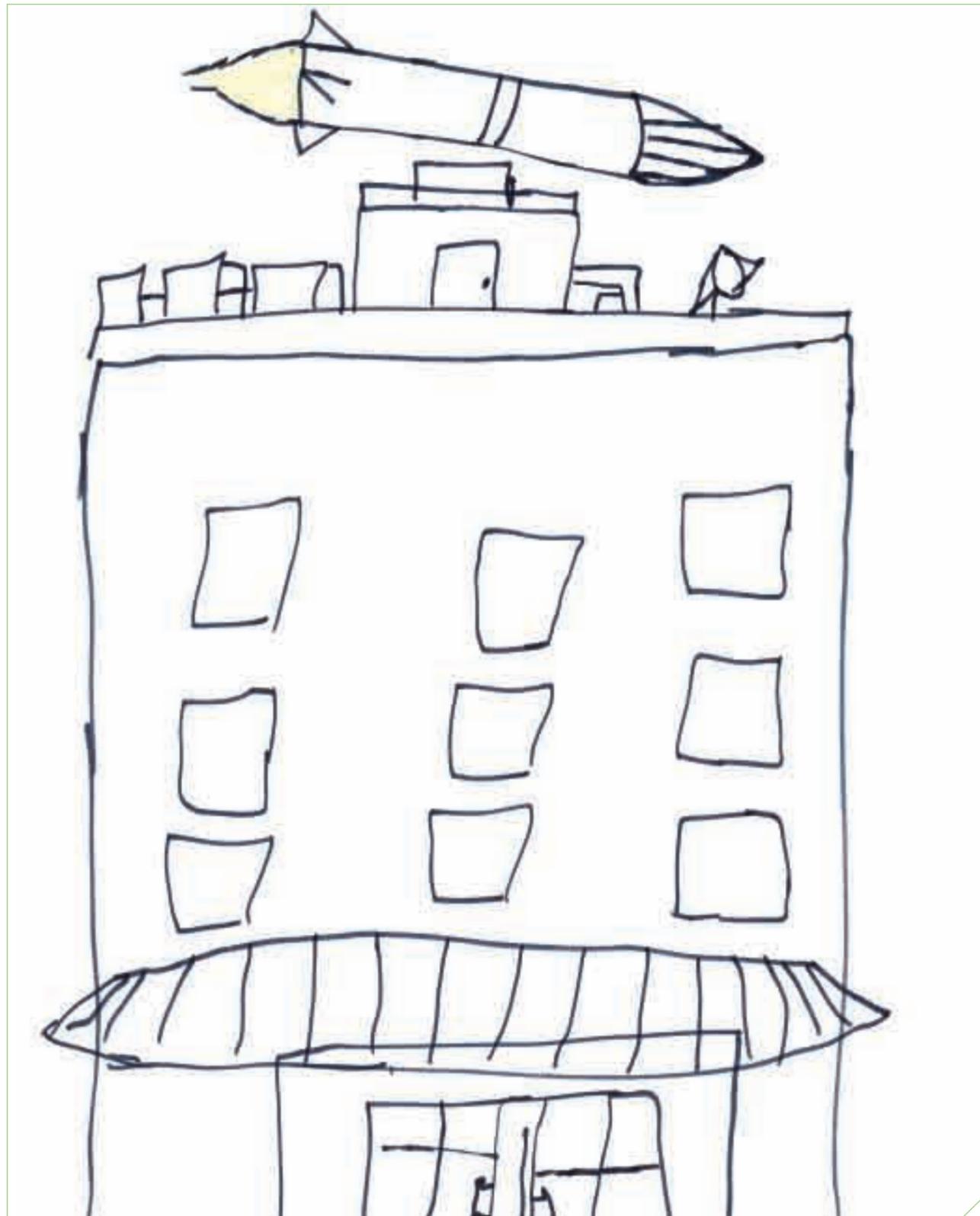
Boy, age 13. Text on the picture above: “They took money from my mother, and we gave it to them. Do you accept that my Baghdad? They wanted to kill me, and my father. My Baghdad, they accepted that.”

Kidnapping

Several of the boys involved in this project were kidnapped in Iraq and held for ransom. Many of the boys who were kidnapped do not want to talk to their parents about their experiences because they want to protect them from further sadness. However, these boys did want to speak with other caring adults.

Some of the boys had very difficult experiences when they were kidnapped that continue to bother them. Other boys are more focused on the consequences of their kidnapping. For example, one boy feels guilt that he was out after curfew when he was kidnapped, and that the ransom paid for his return has caused the family’s economic hardship. His family was forced to sell their belongings and borrowed money to pay his ransom, and then they fled with him and his siblings to Jordan.

Boy, age 13, describing his artwork (above): **“This picture is of a storm. There are people inside and outside of the storm. I was kidnapped and they asked for ransom. That is me inside of the storm. Outside is the terrorist.”**



Boy, age 14.

Witness to violent events in Iraq

Many Iraqi children have witnessed violent events such as murder, fighting, and the destruction of homes, and other buildings. Many have heard the sound of bombs, tanks or planes overhead. Some children have seen their houses and family possessions being ransacked and destroyed, or their pets killed. Some Iraqi children

spoke of how hard it was to forget these events and how remembering made them fearful again. Alternate responses were also evident and of concern to the child's well-being - such as that of the 6-year old boy who expressed an attraction to the 'weapons' of war.

Boy, age 14, describing his artwork (left): **"I was walking in the street one day and I saw it [rocket]. Of course when I saw it, I felt really bad and was so afraid. After that, I was afraid to leave the house. It hit a complex very close to my house."**

Girl, age 14: **"When the war started everyday and every hour we were afraid. My mother slept with all of her clothes on as if we were going out. Females had to be ready in case the Americans entered our house at night."**

Boy, age 6: **"It is a drawing of planes dropping bombs on tents and lots of shooting. I saw this. The planes were silver. The Iraqis were trying to fight with the airplanes. The tank was shooting at the Iraqis. It [tank] was American. Somebody was cheering for the Iraqis. I am in the back behind the tank. I want to have my own tank. I like tanks."**

Group Skit by group of girls and boys aged 6 - 15, as described by young girl: **"My house [in Baghdad] was safe until the war started. One day we went out for lunch at my grandfather's house. When we came back, the house was destroyed. In the kitchen, we found my doll hanging by a noose. The American soldiers did it. We saw them leaving. They came the next day and said they wanted to help. I didn't believe them."**

Girl, age 8: **"I had a puppy in Iraq. Its mother did not feed it so I gave it a bottle. I looked after it. We had to leave for one month. When we came back home we found the puppy had been killed."**

Boy, age 13: **"A Shiite came to my house in Iraq and threatened us. My uncle has a problem with the Shiites. They came to the house and wanted to kill us but we ran away to Jordan - my father, mother, sister and brother. My uncle died. I don't want the house to be attacked while we are gone. I am worried about it."**

Uncertainty about missing family members

Uncertainty about the whereabouts of family members kidnapped and missing in Iraq prevents children from fully grieving or finding closure. These children and their parents can alternate between hope and sadness, and are unable to hold funerals and feel a sense of closure. Some of the older Iraqi boys seek permission from their mothers to go to Iraq to search for their fathers.

Girl, age 15: **“A year and a half ago we were living in Baghdad. It was not a bad life. One day we were sitting in the house - myself, my mother, and two little brothers. My father was visiting one of his friends and we were waiting for him to come back. He didn’t. Somebody dropped a letter at our house. It was from a gang. The letter only said one thing - ‘this is your day’. My uncle went out to try and find my father. He didn’t find him. My uncle told us to go to Jordan. We ran away. Our financial help came from my grandfather on my mother’s side. He lived in Iraq. My grandfather came to visit us in Jordan because my mother was in the hospital. She said not to come because it was dangerous but he wanted to see her. He was going back to Iraq with my aunt when he was kidnapped by a gang. They left my aunt alone. My uncle in Iraq keeps trying to find my father. My aunt sends us a little bit of money. I heard lately that my uncle was working for the American forces as a translator, but last week he was kidnapped. Now we are on our own. There are no men in the household. My brothers are very young. We have a lot of trouble now. Now we have no money. My mother doesn’t know whether to have a funeral for my father.”**

Helplessness to stop the war in Iraq or to protect one’s family from violence

Both young and older boys express frustration at their inability to stop the war in Iraq. Older boys are especially upset that they could not protect their mothers and sisters from witnessing violence in Iraq or from being taken away for questioning by American forces. This regret is closely linked to the boys desire to be courageous - courage being an incredibly important Iraqi value.

Girl, age 13: **“I drew a picture of a gun and a boy saying ‘please don’t shoot.’”**

Boy, age 11: **“We had a thief who came to our house (during the war) and he attacked my grandfather with a knife. He died because the thief stabbed him.”**

Difficult and dangerous journey from Iraq into Jordan

For some Iraqi children, the journey from Iraq to Jordan was terrible - it was long and arduous, and the final destination was unknown. Some Iraqi children were separated from their parents on this journey, and other children witnessed fellow Iraqi passengers being taken away. Memories of this journey remain difficult for some Iraqi children.

Boy, age 12: **“We came here by bus on a road. They stopped us at the border. There were too many people on the bus. I had bad dreams when I slept on the bus. They gave us a very hard time at the border. A government soldier woke someone up who was sleeping outside and they took him.”**

DISPLACEMENT FROM IRAQ TO JORDAN AND THE LOSS OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, RELIGIOUS CONTEXT, SOCIAL CONTEXT AND FINANCIAL SECURITY:

Many of the challenges facing Iraqi children relate to their family's displacement from Iraq to Jordan, and the subsequent loss of their physical environment such as their places of worship, as well as the loss of their social networks and financial security.

Loss of Social Networks and Lack of Community Events

Girl, from group of girls aged 11 - 14:

"Now we don't visit anyone, and no-one visits us. It is not like in Iraq."

Boy, age 17: **"I came to Jordan in 2006. In Iraq, I remember I used to go out with my family and friends visiting. I miss that...I only have an uncle I visit here. It's always in my memory, going to my grandfather's house in Iraq. I miss that very much because he died."**

One of the biggest challenges Iraqi children in Amman identified is the loss of large social networks of relatives and friends. "Visiting" is an important cultural activity in Iraq, in which girls and boys visited their relatives, friends and neighbours frequently - on a daily or weekly basis. In Amman, children may go with their parents to visit the lone relative living in Jordan, but only on Fridays or during holidays. Visiting is no longer a regular activity. Those Iraqi children who do know their neighbours say they are "not important people" in their lives.

There are few opportunities for Iraqi children to celebrate community events in Amman. Many Iraqi children have not been on a condolence visit²² or to a wedding since coming to Amman. This is unusual for Iraqi children. There are also no formal community spaces in Amman where Iraqis can gather. For many Iraqi children, the shopping mall is their family's only opportunity to interact with other Iraqi families.

22. When there is a death, Iraqi relatives, friends and neighbours visit the home of the deceased to pay their respect and to offer condolences to the remaining family members.

Inability to visit mosques and churches regularly or at all

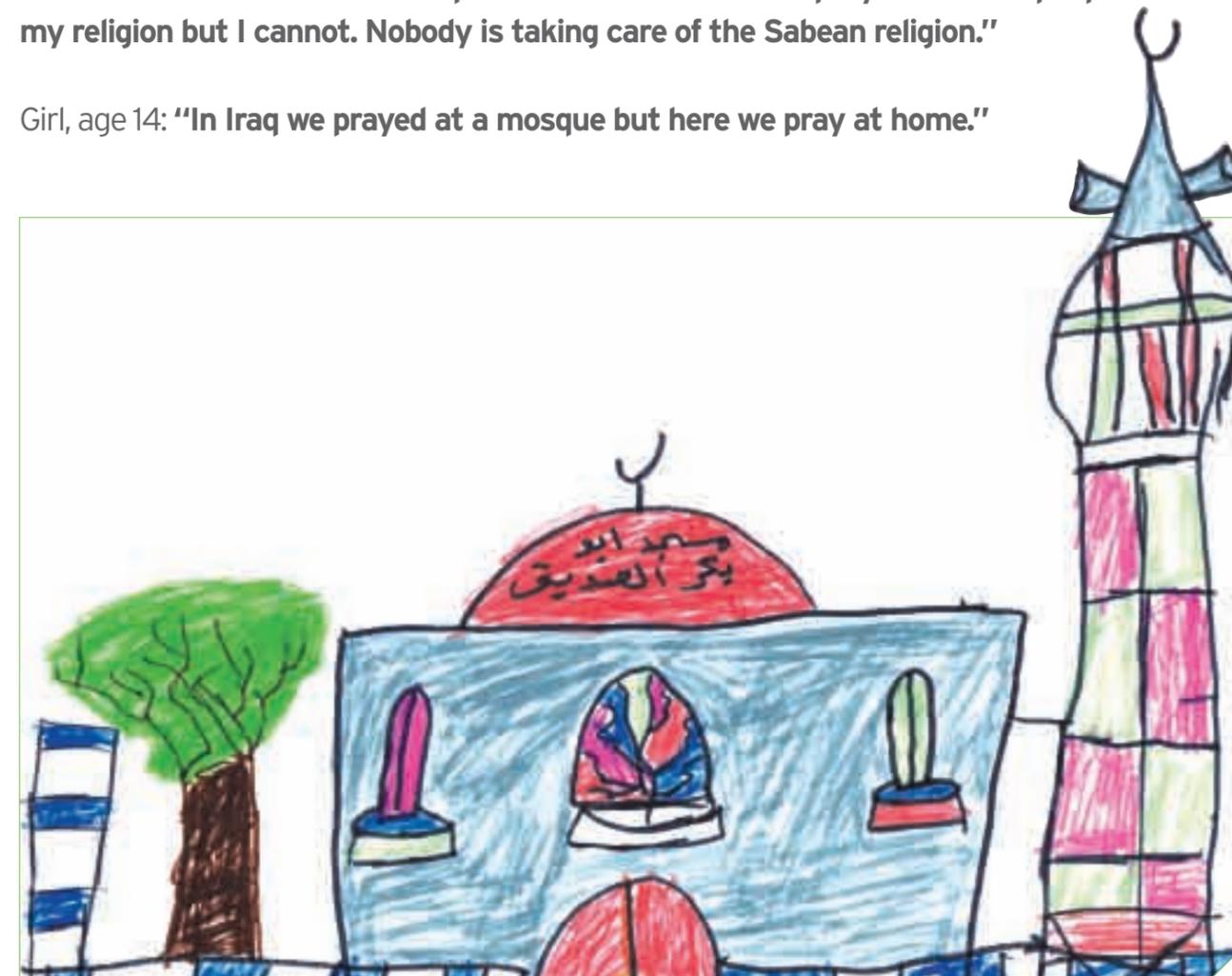
The lack of opportunities to participate in religious life was considered a challenge or problem by the majority of children in the Unity Circle project. These children went regularly to mosques or churches in Iraq; some boys went to the mosque every day when in Iraq. In Amman, Iraqi

children do not often go to mosques or churches and many Iraqi girls have never visited a mosque or church in Amman. Sabean children have no places of worship in Jordan. Shiite boys who can worship at Sunni mosques sometimes feel uncomfortable doing so.

Boy, age 11: **"I drew a picture of the city of Samra in Iraq. There is nothing like it in Jordan. It is a holy place. It is a beautiful place. I have not seen anything like it here in Jordan. The sun (in this picture) reminds me of God."**

Boy, age 12: **"My mother teaches me about my religion Sabean. There is no worship place for us here. We had them in Iraq. I would like to be able to pray with other people from my religion but I cannot. Nobody is taking care of the Sabean religion."**

Girl, age 14: **"In Iraq we prayed at a mosque but here we pray at home."**



Boy, age 11. Drawing of a mosque in Iraq.

Loss of natural places in Iraq and limited access to gardens in Jordan

Gardens and a connection with nature are important cultural themes in Islamic culture. The lack of opportunity to play in gardens and spend time appreciating nature was frequently cited by participants as a deep source of sadness. Many Iraqi families had their own gardens at home, and children stated that they miss the easy access

to the outdoors. Iraqi children in Amman live in urban environments and they long to see nature - trees, flowers, rivers. They do not visit gardens in Amman regularly, even when there are gardens close to their houses. Out of the 96 Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project, only one boy spoke of playing daily in a garden close to his house.



Girl, age 14.

Girl, age 14, describing her artwork (above): **“Iraq is more green than here. There are green trees and a river in my picture. We used to play outside in the garden every day.”**

Girl, age 8: **“I drew a picture of a flower and a butterfly. It represents nature. I love nature. There is no nature in Jordan. Even in Iraq, the war meant we could not see nature. I am dreaming of nature.”**

Girl, age 16: **“There are no places like this in Jordan but I imagine there must be nature somewhere with gardens. There is a small garden next to my house (in Amman) but I don’t go there.”**



Boy, age 9. Text on the picture above: “Our palm tree bears no fruit, it is only for looks. It is a small tree. The foreigners (American soldiers) came and took the tree. The little tree is now a stranger.”

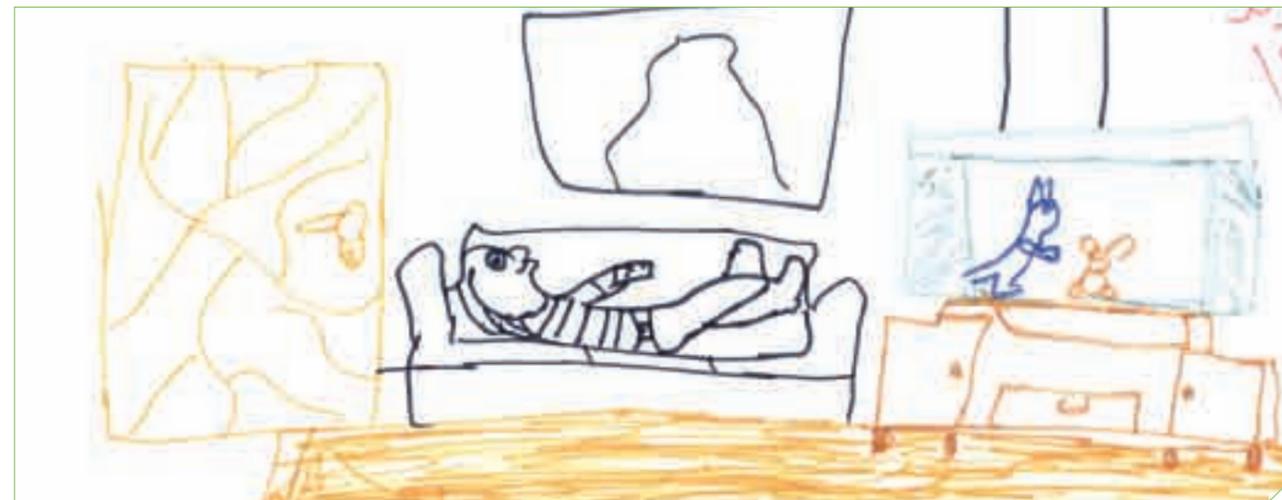
Boy, age 9, describing his artwork (left): **“The tree has three branches on it and I always remember it. It is special. It was in the street near my house. I can’t enjoy the tree anymore.”**

Boredom and lack of recreation

Boredom at home was identified as a significant challenge by Iraqi children in all of the Unity Circle groups in both East and West Amman. Iraqi children of all ages lament the lack of more recreational opportunities. They spend a lot of time inside at home watching television, playing on the computer, helping their mothers with cleaning or cooking, and alternately playing or fighting with their siblings. Iraqi boys are aware that they have a bit more freedom than girls do because they see how they are treated differently than their sisters.

Girl, age 16: **“None of these girls, we don’t want to stay at home this much.”**

Boy, age 14, describing his artwork (below): **“I come back from school and I do my homework but I don’t have friends. I stay at home and sleep and watch TV. Sometimes I play on the carpet.”**



Boy, age 14.

Poverty and significantly reduced family income

Iraqi girls and boys in East Amman, even very young children, feel their family's economic hardship. They understand that their fathers are unemployed in Jordan or not earning very much. Children from formerly middle class or wealthy families in Iraq are especially aware of the loss of recreation and entertainment activities caused by a dramatic decrease in their family income since coming to Jordan. Many children try to protect their parents from more sadness by not asking for new toys or to be taken places that are too expensive.

Boy, age 8: "I wish we could afford to go to Plaza Mall. I wish there were no tickets [for rides]. I wish it was free. I could meet all of my friends and relatives there. We have no money."

Girl, age 14, describing her artwork (below): "We go to Mecca Mall. We just look. We can't afford to buy anything."

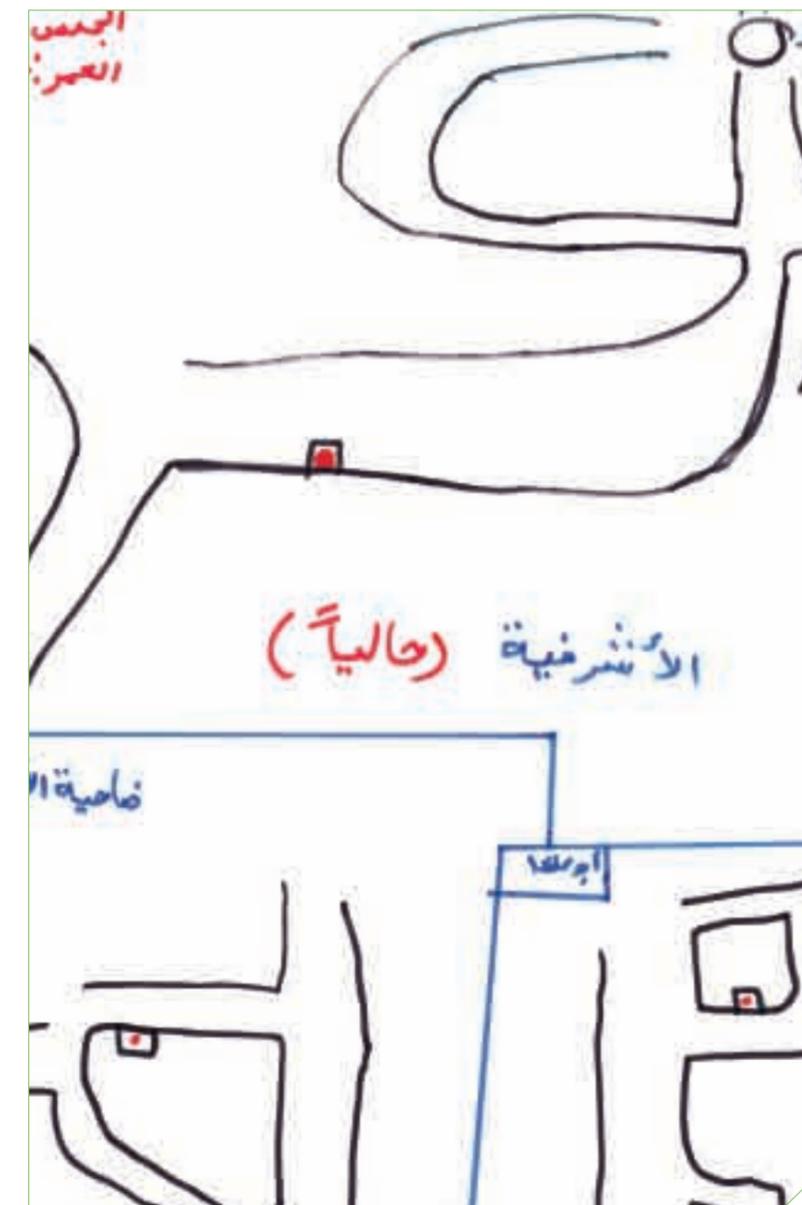


Girl, age 14.

Lack of continuity in housing

Some children expressed that one of the greatest difficulties of their life in Amman has been the 'uprootedness' of frequently moving from house to house. Frequent moving is often due to parents' desperate attempts to save money by moving to cheaper housing. In other cases, families relocate after having conflict with a Jordanian neighbour which makes them fearful of police intervention and possible deportation.

Boy, age 9, describing his artwork (right): "There are three houses in my picture. One is in a village near Amman, one is on the third circle, and now I am living in Ashrifiya. It's a rough road, and I go in too many circles. These are all the different houses I lived in Jordan. I liked the first house best because the neighbours were friendly."



Boy, age 9.

FAMILY RELATIONS:

Family separation

Many Iraqi boys and girls in Amman are living separately from immediate family members. A father or mother may remain in Iraq to continue working and earning money or siblings may remain behind to continue their education. Iraqi girls and boys also miss their larger families including cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents.

Boy, from group of girls and boys aged 6 - 15:

“The most important people to me are in Iraq, my mother and father.”

Boy, age 15: **“All I want is my father to have a job. I don’t want him to have no money. And now my mother and sister have to go back to Iraq. My mother has to work for 3 more years to get her pension. She is a sports teacher. If my father gets a job [in Amman], then my mother and sister won’t leave. My father cannot go back to Iraq. They will kill him.”**

Boy, age 8: **“I drew [a picture of] my cousin who is in Iraq. I miss him. He used to stand by me if I had a fight. He is 17 years old. I miss him. He is in Iraq.”**

Unhappy parents

Both girls and boys talked about unhappy and anxious mothers and fathers, stating that they felt their parents are often too worried or sad to properly interact with them. Older Iraqi girls and boys were especially aware of the stress at home caused by unemployed or under-employed fathers.

Boy, age 15: **“There is pressure in my house. My father comes home from work and he doesn’t want to talk to us.”**

Girl, from group of children aged 11-17: **“There are problems at home. I try to avoid them. Problems happen because people don’t have jobs. People irritate each other. We have nothing to do.”**

Overprotective parents

According to the children in the Unity Circle project, Iraqi parents in Amman can be overprotective because they are worried about their children’s safety, and are fearful that conflict with their neighbours may result in their deportation from Jordan. As a result, many children spend long hours at home every day. Even those Iraqi children who attend school are asked by parents to return home immediately afterwards - in the early afternoon - and remain at home for the rest of the day. Many parents do not allow their children to play outside without adult supervision, even on their own streets.

Iraqi children of all ages do not like being kept at home so much. Older girls are especially desperate to have more freedom and leave their houses more frequently. Older boys are given more freedom than all other Iraqi children. Some older boys are allowed to leave their home unsupervised 2 or 3 afternoons a week. They spend this time walking around with other Iraqi boys or playing soccer in the streets. However, not all older boys are given this freedom - especially if one or more of their siblings were killed in Iraq.

Many Iraqi parents also restrict their children’s friendships with other children. They are anxious if their children form new friendships with girls and boys.

Girl, age 17: **“If I am not at courses here at the Centre, then I am at home. I don’t want to be at home, I want to go out.”**

Boy, age 13: **“It didn’t used to matter what time we came home. We played with dogs and we played football.”**

Boy, age 15: **“The family does not agree that I should be friends with a neighbour. I have to explain to my family why I should be allowed. My father says ‘Don’t walk with this child. He is not good’. I try to explain to my father that he is good.”**

PEER RELATIONS:

Miss old friends and lack new friends in Amman

All Iraqi girls and boys stated that they miss their friends from home. They also regret the lack of new friends in Jordan, either Iraqi or Jordanian. This inability to make friends is both due to Iraqi children's restricted movement, and the unwillingness of some Jordanians to become friends with Iraqi children. Older Iraqi boys were found to be the most likely to have friends in Amman - and the most likely to have both Iraqi and Jordanian friends.

Boy, age 14: **"I had many friends in Iraq. I miss them. My friends represent Iraq to me."**

Girl, age 18: **"Outside of the house I have no friends. I only go to my aunt's house and see my cousins."**

Girl, age 11, describing her artwork (right): **"I am from Northern Iraq and this is a picture of snowfall. I am playing in the snow with my friends and I wish to go back to them in Iraq."**



Girl, age 11.

PHYSICAL THREATS AND DISCRIMINATION IN JORDAN:

Destruction of personal property

Iraqi children, especially older boys, are frustrated about their inability to protect their homes and belongings in Amman. They feel powerless to stand up to Jordanians who abuse or steal their family's limited belongings. When Iraqi boys do fight back, they are often rebuked by their parents who do not want neighbours to report them to the police.

Boy, age 17: **"Even in your home, you are not safe. We are on the first floor. Everyday someone throws trash in front of our house and they say 'it is not us'. They keep doing it."**

Boy, age 15: **"In the holiday, my younger cousin bought a toy gun. The other [Jordanian] boys took it and broke it right away. They destroy things we own, and we can't say anything."**

Dangerous traffic

Negligent driving and busy roads that are difficult to cross on foot are a serious concern to many Iraqi children living in Amman. Girls and boys often find it difficult to travel to and from their school. Some children have siblings who have been injured or killed in road accidents.

Boy, age 9, describing his artwork (right): **"I am walking on the sidewalk and a car is driving recklessly. I am by myself. I was afraid because of how the car was driving."**

Boy, age 11: **"I love my brother. He was going to the mosque and was hit by a car and died [in Amman]. He was 5 years old. We used to play together, my brother, his friend and me."**

Violence and Discrimination

The great majority of Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project feel they are unwelcome in Jordan. Iraqi boys and girls living in East Amman stated that their neighbours, or even complete strangers in the streets, have called them foreigners and told them to go home. Older Iraqi boys reported that when playing soccer outside, they were frequently yelled at to be quiet, or had their games stopped forcibly by Jordanian children and sometimes Jordanian adults. Many Iraqi boys have been hit in the streets, and some Iraqi girls have been spat at - usually by strangers. Some Iraqi children have seen their parents threatened with deportation by their Jordanian landlords when they complain about their housing situation. The majority of the Unity Circle participants in East Amman feel they are living in a hostile environment in Jordan.



Boy, age 9.

Girl, age 12: **"The people treat each other in a different way. At school and in the street, people tell me I am a stranger here."**

Boy, age 16: **"The main problem is that people talk badly about us. The kids become gangs and they are against us... Sometimes Jordanians ask us 'Why are you here? This is not your country'. They put pressure on us and don't accept us."**

Girl, age 15: **"Taxi drivers do not use the meter for us. When he [taxi driver] hears us speaking Iraqi and if I ask him to start the meter, he says 'get out of the car', or he charges more."**

EDUCATION:

Physical violence and discrimination at school - from Jordanian students, teachers' and principals - was one of the challenges consistently identified by Iraqi children in all of the East Amman groups. The great majority of Unity Circle participants in East Amman experience Jordanian schools as hostile, threatening places.²³

Iraqi children entering school in Jordan are doing so in the context of an already stressed and overcrowded Jordanian school system. Due to the increase in tuition (and the general higher cost of living), there has been a great influx of students moving from private schools into the public schools, placing more pressure on Jordanian schools. The Jordanian government has been working to alleviate stressors, in order to accommodate all children. For example, many schools have reverted to double-shifting in order to accommodate the greater number of students.



Girl, age 12.

Violence and discrimination at school

When mapping out important places in their lives in Amman, few Iraqi children drew pictures of Jordanian schools. This stood in stark contrast to the many drawings children made of schools in Iraq. Less than 10% of Iraqi children participating in the project spoke of going to school in Amman as a positive experience, or of teachers as supportive persons in their lives. Of these few children who spoke of school in positive terms, the majority of them lived in the wealthier neighbourhoods of West Amman and attended private schools.

Violence affected both girls and boys. While Iraqi boys are more often punched and kicked by Jordanian boys, Iraqi girls frequently have their hair pulled by Jordanian girls. Iraqi girls and boys also report taunting by Jordanian children for speaking with an Iraqi accent or for being older than their classmates.

Iraqi girls and boys also reported frequent discrimination and violence against them by their Jordanian teachers and principals. In some cases, teachers singled out Iraqi children to perform menial tasks. Iraqi children are especially aware of religious discrimination against them by teachers and principals. For example, Sabeen children may be forced to take exams on important religious holidays, Christians may have to attend Muslim education classes, and Shiites may be questioned relentlessly as to why they are not Sunni.

Most Iraqi children go to school in order to leave their homes, for the chance to be with other children, and because of their family's commitment to education. Given their involvement in violence and discrimination against Iraqi children, teachers and principals are not usually solicited by Iraqi children for help. When asked 'Does anyone at school help you solve your problems?', one young boy replied "No. They do nothing. They leave the problems to us."²⁴

23. It is important to note that although corporal punishment in schools is officially illegal, violence in East Amman schools is experienced by both Iraqi and Jordanian children. The Government of Jordan has committed to educational reform and is working with the NGO and UN community closely in this endeavor.

24. It is likely that the problem of unhelpful teachers may be common to Jordanian students as well - especially in East Amman schools with over-worked teachers and limited resources.

Boy, age 10: **"The teachers hit us. The principal does not respect our mothers."**

Boy, age 10: **"There is different treatment of children according to religion. Sabeans are beaten up. If we hit a Jordanian [child], then the principal takes their side. If we go to the principal to complain, then we are beaten up twice."**

Girl, from group of children aged 6 - 15: **"I am a Muslim and I go to a Christian school and they force me to learn their religion."**

Boy, age 10: **"The teacher orders us [Iraqis] to go and make them coffee and to clean the bathrooms. We have to bring money and without it they won't let us take our exams. Jordanians are always given another chance. But not us."**

Group skit by girls: **Children are in a classroom and are asked by a Jordanian teacher to recite the alphabet. When one Iraqi student does so with an Iraqi accent, she is reprimanded and told to do it again. "Be Jordanian" the teacher says.**

Girl, age 16: **"I don't like my school because they keep telling us we are Iraqis and we are crowding their schools. The students are rough with us. I can speak Jordanian [Arabic], but they know I am Iraqi. It would be nice to have a school just for Iraqis and the Jordanians would not bother us. In the street, we avoid the Jordanians. In playgrounds the Jordanian kids gang up on us."**

Girl, age 14: **"The difficulty I have here is at school. They always put Iraqis at the back of the line for books and there is never enough. They tell me to go and buy the books, but I can't afford it."²⁵**

Boy, age 14: **"Here they [teachers] do not understand different religions. I am Sabeen. They ask me what 'what is your religion? Who is your prophet?' Their reaction is to say that my religion is bizarre. In Jordan they say Islam is the only religion and you will go to hell. If you are Sabeen, you are an infidel. They think we worship the stars. They say 'tell us a verse from your holy book'. Whatever I say, they say it is not right. They make fun of me. Some teachers understand and some don't. They think we are strange people."**

25. For the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 school years, the Jordanian government covered all textbook costs and Save the Children covered stationary supplies and appropriate clothing.

Poor quality teaching

Many children remember the quality of their schooling in Iraq as much better than their current schools in Amman. Iraqi girls and boys feel their Jordanian teachers are not open to questions, or to teaching them how to solve problems.

Boy, age 14: "My complaint about the school is that they [the teachers] don't explain things properly. In Iraq it was different. They answered us when we asked questions."

Difficulty understanding new school curriculum and Jordanian dialect of Arabic

Some Iraqi girls and boys reported having trouble understanding components of the Jordanian school curriculum, especially in the areas of Math and English. Some Iraqi children also said they had difficulty understanding the Jordanian dialect of Arabic used by their teachers and classmates.

Not attending school

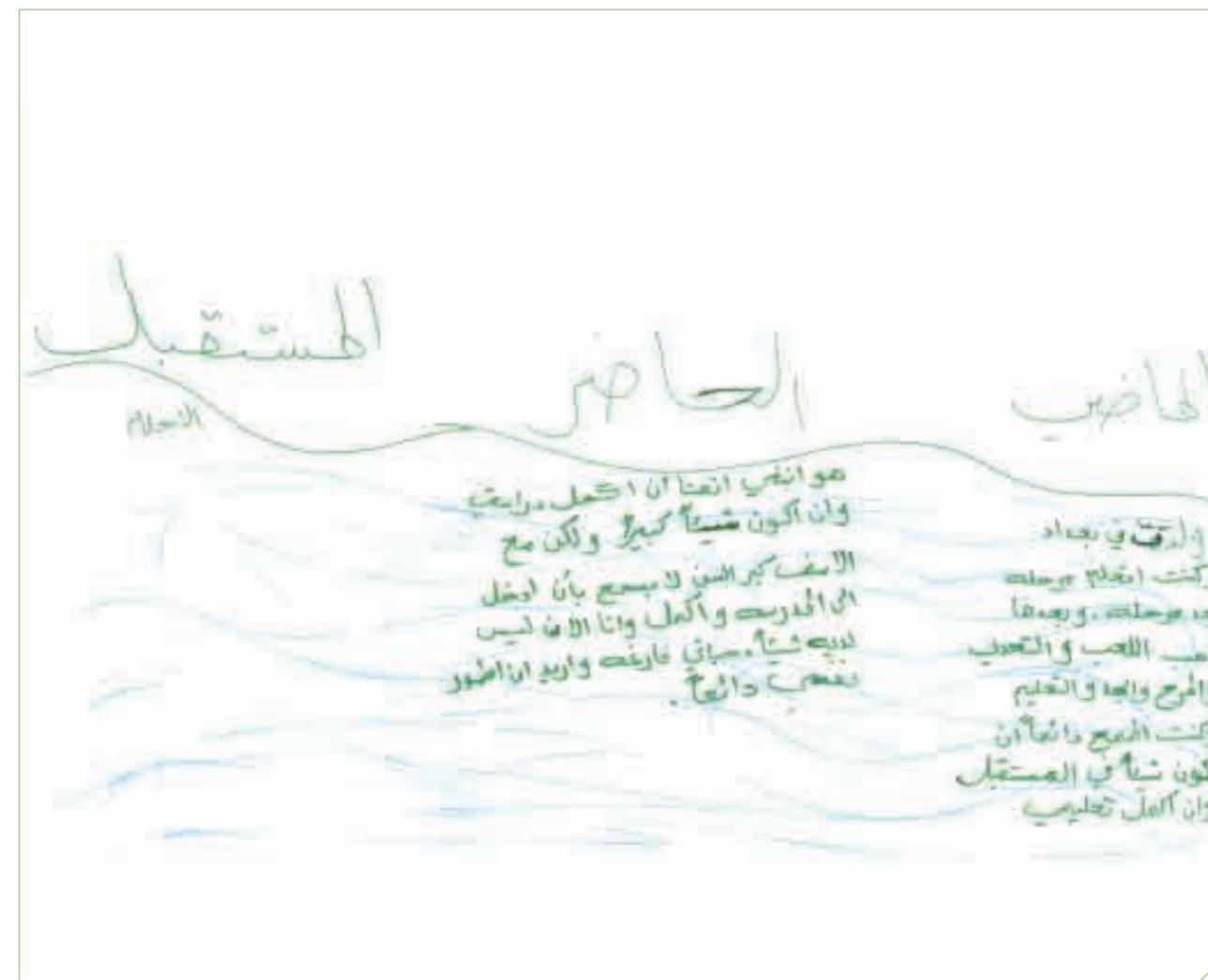
The majority of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project attend school in Amman. However, a minority of the Unity Circle participants - about 10% - do not participate in the formal school system. These are mainly older girls and boys, but a few younger children as well.

According to the older Iraqi girls, they are kept at home to help care for younger siblings or to do housework. This was especially true of families where the mother works outside the home - even when there is an unemployed father at home. Some Iraqi parents removed their children from Jordanian schools after they were beaten by a teacher or by a Jordanian student. While these parents were regretful about taking their children out of school, they were adamant that their safety and well-being were more important.

Some older girls and boys feel they are 'too old' to return to school, especially those who have missed several years of schooling. These youth feel that education is no longer a possibility for them, even non-formal schooling.²⁶

Some of the children not in the formal education system identified the NGO centres they visited as their 'school'.

Girl, age 15: **"We have a handicapped person in our house. I have to help move him. It is more important for me to be at home, and to look after my brother and not to leave my mother alone, than to go to school."**



Girl, age 18. Text on the picture above: "Past - I was born in Baghdad and I finished some classes. I like to play and to laugh, but I am serious about learning and I always hoped to be something in the future and to finish my school. Present - I wish to finish my school and become something big but unfortunately, my age does not allow me to go to school and finish my studies. Now I am doing nothing, my life is empty. I want to develop myself all the time. Future - Dreams."

26. In Jordan, there are three types of education available to children. 'Formal education' refers to education provided in schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitute a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education for children and young people - generally beginning between the ages of 5-7, and continuing in some cases beyond 20 years of age. 'Non-formal education' consists of structured learning programmes, which are outside the formal stream, but formally certified through certificates or other forms of formal recognition. 'Informal education' refers to any other set of structured learning experiences, which might or might not be formally certified through an award or other form of recognition.

CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO YOUTH

Iraqi youth (boys and girls aged 14-17) raised the following difficulties, in addition to those given above:

Inability to work and contribute to family income

Many youth spoke of their desire to work and contribute to family income. This was an especially important theme for both older girls and boys. Many Iraqi youth want vocational training opportunities.

Boy, age 16: **“My family are goldsmiths. My uncle was attacked and killed in the North of Iraq. So we came here from Baghdad. The government won’t allow my father or me to work here.”**

In class with younger students

Many Iraqi youth missed several years of schooling due to fighting in Iraq, which may have prevented them from reaching their schools, and then were unable to attend school when they first arrived in Jordan. When Iraqi children were accepted into Jordanian schools in September 2007, they were placed in classrooms according to the grades completed, not their age. As a result, many Iraqi boys and girls are much older than their classmates. This was expressed as being especially painful for Iraqi youth.

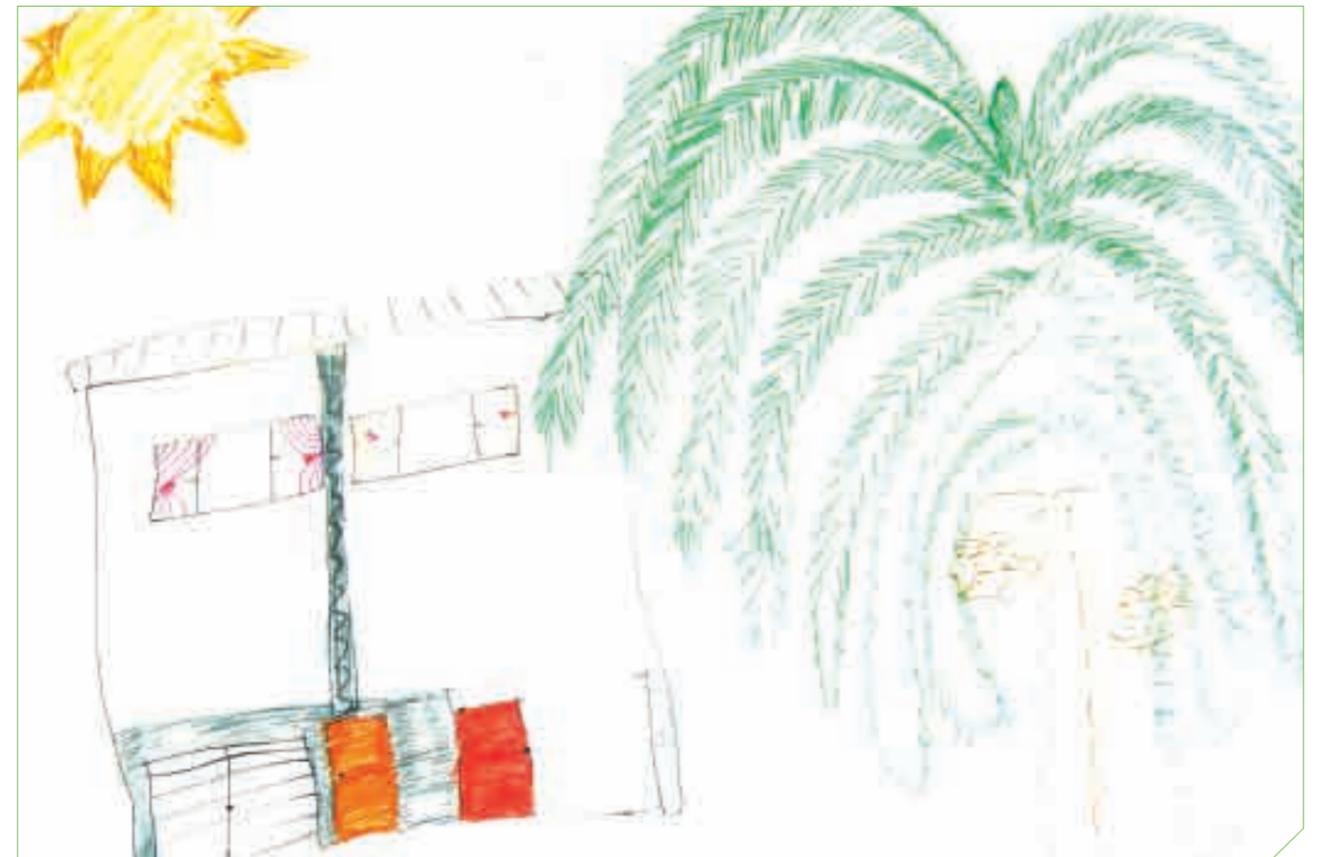
Boy, from group of children aged 11 - 17: **“We all have the same problem. The class does not fit our age group. The teachers make fun of us.”**

Lack of privacy

Iraqi youth - both girls and boys - miss the privacy their houses in Iraq afforded them. In Jordan, they no longer have their own room where they can go to think or spend time on their own. Iraqi youth expressed that this lack of privacy affected their ability to develop a healthy sense of personal identity and to be creative, a very important component of Iraqi culture.

Boy, age 15: **“My drawing is of a quiet place where I can sit and think. It is in Iraq. I remember it. Sometimes I like to express myself by words and not by drawing. I wrote this: Iraq has a lot of good people. We will get rid of occupiers. Peace will come back to Iraq. The palm trees in my picture are like Iraqis, tall and very generous.”**

Girl, age 15: **“My drawing of my house in Iraq has doors to different rooms. It makes me think of privacy. I used to have a place of my own. I remember my room and I miss it.”**



Girl, age 13. Picture of her house in Iraq.

PARENTS' VIEWS OF CHALLENGES FOR IRAQI CHILDREN:

Iraqi parents in the Unity Circle project expressed worry about many of the same challenges that the children did. Many of these parents are highly educated, articulate, and are analytical about their children's situation. Iraqi fathers and mothers spoke at length about these difficulties both in formal focus groups and in informal one-on-one conversations with the Unity Circle teams.²⁷ Parents also identified some specific challenges that they felt they faced in their role as parents.²⁸ These included not feeling empowered as parents, the inability to teach children important values and appropriate behaviour when in such a difficult context themselves, over-protectiveness, and concern about the consequences of lying to their children. Some parents also admitted to the use of violence within their homes.

The following challenges to their children's well-being were of particular importance to the parents of the Iraqi children participating in the project:

- Poor quality of schooling and school expenses
- Violence in Jordan
- Lack of information about kidnapped family members
- Psychological issues including their children's lack of self-confidence, anxiety and fear
- Insecurity in Jordan
- Poverty

Poor quality of schooling and school expenses

Parents expressed worry about what they consider to be the poor quality of education in Jordan - especially when compared to the education system in Iraq before the war.²⁹ Weak teaching skills, the lack of supplies, and poor communication between the school administration and parents were the primary concerns identified. Iraqi parents of participants in the project were also worried about the high costs of books and transportation to and from school - and were concerned that if they are unable to afford these school-related expenses, their children may have to drop out of school.

Iraqi Father: "My children are going backwards here. They are not learning much at school."

Iraqi Mother: "My son is not given homework. I am afraid that his brain will not grow."

Violence in Jordan

Parents expressed both worry and anger about the violence their children are experiencing in Jordan, at schools and on the streets of Amman. Some parents state they have resorted to keeping their children at home with them as much as possible because they feel unable to stop this violence.

Iraqi Mother: "My son has been beaten and bad mouthed on the streets. He comes home crying. He was held by a boy at the throat. It is dangerous for them [children] to be outside. My neighbour says if my children make trouble, they will call the police. I want my children under my wings."

Iraqi Father: "Jordanian children are different than Iraqi children. They are violent. After one month of friendship, they are still not friendly. Jordanians need to be less violent. Jordanian children are violent to each other, it is not just towards Iraqis. The Jordanian parents are not stopping their children from being violent. They think it is a natural thing. They do not take strong action against it."

Lack of information about kidnapped family members

Many Iraqi families in Amman remain unsure of the whereabouts of their kidnapped family members - even months or years after the event. In those cases where ransom was not demanded, an assumption may be made that the kidnapped person is dead. However, many Iraqi families are reluctant to accept this reality without any official confirmation.

Iraqi Mother: "My children see me crying and they say, 'Why? Because your father and brother died? Let's go to Iraq and try to find them. Maybe they are not dead.' It is hard to explain it [kidnapping] to them."

²⁷ Unfortunately, it was not possible to ensure equitable representation of women and men in the various parents groups. About 70% of the parents groups were fathers and 30% mothers. Parents were sometimes joined in these discussions by older Iraqi girls who care for their younger siblings.

²⁸ Identifying challenges to the well-being of Iraqi parents in Amman was beyond the scope of this project. However, during the Unity Circle project Iraqi parents identified specific challenges to them in their role as parents.

²⁹ Of note, the Iraqi education system was widely regarded as the best in the region before sanctions and the war. Many Iraqi teachers had studied abroad, and the quality of teaching was seen as exceptional.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

Parents also identified a range of psychological issues that concern them about their children's well-being - including a lack of self-confidence, anxiety and fear - which parents noted can be extreme. Parents are eager to provide emotional support to their children but are not always sure how. For example, one mother whose daughter found a hand hanging in a tree in their backyard is not sure how to talk to her daughter about this experience. Sometimes parents do not ask their children questions about difficult events because they do not know what questions to ask or they fear that they will make their child feel worse.

Lack of self-confidence in children

Being courageous and sociable are both important Iraqi values. Many Iraqi parents expressed concern that their children are losing these cultural values due to their experience of war in Iraq, and because of the challenges they are facing in Jordan.

Iraqi Father: **"Our boys are feeling inferior. Jordanians are making them feel that way."**

Iraqi Mother: **"Our children are becoming shy. They didn't use to be this way."**

Iraqi Mother: **"My son used to be friendly but now he is so afraid whenever someone approaches him."**

Anxiety and fear in children

Parents expressed an intense desire to see their children overcome the fear and anxiety they are experiencing as a result of the war in Iraq. They are especially concerned that these fears and anxieties are preventing them from studying at school or being able to carry out their domestic responsibilities independently. Parents desperately want to know how to help their children overcome their fear and anxiety.

Iraqi Mother: **"My daughter was about to be kidnapped in Iraq. We stopped it. But she is always afraid now. My girl is always nervous. She can't understand things at school."**

Iraqi Mother: **"My 6 year old boy, someone tried to kidnap him 2 years ago. He still remembers it. They asked him his name and when it was a Sunni name they tried to trick him into coming to a barber shop far away so they could kidnap him. My sister saw it and stopped it. This is why we came to Jordan. My son still remembers it."**

Iraqi Father: **"My son does not talk about what happened to him [when he was kidnapped]. He will talk to his friends at school but not to us...When I came back with him to the house [after giving ransom money], all of the relatives were waiting. My son had no control and was urinating...My son cannot sleep on his own. He is afraid of the dark. He won't leave the house at night. I encourage him to go buy something from the shops, but he won't. When I go outside with him, he often holds my arm. When he goes to the bathroom, he won't shut the door...I don't want to ask him what else happened unless he wants to bring it up...I would like to find another child who was kidnapped to talk to my son. I think it would help him."**

Iraqi Mother, whose son has a scar on the top of his head which he keeps picking at and re-opening until it bleeds: **"He is a problem in the house. He is trying to hurt himself. How can we help him?"**

Insecurity in Jordan

Iraqi parents feel strongly that their insecure situation in Jordan and their uncertainty about their future is having an adverse effect on their children. Iraqi parents feel that many Jordanians exacerbate this sense of insecurity by treating Iraqi children badly.

Iraqi Mother: **“Jordan is like a big jail for us.”**

Iraqi Mother: **“All of the differences between us are pointed out by them [Jordanians] all the time. We are reminded all the time that we are foreigners.”**

Poverty

Parents feel it is abnormal for their children to be worrying so much about money.

Iraqi Father: **“My 5-year old wanted a toy and we went to pay for it and she said ‘no, that is too much’ when she heard the price. This didn’t happen in Iraq. Children feel the financial problems here.”**

CHALLENGES TO IRAQI PARENTS IN THEIR ROLE AS PARENTS:

Identifying challenges to the well-being of Iraqi parents in Amman was beyond the scope of this project. However, during the Unity Circle project, Iraqi parents identified specific challenges to them in their role as parents:

- Not feeling empowered as parents
- Inability to teach children important values and appropriate behaviour
- Lying to protect children from difficult information
- Domestic violence

Not feeling empowered as parents

Iraqi parents expressed a lack of empowerment in their role as parents in Amman. They feel unable to orientate their children to their new life in Jordan, and expressed frustration that they do not have either the financial resources or the physical space to teach their children new skills and to promote their creativity.

Iraqi Father: **“We cannot build our son’s curiosity. We want a place at the school where we can help children explore. We want creative spaces to be with our children like workshops. In Iraq we had large homes and could do more at our homes with the children.”**

Iraqi Father: **“We can’t bear this anymore. We need someone to help us build our children’s learning. We have the time to invest in our children, but we have no money.”**

Iraqi Mother: **“How can we explain to our children what they have seen when it is a hand hanging in a tree, or a knife in a stomach? My daughter is now afraid that her dolls will be killed and she sleeps with them at night. She saw someone killed. How can I help her?”**

Lying to protect children from difficult information

Some parents resort to lying in an effort to protect their children from difficult information. They often do so in collusion with older siblings. Parents, especially mothers, may subsequently realize they need to tell their children the truth but feel unsure of how to do so. Mothers are especially worried about losing the trust of their children when they reveal they have lied to them.

Iraqi older sister: **“He (brother) keeps asking for his father. Before the war, his father went missing. We lied and said he was out of the country. Now he keeps asking where his father is.”**

Inability to teach children important values and appropriate behavior

The war at home and subsequent dislocation to Jordan has made it harder for Iraqi parents to ensure important cultural values are internalized by their children. Likewise, Iraqi parents in Amman do not have large networks of family and neighbours who reinforce these values with their children.

Iraqi fathers and mothers are especially distressed about their own fearfulness, and their inability to demonstrate courage to their children. These parents worry that their fear is causing them to be over-protective of their children, but at the same time, they feel their worry is justified given the many dangers their children face living in Amman.

Some Iraqi parents also feel unable to prevent their children from behaving "badly" - for example, using "bad" language. This fear of losing influence over one's children is especially strong for the parents of older children. Some parents report that older boys and girls are behaving inappropriately - for example, by refusing to do their chores, or by talking angrily to their parents or siblings.

Domestic violence

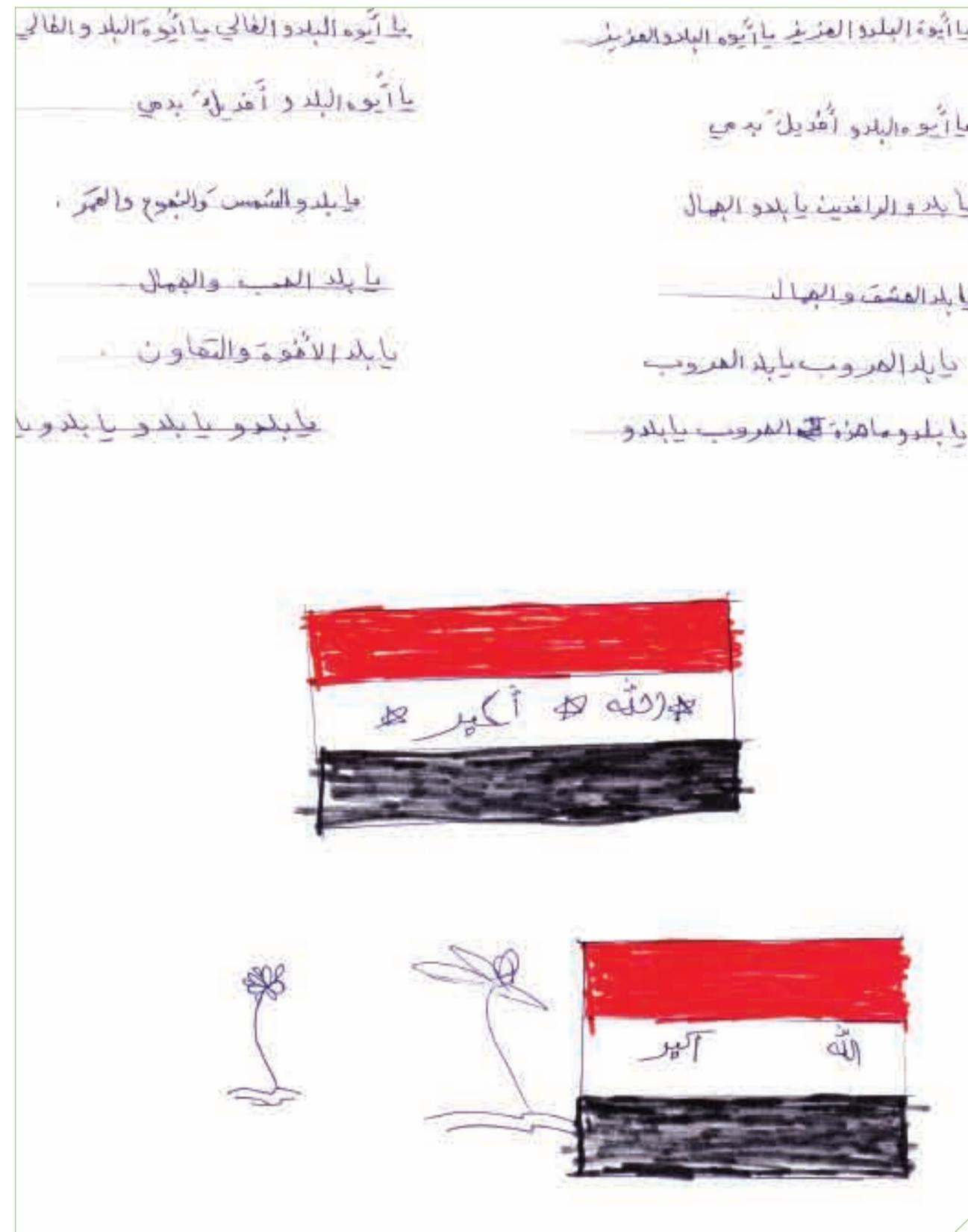
In some Iraqi families in the Unity Circle project, fathers and mothers admitted to using violence as a means of disciplining their children. One Iraqi father beats his son because he does not know how else to get him to listen, but he cares deeply about his child and wants advice on alternative methods of discipline. One Iraqi mother admitted to beating her children because of "too much stress and too much time spent together in cramped living conditions."

Iraqi Father: **"Children learn 90% of their values by practicing them, and only 10% by hearing what to do. If you lie one time in front of him, what you teach is destroyed. I can't say be brave or generous when I can't practice this here. I can't give people what they need. I can't love people here. I do not have an opportunity to be a role model here. But even in Iraq these circumstances are changing. In Iraq, if you hear shooting next door, you can't go to see if your neighbour is ok. You are afraid. Your children see this."**

Iraqi father: **"In the family, we do tell our children to be afraid. The source of this fear is the family."**

Iraqi Father: **"We the parents are responsible for the behavior of our children. We don't want our children to become bad people. Their personalities are weak here."**

Iraqi Father: **"I beat my son because he doesn't listen...I have been disabled since the war with Iran. I am having a very hard time here (in Amman). It is why I am not patient."**



Boy, age unknown. Text on the picture above: "Oh my beloved country , Oh my beautiful country, Oh my country of war, Oh my country of sun, clouds and life, Oh my country of love and beauty, Oh my country of brotherhood and cooperation, Oh my country, my country, my country."

4b. Project Findings: Coping with Challenges - Addressing Risks through Protective Mechanisms

Iraqi girls and boys are proactive in trying to solve their problems. They have developed a wide range of both positive and negative coping mechanisms to respond to the challenges they face. Positive coping mechanisms are best understood as 'strengths' or strategies that protect them from, or reduce, risks. Negative coping mechanisms are those strategies that may be helpful in the short-term, but have long-term negative consequences.

Sometimes Iraqi children and their parents disagree about whether coping mechanisms are positive or negative. For example, many Iraqi children in Amman are adopting a Jordanian accent in public spaces in order to escape detection as an Iraqi. Although the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project unanimously agree that this is a useful strategy, their parents are uniformly dismayed and fear it will result in their children being ashamed to be Iraqi. The following chart outlines the coping mechanisms identified by the children themselves.

Positive Coping Mechanisms or Strengths from Children's Perspective:

- Co-operation in the family
- Not spending money
- Working part-time or full-time
- Attending classes or volunteering at community centres
- Spending time with family
- Communicating with relatives outside of Jordan
- Friendship with Iraqis
- Remembering Iraq / Patriotism
- Optimism / Hope for the future
- Problem solving
- Promoting peace amongst Iraqis
- Encouraging family members and other Iraqi adults
- Avoiding conflict
- Integrating into Jordan
- Seeking substitute figure for dead parent
- Following parent's moral / religious teaching
- Courage
- Helping others less fortunate

Additional Positive Coping Mechanisms identified by a Minority of Participants

- Attending Mosque
- Participating in Iraqi community life

Negative Coping Strategies from Children's Perspective:

- Caution

Coping Strategies which may be deemed Positive by Children and Negative by their Parents:

- Lying
- Joining with other Iraqis for protection / Using force
- Refusing to talk about difficult experiences

Youth-identified Positive Coping Mechanisms

- Exercising
- Engaging in artistry
- Negotiating with parents for greater freedom
- Avoiding asking parents for help
- Seeking solitude
- Protecting the family and younger Iraqis
- Supporting Iraqis outside the country

Youth-identified Negative Coping Mechanisms

- Emotional withdrawal
- Pessimism about the future
- Fixation on past event/s

Children's Coping Mechanisms Encouraged by Parents

- Befriending Iraqi children
- Attending classes at centres
- Following traditional Iraqi cultural values

POSITIVE COPING MECHANISMS

Cooperation in the family

The majority of Iraqi girls and boys involved in the project believe it is important to cooperate with their parents, to abide by family rules and to share in the responsibilities at home. Girls of all ages typically help their mothers with cooking, housework, and caring for younger siblings, including helping with homework. Iraqi boys participate in all of these household activities, though they typically help less with caring for younger siblings. Boys also run more errands outside the home such as shopping for food at local stores.

Boy, age 12: **“We cannot leave everything on our mothers and fathers shoulders.”**

Boy, age 17: **“I listen and remind myself of the family rules. Respect is important and to do what parents say.”**

Girl, age 13, describing her artwork (right): **“I help in the kitchen and I look after my sisters.”**



Girl, age 13.

Girl, age 17: **“If we do not spend too much money, then we can help our family and others. I try not to ask my mother for money. I know she needs it for basic things and she doesn't have much.”**

Working part-time or full-time

None of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project work full-time.³⁰ However, many of these children knew of other Iraqi children who do work full-time. In the experience of the Unity Circle participants, Iraqi children who abruptly leave school and enter full-time work have usually suffered a terrible loss, such as the death of a parent or the end of remittances from relatives in Iraq or elsewhere.

Approximately 20% of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project have worked part-time at some point during their time in Amman. Both girls and boys tend to work after school hours. Most of the boys work as 'delivery boys' for pharmacies or other small shops, or sell vegetables at the market - but only for short periods of time during busy seasons. Girls typically work at stores cleaning, or doing sewing or toy making at home. All of the Iraqi girls and boys working part-time long for better paid, steadier employment. Girls want more formal employment outside of the home. Many of the children who have never worked before want to work in order to contribute to family income.

Boy, age 16: **“I bring money to the house. I work different jobs. Now I am working in an aluminum factory. I go everyday after school. Since last year I do this. My father helped me get this job. I earn about 60 JD a month. I am too tired to do my homework, but thank God, I do ok at school. I don't miss school. I am in the 9th grade.”**

Girl, age 14: **“I know of a boy who is 16 and he works in a place where they fix stoves. He used to go to school, but he quit school to help his family. His father died, and he has to help his mother and aunt.”**

30. Iraqis are not permitted to work legally in Jordan.

Attending classes or volunteering at community centres

Some of the Iraqi parents allow their children to take courses offered by non-governmental organizations at community centres. For many Iraqi youth, taking these courses is not just about learning a new skill, but is also a unique opportunity to meet with other Iraqi youth. Some of the older boys and girls volunteer at a Centre teaching younger children drawing or other skills.

Boy, age 16: **“I help the little children learn drawing at the Centre.”**

Spending time with family

Spending time with their families - the people who are most important to them - is a fundamental coping strategy for many of the Iraqi girls and boys. One group of Iraqi children ages 11-14 listed the following people in order of their importance: mother and father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends. For the older Iraqi children, siblings - especially those close in age - are identified as being more important to them than their parents.

Iraqi children especially enjoy playing games with their parents. They also enjoy the rare opportunity to accompany their mothers and fathers to religious services or to shopping malls or entertainment centres.

Communicating with relatives outside of Jordan

Although Iraqi children generally have limited family networks in Jordan, many talk to their families via the internet or the phone. It is very important for children to speak with their relatives in Iraq to ensure their safety, but children also want to talk to family members in Syria or abroad to maintain their connection to them.

Girl, from group of girls aged 11-14: **“On Fridays the whole family does drawings together. My father brings puzzles for us.”**

Girl, from group of girls aged 11-14: **“My family sometimes goes to see a movie and then makes dinner together.”**

Boy, age 11: **“My mother and my aunt are the most important people in my life. I call both of them ‘mother’. I talk to my aunt in Syria sometimes, and she comes to visit too.”**

Friendship with Iraqis

Most of the Iraqi children involved in the project have few opportunities to be with Iraqi peers, other than at school. However, those Iraqi girls and boys lucky enough to see their friends outside of school count them as very important, and actively rely on them for help. For example, they may ask their friends to advocate on their behalf with their parents.

Boy, age 8, describing his drawing of a church on a map of important places in his life: **“I drew a church because I love my friend. He is a Christian. He is here in Jordan. He is Iraqi.”**

Boy, age 14: **“You can use your friend to help convince your family. And you can do this for your friend too. I bring my friend over to my house and he can convince my father [to allow me to do things].”**

Girl, age 14: **“I had a friend with a problem. Her family won’t let her leave the house alone. She is a girl. I went to her house and I told the parents ‘please let her go out with me’. They let her go out.”**

Remembering Iraq / Patriotism

Taking time to remember Iraq and to express patriotic feelings for their country is an important coping skill for Iraqi girls and boys. Writing poetry about Iraq or singing well known songs enables children to be proud of who they are as Iraqis, and to dream about going home one day. Cultural activities were an important component of the Unity Circle project.



Boy, age 15.

Girl, age 14: **“If I were asked, and asked, and asked who I want to be with, and who lives in my heart, I would say Iraq. It is the light of my heart and my life. It is full of rivers and of light.”**

Girl, age 13: **“Iraq is the most beautiful. You are crying with pain but you will laugh someday. I spent with you my most beautiful days and I will come back.”**

Song by a group of girls and boys age 6 - 15: **“I am thinking of Iraq. It is not free. I am wounded. I play with my hand held over my wound.”**



Boy, age 15.

Optimism / Hope for the future

For some Iraqi children, an optimistic outlook is an important coping strategy. The majority of the younger Iraqi children (below the age of 14) are hopeful about their future. An overwhelming majority of them believe that the war in Iraq will end, and they will return to a peaceful country where they will live with their reunited families. Many of these children want to help rebuild Iraq by becoming teachers, engineers and architects. Less than 5% of the Unity Circle participants want to move to another country or to stay in Jordan. However, they are generally optimistic that Jordanians will begin to treat them better. Of the younger children involved in the Unity Circle project, only one ten-year old boy felt the future was hopeless and that there would always be war in Iraq. This is in contrast with Iraqi youth, of whom less than 50% are hopeful about their future.

Boy, age 15, describing his artwork (above): **“I always try to imagine that the blue flower is home. I imagine the arrows are all of us in Jordan and we are wanting to come back to Iraq. Iraq is attracting its people back.”**

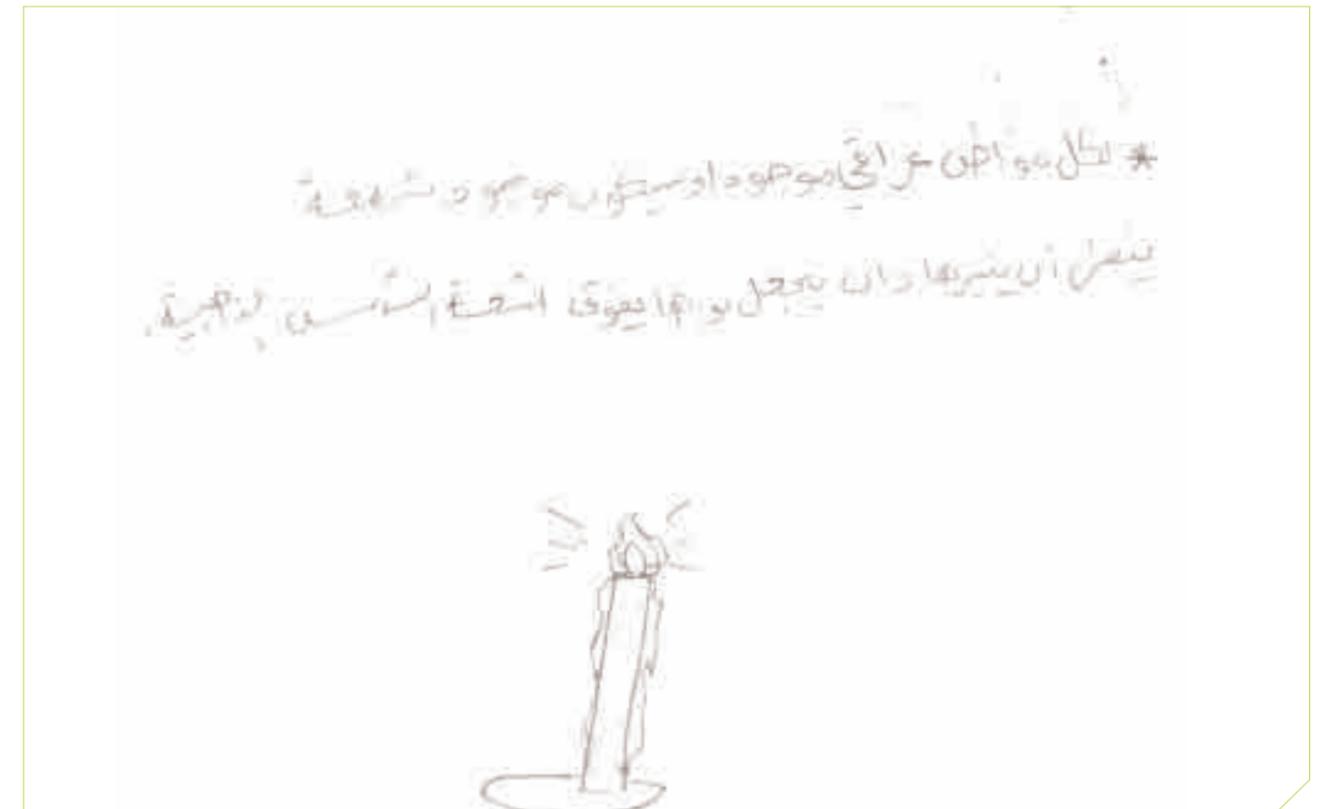
Girl, age approximately 12: **“Suffering is a part of life. We suffer in Amman. We will go back one day and the suffering will end.”**

Boy, age 15, describing his artwork (right): **“I want to live in Iraq. In Baghdad. If it is dangerous or not dangerous. If I die there, I die with honour. This is a table with chemicals. I want to do chemistry. I want to live in a house beside the river. I want to build my future in Iraq”**



Boy, age 15.

Girl, age 17: **“I want Jordanians to treat Iraqis in a better way and I want to stay here. I want to be able to go around Jordan. I want to visit Iraq. It is home.”**



Girl, age 16. Text on picture above: **“Each Iraqi citizen who is here or who will be here [in Jordan], there is a candle he should light. He should make its light brighter than the golden sun.”**

Problem solving

The ability to identify problems and to actively solve them is an incredibly important skill. It is a skill very much evident amongst the Iraqi children of all ages. Older Iraqi girls are especially adept at expressing their views on difficult matters, and helping their families solve problems. Some of the older Iraqi girls even intervene to help other Iraqi families with their problems.

Boy, age 14: **“There are two kinds of problems. Those you can solve on your own, and the other problems that you need others to help you with. You should also recognize problems before they become big problems.”**

Girl, age 15: **“I participate in thinking. We think together and we come up with solutions. My mother and father make the decision, but I have to express to them how I think, so they know. Sometimes I talk to other families and help them solve their problems.”**

Boy, age 17: **“I try to deal with my problems but I have to keep solving them everyday. We tried to make a snowman the other day and the boys came and wrecked it before it was done. I said, ‘Why did you do it when you don’t know me?’ The Jordanians said, ‘I don’t like you.’”**

Girl, age 15: **“There are a lot of things I like to do in life. I like challenges and I like to deal with difficult situations.”**

Promoting peace amongst Iraqis

Iraqi children, especially older children, feel it is important that they personally engage in political debate about Iraq. They believe that if they talk to other Iraqis and promote peace they may help solve the problems of Iraq.

Girl, age 14: **“We should promote the idea that we are Iraqis first, then Shiites. If we all think this way, we may find common ground between us.”**

Boy, from group of children aged 6 - 15: **“I hope every stranger will be able to go back home in good health and be able to love each other. I hope I will see Iraq without anyone saying I am Sunni, Shiite or Zadi. I want to go back to Iraq. I don’t want to see anymore war.”**

Encouraging family members and other Iraqi adults

All Iraqi children consider ‘cheering up’ their parents a core responsibility. Children as young as six may use physical affection, whereas older children resort to reasoning with their parents or invoking faith in God. The ability to make their parents feel better is considered an invaluable skill by the Iraqi children in Amman.

Girl, age 17: **“We have a responsibility to make our family feel better. We tell our parents, don’t worry, everything will be fine. We remind them that God is going to help us and tell them to stop worrying about us [children]. Every once in a while, an Iraqi visits us at home and they start to cry. We try to cheer them up.”**

Boy, age 6: **“If I see my mother crying then I go and hug her.”**

Avoiding conflict

Iraqi children often avoid conflict with Jordanians by staying away from them physically, or by refusing to discuss contentious issues with them. For example, Shiite children may respond to questioning about their religion by simply saying they are ‘Muslims,’ or by refusing to talk about religion altogether.

Boy, age 16: **“We don’t deal with Jordanians. We try to avoid them. We respect them, but they don’t respect us, so we stay away.”**

Boy, age 17: **“I discussed being beaten up with my Iraqi friends and we decided not to make a confrontation. We don’t want a problem with the police.”**

Girl, age 15: **“People here insist to know whether you are Shiite or Sunni. I try to avoid this and say I am a Muslim.”**

Integrating into Jordan

Some Iraqi children believe they will only be secure in Amman when they have integrated fully into Jordanian life, including making Jordanian friends. The majority of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project are unsuccessful in their integration efforts, but they still envision a day when they will be a part of Jordanian life. Older Iraqi boys appear to have had the greatest success at integration through mixed Jordanian and Iraqi soccer games. Not surprisingly, those Iraqi children who have been in Jordan the longest also have greater success at making Jordanian friends than those who arrived more recently.



Two boys, ages 15 and 16.

Boy, age 17: **“We want to be closer to Jordanians [youth] and ask them questions and be friends. We are living here and sooner or later we have to understand each other. Some of the Jordanians [youth] are trying to understand us.”**

Girl, age 16: **“I have been at the same school for 7 years. If you get used to them [Jordanians], they become your friends. We do not go to their houses but we meet at school. We help each other with homework and sometimes we go to the garden near our house.”**

2 boys, ages 15 and 16, describing their artwork (left): **“This soccer field is in our area. It is not green [like in the picture]. We imagine it will be green one day. This is the only place we mix with Palestinians and Jordanians. We mix up our teams. I keep a Palestinian friend always in my team. Every 2 or 3 days we go after school to play soccer. We made this playground together with Palestinians and Jordanians because we did not want to play in the street.”**

Seeking substitute figure for dead parent

One of the positive strategies for coping with the death of a parent is to adopt another Iraqi adult as a ‘substitute’. One girl who lost her father, grandfather and uncle through kidnappings liked to spend extra time with the adult Iraqi member of one of the Unity circle teams. This facilitator happily gave this girl extra attention by including her in both set up and clean up after the sessions, and by spending extra time talking to her at the centre outside of the group sessions. Although this ‘substitution strategy’ was openly discussed by participants of the Unity Circle project, it is not clear how widespread this practice is outside of the supportive context of the project. Traditionally, the uncle or grandfather would assume this substitute role of a father, but often there are no male relatives living in Amman or they too are dead or missing.

Following parent’s moral / religious teachings

For many Iraqi children, adherence to the teachings of their parents and their religion is an important way to respond to problems such as bullying. Muslim, Christian and Sabean children all talked about how their religion taught them to return hatred with love. Although this approach did not always result in fewer problems, it gave children strength to know they were responding to their difficulties in a manner their parents would be proud of and which were consistent with their religious beliefs.

Boy, age 12: **“Every time they ask me what I am, I say Sabean. They beat me. I kept treating them well. After some time, they start to be nice to us. My father said the best way to treat people who hate you, is to love them.”**

Boy, age 17: **“In the family there are rules known by each one. The family is like an institution with two leaders - mother and father. Without them it will sink. They [parents] manage the family, the resources. The mother and father are like farmers trying to make trees out of good seeds. The family is the first school where young people learn what is wrong and right. The family teaches us how to deal with others, and they shape you the way they like to. If the family is not strong, the member will be a bad member in school and society. Family is the most important in society. Without learning in the family, you can’t learn to be good at school. The family is a small state. It is a democracy.”**

Boy, age 12: **“If you have lost a parent, you can substitute it for another relative, a friend, or someone at the centre. We should help people to join our group and provide a family. To open our hearts to him and be a substitute brother or sister.”**

Boy, age 14: **“When I am treated badly, I don’t treat him (Jordanian boy) the same way. I respect him and I love him. I give him an example and show him that Iraqis are better. My father tells me this.”**

Courage

Courage is an incredibly important value in Iraqi culture, and many Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project consider it a useful coping strategy when faced with problems. Both Iraqi girls and boys talked about experiences in Amman that require them to be courageous, such as standing up to Jordanian neighbours who bully them. Courage is just one example of the many cultural values that are important to Iraqi children and their parents.

Helping others less fortunate

For some Iraqi children in Amman helping others less fortunate is an important coping strategy - it reminds Iraqi children that there are others worse off than they are. Even poor Iraqi children help other Iraqi families by volunteering for physical chores such as carrying groceries or sweeping. One Iraqi family in the Unity Circle project was trying to help a homeless Jordanian family access support from a local NGO.

Chart 3: A list of 'the most important values taught by our parents'

Boys, aged 11 - 14

- Showing respect to relatives and neighbours
- Helping parents
- Getting along with siblings, cousins
- Behaving well
- Telling the truth

Girl, age 15: **"We should have the courage to do whatever we can when someone needs it. We should point out when something is wrong. It is up to us."**

Girl, age 16: **"Iraq, Iraq, I hope my absence from you will not be forever. And I hope that coming back is not impossible. I look at this period of time as the adventure of an explorer."**

Boy, age 12: **"If someone is sick, we go to visit them so that time is more comfortable. If they don't have medicine and we have it, then we give it to them."**

Girl, from group of children aged 11 - 17: **"One time, one of our neighbours house caught fire. We gave them clothes and furniture."**

Girls and boys, aged 12 - 17

- Respect the neighbours by not making noise
- Respect older people and younger people
- Try to stop fights at home between brothers and sisters
- Respect the laws and protect things in the street for everybody

ADDITIONAL POSITIVE COPING MECHANISMS IDENTIFIED BY A MINORITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Attending mosque

For the minority of Iraqi Muslim boys in Amman who are able to do so, going to the mosque regularly is a helpful coping strategy. These boys like learning from the Koran, being with their male relatives, and having the chance to remember their lives in Iraq.

Boy, age 14: **"I go with my father and my friend Abdullah to the mosque. I like the mosque here because they teach me about the Koran."**

Boy, from group of children aged 11-17: **"Every time I go to the mosque, I remember Iraq."**

Participating in Iraqi community life

Although Iraqi children in Amman rarely have the opportunity to participate in condolence visits or weddings, they love being a part of these events when they do occur. These community activities give their life in Amman a sense of normalcy.

From list prepared by group of boys aged 11 - 14: **"To participate in our neighbours lives, if they are happy or sad, is important. If my neighbour died we give condolences and if somebody gets married we help with the celebrations."**

NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES FROM CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE

Caution

Caution is a behaviour employed by a minority of the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project. Caution is considered by Iraqi children to be undesirable given the importance of courage in their culture, but for some Iraqi children it is a necessary survival strategy given their current situation in Jordan.

Girl, age 13: **“We shouldn’t take adventures in life. We have to be careful because we are living in a strange place.”**

COPING STRATEGIES WHICH MAY BE DEEMED NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE

Sometimes Iraqi children respond to problems in ways which adults would deem negative but children do not. The following are some examples.

Lying

Many Iraqi children in Amman try to minimize their problems by lying about their identity. For example, Iraqi children may deny they are Iraqi to fellow students or strangers on the street. Shiite boys who go to the mosques may pray in a Sunni manner rather than as Shiites. Adopting a Jordanian accent in public to avoid detection as an Iraqi is a very common coping strategy by Iraqi children. While Iraqi children consider lying an effective strategy to avoid conflict with Jordanians, Iraqi parents are fearful that it will result in their children being ashamed to be Iraqi.

Girl, age 13: **“We are forced to speak with a Jordanian accent, so they don’t know that we are Iraqi. Then they can’t mistreat us. Then they won’t ask, ‘are you Iraqi?’”**

Girl, age 15: **“I say I am not a religious person. I am a Shiite, but sometimes I am forced to say I am a Sunni.”**

Joining with other Iraqis for protection / Using force

For many Iraqi children, forming a protective group with other Iraqis is the most effective strategy for coping with physical abuse. Iraqi boys or girls separately form groups to fend off attacks from Jordanian children and to fight back physically when necessary. Iraqi boys sometimes walk to school together for protection. Even though Iraqi girls are often escorted to school by male relatives or by their mothers, they may still form groups for protection within the school grounds. Although the creation of ‘protective groups’ is considered a positive coping mechanism by both Iraqi children and their parents, the use of force is more controversial with some Iraqi parents who do not want their children involved in fighting.

Boy, age 12: **“Sometimes you can solve problems with force. There is a lot of fighting at our school. If there is a fight, I always take sides with Iraqis [against Jordanians].”**

Girl, age 15: **“One of my friends at school, the kids abuse her because she is weak physically. They pull her hair and beat her up. We helped her without telling the teachers.”**

Refusing to talk about difficult experiences

Several Iraqi children raised painful experiences but then decided not to talk about them further. When children maintain silence about a difficult experience, it may be because the memory is too painful to revisit. For other children, telling a supportive adult about a difficult event without divulging details is an important step in the healing process. Some Iraqi parents feel their children’s silence about difficult events is preventing them from healing.

Boy, age 11, describing his artwork of a mosque with a boy running away from it (not shown): **“The boy is running because he is very afraid. I don’t talk about what happened.”**

YOUTH COPING MECHANISMS

Older Iraqi girls and boys, aged 14-17, share all of the above coping strategies adopted by younger children. However, they also identified additional coping strategies that they utilize.

POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES IDENTIFIED BY YOUTH:

Exercising

Some of the older Iraqi boys use exercise to manage their stress. Usually they walk near their homes, as only a very small number of the older boys have the financial resources to visit the gym. Exercise was not mentioned by any of the female youth.

Boy, age 15: **“My favorite thing is to go to the club for weight lifting, and sometimes we swim there.”**

Engaging in artistry

All of the participants in the Unity Circle project enjoy the opportunity to express themselves creatively. However, Iraqi youth are more proactive about being creative on their own. Older girls and boys write poetry or journals, draw or paint in order to express their feelings.

Girl, age 17: **“Sometimes I feel things and I like to put it on paper - writing or drawing. I can express myself by singing or writing.”**

Negotiating with parents for greater freedom

Iraqi youth are skillful at lobbying their parents to give them greater freedoms. Both girls and boys can be very persistent at convincing their parents to take them out, or to allow them to go out with their friends.

Girl, age 15: **“When I want to go out, I keep talking to my father until he takes me out. I don’t go with friends, just with family.”**

Avoiding asking parents for help

As is typical of adolescents in many countries, many Iraqi youth avoid asking their parents for help. They may feel better equipped to deal with their problems on their own, or they may be cynical about their parents' ability to help.

Boy, age 17: **“Our parents do not give us solutions. They tell us to be patient and God will help you. It is no use to talk to them.”**

Seeking solitude

Both older girls and boys speak of solitude as an effective coping mechanism when needing a break from one's problems. While boys are more able to go outside, girls must try and find private space in their frequently crowded apartments. Older girls often listen to music to shut out the sound of their siblings and parents.

Boy, age 17: **“I like to go to a quiet place and listen to music on my phone. In the daytime, it is busy and noisy but at night I can go out and walk. The cold weather means I am more by myself.”**

Protecting younger Iraqis and the family

Older Iraqi children feel a special responsibility to protect their families and younger Iraqis from harm in Jordan. This responsibility is felt not just by boys, but by older Iraqi girls as well. A common strategy is for older girls and boys to pick younger children up on the way to school or occasionally to escort them to an apartment for a visit.

Boy, age 15: **“I have to go and pick up younger friends to accompany them back to my house.”**

Boy, age 14: **“Once I was walking in the street in Baghdad and they started shooting at us. We were safe, thank God. I need to protect my mother, father and brother here in Jordan.”**

NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES IDENTIFIED BY YOUTH:

Older Iraqi girls and boys identified the following negative ways of responding to problems.

Emotional withdrawal

Some of the older Iraqi girls and boys living in Amman reported having become emotionally withdrawn – and they believe this is negative. Many of the youth felt unable to trust others with their feelings, even their families and peers. This problem is acute for older girls who are unable to spend time with other girls their age and develop friendships.

Boy, age 15: **“I go to school in the morning but I don’t tell my secrets to anyone. I don’t know a lot about the people here. I don’t talk at home. I keep my feelings to myself.”**

Girl, age 15: **“I am quiet and I don’t share with too many people. I don’t want to waste my time talking. I don’t trust people with my secrets.”**

Pessimism about the future

Iraqi youth are much more pessimistic about their future than younger Iraqi children. Older boys and girls often feel helpless to make changes in their lives. They believe it is unlikely they will have the opportunity to study at a university and become a professional. Some of the older girls and boys believe their future would have been better if they stayed in Iraq. The Iraqi youth believe their pessimism is not helping them solve their problems.

Girl, age 16: **“In the future I would like to be a very good singer. In Iraq, I would be good already.”**

Fixation on past event/s

Some Iraqi youth fixate on a past event in an unhelpful way. For example, some Iraqi youth regret leaving Iraq and coming to Jordan. They wish they could go back in time and prevent their families from leaving and so prevent their current hardship. The youth acknowledged that focusing on a past event does not allow them to move forward and embrace new opportunities.

Boy, age 15: **“In my picture I am going back to Iraq. I am in the middle of the road coming from Iraq to Jordan and I change my mind and go back. I am wishing that I did not come here.”**

CHILDREN'S COPING MECHANISMS ENCOURAGED BY PARENTS:

Iraqi parents have their own ways of helping their children overcome challenges. The following are some of the strategies they encourage their children to use:

Befriending Iraqi children

Many Iraqi parents believe it is important that their children ‘stick together’ with other Iraqi children. Although Iraqi parents are partly motivated out of fear of Jordanians, they also want to reinforce traditional Iraqi values.

Iraqi Mother: **“Most important is for our children to stick together with other Iraqi children. Jordanian children are not well behaved and we do not want our children to learn bad things.”**

Attending classes at centres

Many Iraqi parents believe that outside of the home, the safest place for their children to be is at an NGO centre. Some Iraqi parents also wrongly believe that registering with an NGO will protect them from deportation by the Jordanian authorities.

Iraqi Mother: **“I am comfortable with my children at the centre. I know where they are. I can check on them.”**

Following traditional Iraqi values

For Iraqi parents in Amman, there are still opportunities to reinforce important values.

Iraqi Father: **“There are some values I am very careful to teach my children. When my son has difficulty at school, I say you must go back. Facing difficulties is one of these values.”**

The following values were identified by Iraqi parents as being especially important to teach their children:

- SARAHAAH: Being emotionally transparent and showing one’s emotions; ‘being honest with what is in your heart’
- SHAHAMAH: Being brave; forgetting your own well-being as you help others
- FAZAA: Belonging to a community which gives you support in times of need
- Patriotism for Iraq
- Respect for artistry, including an appreciation of drawing, poetry, and painting
- Religious commitment and an understanding of ‘good ethics’
- An ability to socialize and to participate in important cultural ceremonies
- Generosity with others, including hospitality
- Sharing responsibilities within the family
- Honesty
- Honour
- Respect for education

4c. Project Findings: Action Plans and Benefits of Unity Circle Project

ACTION PLANS

In the last stage of the Unity Circle project each group of children strategically chose one challenge they wanted to address. After studying their list of coping mechanisms and drawing up a list of personal and collective strengths they could draw from, the children developed their own action plans with support from the adults.

Implementation of action plans began in May 2008. One group of girls chose boredom at home as their greatest challenge and one where they felt they could make a difference. They meet regularly to learn new hobbies together and also practice them at home. To respond to the lack of recreational opportunities, a group of boys set up a regular time for playing soccer together with adult supervision in a safe space controlled by an NGO. Another group of Iraqi boys and girls decided the lack of information about their situation in Jordan is an important challenge and they are planning a conference with Iraqi and Jordanian children to advocate together for greater attention to their concerns. Several of the youth groups who wanted to spend more time with each other developing friendships are meeting for youth tele-matches, which include games, sport and entertainment. All of these groups have organizational committees run by children, but supported by adults. Some of these groups of children began campaigns to reach out to other Iraqi children in their schools and neighbourhoods. Many of these groups plan for these activities to be ongoing, and to also enjoy regular outings together including trips to gardens and museums, often with their siblings and parents.

ACTION PLAN OUTLINE FOR GROUP OF GIRLS AND BOYS AGED 11-17

Action Plan Name	Goal
<p>Action Plan Goal/Objective</p> <p>Success How will you know when you have achieved your goal?</p> <p>Challenges to be addressed</p> <p>Strengths to build on</p>	<p>To have a Jordanian and Iraqi Sports Day</p> <p>If 50 youth - Iraqi and Jordanian - from both sexes participate in the activities, and some of them bring their parents too</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of commitment from the group Want to have more people involved Some members of the group are sick Lack of materials and equipment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-confidence Co-operation in the group Optimism Love for each other and the project Different skills among members in the group The will to help society
<p>Involve other Iraqi and Jordanian children</p> <p>Work Plan Responsibilities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Through the Iraqi families that we know Through our neighbours and friends at school Through NGO workers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Invite 50 people Give out invitation cards Make a plan for continuing after Appoint referees for games Have enough training equipment Appoint a reception committee Appoint a cleaning committee Buy some decoration materials (balloons, etc) Make sure we bring trash bags

BENEFITS OF THE UNITY CIRCLE PROJECT FOR THE CHILDREN INVOLVED

Although there was not a formal monitoring and evaluation component in the Unity Circle project, informal assessments by the project team leader and members indicate that there were direct benefits for the children involved.³¹ From the perspective of the project leaders, one of the significant benefits shared by the Iraqi children in the Unity Circle project was the simple act of adults listening to them in a safe, non-judgmental manner. The participatory nature of the 'Triple A' process empowered children to look deeply at their lives and the challenges they face, and to be encouraged by strengths and resources around them. This deep exploration of their lives in a trusted environment had a visibly positive impact on the emotional well-being of many of the participants. Iraqi children also benefited from the process of designing and implementing an action plan to meet a specific need. Parents were empowered through having ongoing, meaningful dialogue with facilitators and one another, as well as opportunities to contribute to the development of actions for the well-being of their children.

Team members attest that many girls and boys appeared to be happier and more confident at the end of the project. One boy who had been self-harming proudly announced he was no longer doing so. Many children spoke of how glad they were to be able to express their feelings with others and that they felt cared for and listened to. The singing of Iraqi songs and reciting Iraqi poetry were much loved activities. The development of new friendships and the support of Iraqi and Jordanian adults were also significant to children of all ages. The majority of the children asked for the groups to continue meeting – girls were especially eager to do so.

Some of the mothers and fathers of participants also expressed gratitude to the Unity Circle project team members.

Boy, age 16: **“I was able to express my opinion courageously and frankly.”**

Iraqi mother: **“My children are very happy to be here. It is very important. The children are under a lot of pressure and have not been social, but this activity has made them stronger. Our children are now talking and expressing themselves and I thank God. Psychologically they are getting better. We want our children to be able to express themselves and we thank Relief for that... I talk to my children now as if they are grown-up. They have more confidence. They are not afraid anymore...They have courage which is very important. I thank God.”**

5a. Recommendations: General Principles for Programming with Iraqi Children in Jordan

The following are general principles recommended for all agencies or entities with programming aimed at benefiting Iraqi children in Jordan. While ideally, such principles would be adhered to at the program or project design stage, the integration of these principles at any time into existing programming can strengthen and enhance program effectiveness.

1. Listen and talk to Iraqi children

Information about Iraqi children is best learned through respectfully listening to and talking with children in a safe and supportive environment. The views of adults, especially parents, can add to our understanding of Iraqi children, but they are no substitute for talking directly to children. By listening to and talking with Iraqi children we will learn more about their lived experiences - the challenges they face, and the many strengths they bring in dealing with these challenges. Incorporating children's experiences and perspectives into programming is a key way in which a project or program can adhere fully to the commitments of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC).

2. Build on children's strengths

Support programming for Iraqi children that builds on their positive coping mechanisms or strengths. Be creative about how to incorporate children's strengths into programming - whether enhancing children's problem solving skills or incorporating Iraqi cultural activities. Involve children in this process on a voluntary basis, using appropriate and safe tools and approaches.

3. Involve Iraqi parents more

Iraqi mothers and fathers are both analytical about their children's difficult situation, and motivated to help. More importantly, they are willing to volunteer both their time and their skills to help Iraqi children. Programming for Iraqi children can better utilize this resource by more actively involving Iraqi parents. Such involvement can also address some of the challenges Iraqi children - as well as parents and families - are facing in Amman, in terms of building a spirit of community and strengthening family bonds.

31. The adult facilitators of the ongoing groups will informally monitor Iraqi children's well-being in the longer term.

5b. Recommendations: Sector - Specific Recommendations

EDUCATION SECTOR

The Unity Circle project recommends that a critical component of any efforts aimed at the education sector must be focused on improving Iraqi children's experience within the school system. It is also critical that the strong partnership that currently exists between the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNHCR and NGOs in Jordan continues. The following interventions are recommended as priority areas, and combined, constitute a multi-pronged approach that addresses the key challenges facing Iraqi children:

1. Address Violence

- Advocate for and support Iraqi volunteers to observe school grounds during class breaks and to act as on-site support for Iraqi children.
- Recognize that violence in the schools against Iraqi children is part of a larger systematic problem of violence in the schools, which also affects Jordanian children. Work with the teachers, principals and other members of the school administration to help them more effectively implement principles of non-violence and the CRC.
- Co-ordinate the response of the Ministry of Education, NGOs and other local initiatives to appropriately address violence in schools.

2. Address Discrimination

- Reinforce teachers and other members of the school administration's understanding of the importance of respecting cultural and religious diversity.
- Work to improve the relationship between Iraqi parents and school administration through structured meetings, the formation of parent/teacher committees, or cultural sharing activities.

- Support Iraqi student-led cultural activities at schools as a means of sharing Iraqi values and culture with Jordanian students and teachers.
- Create opportunities to improve the relationships between Iraqi and Jordanian students.

3. Prevent Drop-Out and Support Enrolment

- Develop youth mentorship programs where Iraqi youth help younger children with their homework or teach them new skills.
- Provide special support for Iraqi children who have fallen behind in grades due to lack of access to schooling.
- Support Iraqi children and youth who do not attend school to access the formal education system or non-formal education opportunities.
- Explore more holistic education responses.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SECTOR

It is recommended that all psycho-social programming with Iraqi children adopt the following six points as guiding principles:

- Recognize that the effects of trauma from armed conflict are long lasting in nature, and develop long-term program interventions.
- Promote normalcy as a crucial means of encouraging children's healing and restoring their psycho-social well-being.
- Develop strength based approaches to programming to ensure children's best interests are served.
- Draw on children and adults imagination and their creative abilities to promote individual and collective healing and recovery.
- Promote 'nature based' programming as an important means of strengthening children's recovery.
- Create an enabling environment in order to operationalize these principles, including integrating respect for children's rights at all levels, and integrating children's meaningful participation whenever possible.

Drawing on the experiences of the Iraqi children participating in the Unity Circle project, the project recommends the following specific interventions:

1. Support Iraqi children to process difficult experiences and challenges in both Iraq and Jordan

- Avoid 'culture blind' therapeutic interventions, and ensure that psycho-social interventions are community and culturally grounded.
- Develop issue-specific groups for Iraqi children to talk about shared experiences such as kidnapping in Iraq, or violence and discrimination in Jordan, with supportive peers and adults.
- Formally identify a 'substitute' figure or mentor for those Iraqi children who have lost one or two parents.
- Provide psycho-social training for NGO staff and Iraqi volunteers on how to recognize children in distress and how best to support them and their parents.
- Offer strategy sessions for parents to talk about how to help Iraqi children with specific psychological issues (i.e. inability to sleep).
- Develop groups with Iraqi parents to talk about their own anxiety and grief and to strengthen their positive coping mechanisms.
- Hold special ceremonies to remember those family members killed or still missing in Iraq to help provide closure.
- Design activities which use personal and collective creativity, imagination and play as entry points for psychosocial support.

2. Support the strengthening of family, cultural and religious bonds

- Support interventions that help empower Iraqi parents, especially in their role as parents. For example, provide supportive environments outside of the home where parents can teach their children new skills or subjects.
- Facilitate opportunities for children to spend time with their families at centres – playing games or reading books, or engaging in organized activities. Provide support to those parents unsure of how best to structure play time with their children.
- Hold regular cultural events for Iraqi children and their families, involving the singing of Iraqi songs, reciting Iraqi poetry and sharing of Iraqi artistry.
- Provide places in NGO centres where Iraqi girls and boys can pray in separate groups.
- Develop programs that reinforce important Iraqi cultural values, especially those under threat. Examples include providing opportunities for Iraqi children and parents: to be emotionally transparent with each other; to socialize and develop friendships with other Iraqis and Jordanians and thus, feel part of a supportive Arab community; to show patriotism for Iraq through singing songs and appreciating Iraqi poetry together; to participate in artistic activities such as drawing and painting, etc.

3. Contribute to Iraqi children's sense of agency

- Establish Iraqi children's clubs at NGO centres and at schools to encourage Iraqi children to spend more time outside of their home.
- Negotiate with Iraqi parents to encourage children's involvement in clubs, and provide safe transportation for girls when necessary.
- Provide classes to encourage Iraqi children to develop mastery over certain skills.
- Give Iraqi children responsibilities at NGO centres, such as caring for plants, or organizing a library.
- Form child or youth led committees to provide feedback to staff at NGO centres on ongoing or new programming for Iraqis.
- Wherever possible link child participation activities in programming to children's everyday participation in peer groups, families, and community life.

4. Support the development of peer networks

- Form on-going groups for Iraqi children to spend time with each other and with supportive adults in building friendships, talking about challenges and sharing positive coping mechanisms.
- Develop youth mentorship programs where older Iraqi children help younger children with their homework or teach them new skills.
- Encourage activities which bring together Iraqi children from East and West Amman.
- Provide opportunities for Iraqi children to have positive interaction with Jordanian children and develop new friendships.
- For those Iraqi children without internet access at home, provide opportunities to email their friends (and family) outside of Jordan.

5. Build opportunities for children to exercise, be creative and access nature

- Increase Iraqi children's access to nature through structured trips to gardens or by opening up more outdoor play spaces at NGO centres or schools.
- Involve Iraqi children in the building or decoration of gardens, or play areas at NGO centres or schools.
- Provide regular, outdoor recreational activities for Iraqi children with adult supervision.
- Play Iraqi games that promote social connections and feelings of self worth and belonging.
- Create space for older Iraqi children to be on their own (to exercise or read, etc).
- Hold regular artistic activities such as painting, drawing, drama and story-telling, as well as other imaginative activities which help build and strengthen children's sense of well-being and their hope for a better future.
- Develop lending libraries from which children can borrow books, games and art supplies to use at home.

6. Ensure safety

- Promote children's sense of safety and security by supporting the establishment of regular activities and routines for children including cultural rituals, play, education, and responsibilities within the family.
- Set up groups with Iraqi parents and children to help parents better assess the real risks of Iraqi children and youth going outside more on their own.
- Develop groups of Iraqi and Jordanian children and adults to advocate for change in specific problem areas, such as dangerous traffic in certain neighbourhoods in East Amman.
- Ensure the participation of Iraqi children and their families in programming is always voluntary.

7. Create youth-specific programming

- Develop youth specific groups to talk about challenges and coping mechanisms specific to Iraqi youth – sharing experiences and building supportive environments.

8. Support Iraqi adult volunteers

- Recognize and address the psycho-social needs of the adult volunteers drawn from the Iraqi community. Provide opportunities for Jordanian NGO staff and Iraqis volunteers to strengthen their relationships through sharing their different cultures and life experiences.

9. Build local capacity

- Build the capacity of local organizations to better understand and support Iraqi children and their families, as they continue to address the on-going needs of the local Jordanian community.

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