



Jiyan Foundation
for Human Rights

Our Stories Need to be Heard

Rebuilding our
Society Together
through Listening
and Dialogue

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Dear reader,

We at the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights know how difficult it is to gain someone’s trust. As an independent organization working for the physical and psychological well-being of survivors of human rights violations, we make sure our clients can rely on our therapists and doctors in their healing process. We know from their stories just how easily trust can be broken inside and outside of the home, but we also believe that trust is what makes communities strong and resilient.

The actions of the so-called Islamic State (also known as ISIS) have caused neighbors, friends, and even families to look at one another suspiciously. After defeating ISIS militarily, we will all have to work hard to regain what they took from us: our belief in each other. To rebuild a safer, more tolerant society in which everyone can live a fulfilling life, we need to begin talking to one another once more.

This booklet offers the stories of survivors who hope for a better future, not only for themselves but also

for their country. To counter the violent message ISIS has spread throughout Iraq and further, we encourage parents to use this publication to begin conversations at home and in small groups with peers. Constant violence can make us feel voiceless and powerless. But to help prevent another group like ISIS from forming, we have to talk to each other and our children about how violence of all kinds remains wrong. Children often do not know how to talk about how they feel regarding conflict. So, let’s begin by talking with our children, family members, and communities about what we hope for the future.

Our booklet is intended for the use of all people, from Muslims and Christians to Yazidis, and those without a religion. If we do not talk about traumatic experiences and violence, we leave a vacuum in which negative ideas can germinate in the future. Where Islam was wrongly used to justify violence against you or your deeply held faith, we stand with you. We must question hate speech and acts of violence and let messages of peace speak for themselves.

We are extremely thankful to our patients and staff who contributed their stories and their time. Without them, the production of this booklet would not have been possible.

On behalf of the whole team of the Jiyan Foundation, we wish you an interesting read, helpful insights and fruitful discussions.

Salah Ahmad
Chairman

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I.

CHAPTER

We need to say
the truth in all honesty

ISIS has brought terrible violence and pain to our country. To move past this violence, it is important to acknowledge our collective pain. It is hard to speak about traumatic experiences, but talking about suffering in a safe environment can be the first step towards recovery.

“

Our stories need to be heard. We need to do whatever it takes to defeat ISIS and their terror and destruction. That is why I am telling you my story.

Lamiya, Jiyan Foundation client



Narî,
15-year-old boy

“I was 12 years old when ISIS invaded my village. Until then I had lived happily in Kucho with my parents and siblings. I went to school and helped on the farm. Our lives were normal.

When ISIS came, it was terrible. I couldn’t understand what was happening. They took us to the school to separate us. They put me with my mother and other mothers with children. I was glad that I had not lost all of my family, but later they separated us again.

ISIS men took 15 boys from my village, including myself, to Syria. It was awful there. They told us how they had killed our fathers and then they beat us. They gave us almost nothing to eat. The soldiers I met only seemed interested in yelling at us and hurting us and commanding us to do things.

Later they put us with many other boys in what turned out to be a training camp. But we were the only Yazidis. The soldiers told us: ‘Convert to Islam, or we will starve you!’ They hurt us when

“I did not want to even pretend to give up my faith, but I had no choice.”

we refused. I became so weak and hungry that I often thought about converting, but I also felt ashamed of thinking this way. One of the older boys from my village told us: ‘Lie to them! Say you have converted so we can survive long enough to escape!’ We decided to pretend to convert, because we could not stand the violence and did not want to die.

I did not want to even pretend to give up my faith, but I had no choice. They forced me to pray, read the Qur’an and fast during Ramadan. Whenever I did not do something exactly right, they beat me. They even forced me to learn how to use weapons. They were training us to be soldiers.

Every few months, they let us call home. This gave me hope that I would be able to see my family once again. I am happy that I escaped, but my life feels so strange. My family is still in danger. The only good thing I have in my life is that I can be a Yazidi again. I am also lucky that I escaped and do not have to kill for ISIS.”

Nari experienced terrible things, and he was only 12 years old. Luckily, he was able to escape his captors after two years. But the memory of what he went through will continue to haunt him. He was separated from his family, held in captivity, forced to train as a soldier, given little food and beaten regularly. When ISIS forced him to practice Islam, they were stripping him of his identity and his freedom of belief.

Being forced to practice a faith that we do not believe in can create an identity crisis. Like Nari, many may suffer feelings of extreme guilt or intense confusion because they were not able to practice their religion on the pain of death. This experience can be crippling, it can increase anxiety and cause depression. For children and teenagers, who are just learning who they are and what they find important, being forced to deny their faith can be especially destabilizing.

Nari and others like him need professional help as well as understanding and support from those who

love them. As a community, we should provide safe places in which therapists can help survivors like Nari and their friends tell their stories.

It is also important that we acknowledge the discrimination and suffering that certain groups, like the Yazidis, have faced over many centuries. Their sort of pain heals very slowly, and they need time to recover before reintegrating into a society they do not trust anymore.

If we address the past with sensitivity and compassion, we can begin living in the present as a community once more.

“Every person is different. Prejudice forces us apart, and that is what ISIS wants. I refuse to give ISIS anything that aids its awful goal.”

Lamiya,
55 years old

“My husband and I lived happily in Gerazer with our five children for many years. In the summer of 2014, ISIS attacked our village and captured my family. On that day, my happiness was taken from me. We were forced to go from our village to Syria after a stop in Kasr Mihrar. My husband was forced to work for ISIS there. I have not seen him since then.

Four days after our village was captured, I was forced to marry an ISIS soldier who was barely out of boyhood. He told me: ‘You are a Yazidi woman, so my religion allows me to take you as a wife and convert you to Islam. Because of this, I will go to heaven.’ His actions were horrible – nothing like a good life that would get one to heaven. I was his slave. I still have nightmares and I worry about what my family will think of me if we are ever reunited.

After a month, I had a heart attack and lost sight in one of my eyes. Subsequently, my enslaver sent me back to Iraq.

I now live in a camp. I am waiting for news of my family, and I pray for their safety and safe return. The hardest thing for me is knowing that they are still under ISIS control. ISIS has caused so much harm to my family, and I know of many survivors who distrust all Muslims now. I understand why they feel this way, but I also know that every person is different. As every Yazidi person has a unique outlook on life, so do Muslims.

Prejudice forces us apart, and that is what ISIS wants. I refuse to give ISIS anything that aids its awful goal.”

No person should ever be owned by another. For ISIS to claim enslaving women and girls is halal, and based on the Qur’an, is a gross misinterpretation. During the time of the Qur’an’s revelation, slavery was a common practice that it addressed. The passages in the Qur’an argue for better treatment of slaves and promote the end of slavery, not the encouragement of it.

Enslavement and sexual violence cause severe psychological and physical trauma. Sexual violence can damage some parts of the body permanently and lead to chronic pain or infection. Survivors often have difficulties in their relationships with their children or spouses. They can feel powerless and very alone, and find it hard to engage in sexual relationships. This can lead to divorce and financial insecurity.

ISIS used sexual violence against women, children and men, but rape and sexual violence affect a whole community in times of peace as well. We should listen to the survivors when they say they were raped or assaulted and not blame them for the illegal and immoral actions against them.

No community can be truly healthy when some believe certain classes of people are superior to others. Yazidis, Muslims, and other religious and ethnic groups have all suffered because of ISIS. We are all different, but this does not mean we do not all deserve the same respect and treatment.

If someone you know was sexually abused

- ▶ Believe them and be supportive. Listen if they want to talk, but do not pressure them if they do not.
- ▶ Do not blame them. Rape is never the fault of the victim.
- ▶ Help them get professional help from a doctor or therapist.
- ▶ Be patient. Trauma can change how your brain works and reacts, so survivors of sexual violence may behave in ways you don't understand. Remember that they need your understanding and support to recover.
- ▶ If the victim is a child, make sure they are never left alone with their abuser. Seek professional help quickly.
- ▶ Sexual violence is a criminal offense. If you are considering legal action, our attorneys can advise you and help you review the options.

*Have you ever felt that
your religion has been misrepresented?
How did it make you feel?*

Childar,
26 years old

“I have a story similar to many others in our country. It is clear that too many of us have been hurt by ISIS. My story starts with my capture in 2015. I was with my brothers in Hawija when they captured us. Being a soldier, I expected the worst, you see. Why they did not kill us, I still do not know. I did not know until it happened that torture could be worse than death. They did unimaginably cruel things – things that I still feel shame about, even though they are the ones who should be ashamed.

I tell my story because it is important that others know that they are not alone. So many soldiers and innocent people have experienced torture. Burning, beating, starvation, sexual abuse. ISIS knows so many ways to hurt a body and how to break a soul. They hurt non-Muslims and Muslims alike. It does not matter to them. When a cat wants to eat her kittens, she says they look like mice.

They hurt my body, but I am just as upset that they hurt my faith. They told me they were hurting me in God’s name. They said that they were right, and were

punishing me for God. They have no right to act for God or to punish in his name! Even as I recover, I cannot ignore how their words and actions have affected me and my faith in Islam. I hate that I have doubts. Islam can be beautiful and many people need to know that ISIS has corrupted this beauty.

But until I know what happened to my brothers, I cannot be the person to show this beauty. I hope others can find the strength to do so and that I can join them one day.”

Men who have been captured by ISIS and experienced torture and other forms of abuse can have extreme difficulties when they return. Torture can cause permanent physical damage as well as chronic pain and infection, and it can also leave invisible scars that manifest in psychological problems. Many victims have sudden, uncontrollable flashbacks of their experiences. They can suffer nightmares, panic attacks and feelings of shame and guilt. These difficulties are normal reactions to abnormal experiences. People who have suffered

torture will struggle to live happy and healthy lives, and they often find it very hard to access education and employment.

Among clients who have survived abuse from ISIS, our therapists have noticed two common patterns: Many suffer from extreme depression and suicidal thoughts, while others become aggressive towards the people in their lives. In both cases, these individuals need long-term psychological care to make sure they can heal. They also need to be monitored so that they do not harm themselves or others.

Traumatic experiences such as those Childar experienced can also raise very difficult religious questions for the survivors. In a time when religion could provide support for them, it can become a source of distress when they are confronted with questions such as “Why did God allow this to happen to me?” Anyone who is recently traumatized cannot process such questions. Survivors like Childar first need the help of professionals to achieve a more stable and calm state of mind.



III.

CHAPTER

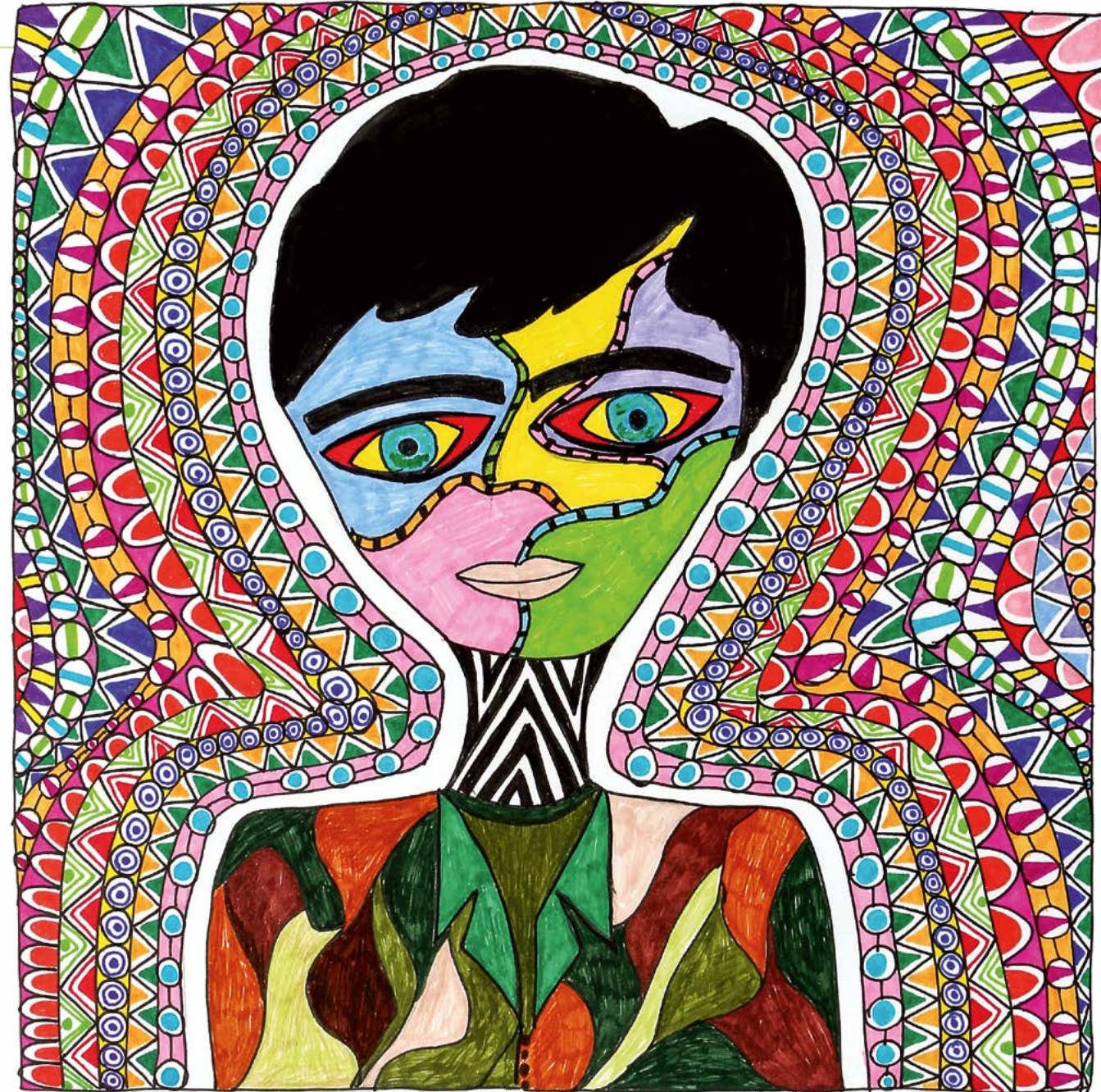
In a healthy community, you have a sense of belonging

How can we rebuild a safer, more tolerant society in which everyone can lead a fulfilling life? Before we begin tackling larger issues about living together post conflict, let's start by talking within our communities, with family members and neighbors about what we hope for the future. We started this conversation with our staff and clients and have included their ideas here. We hope they will inspire you to join the conversation.

“

If our country is precious to us,
let's develop ideas about how to bring
the different religions and ethnicities
closer together.

Salah Ahmad,
Chairman of the Jiyan Foundation



Loran,
father of
12-year-old Sara

“My Sara will be turning 12 years old soon. I brought her to see a psychotherapist because I wanted her to be happy again. She was always a happy child – before the explosion. She loved going to school and playing with her friends. It hurt me to see her so changed.

My family was in our house having tea when the bomb went off. Some misguided person placed the bomb in our church and detonated it. Since the church is next to our house, the explosion broke all of our windows. The rooms quickly filled with dust and smoke. Thank God that none of us were seriously hurt. But this was just one of several attacks against Christians that I have heard about.

My wife and I have tried not to burden our children with fear and worries, but we cannot shelter them completely. They hear things in school. People treat them differently. We cannot protect them from what other people say or do. I wish we could protect them – or better yet – make others understand that we are all humans who want to be accepted as we are. My

“Regardless of religion or ethnicity,
we are all people who deserve to feel safe.”

children should be able to be proud of being Christian, just like our neighbors and friends should be able to be proud of being Shabak or Yazidi, without fear of violence.

But ever since the explosion, Sara has been afraid because of who she is.

I took her to the Jiyān Foundation because she reacted very strangely to high-pitched noises. Her heart would race and she would look terrified. She could not sleep at night, and when she did she would have nightmares. Because of her fear, she was unable to attend school. She dreads another bombing.

Her psychotherapist has taught me a lot about Sara’s condition – anxiety and panic attacks – and how I can help her. Her sessions seem to be helping her, and I think she will be able to go back to school after more therapy. It is my deepest wish for her to get better and for no one to fear for their safety because of who they are. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, we are all people who deserve to feel safe.”

ISIS has exacerbated the conflicts in our country. But discrimination existed before ISIS, and it will continue after ISIS if we allow it. Not all acts of discrimination are so easy to spot, like the Church bombing described by Sara’s father. Sometimes, small gestures and the way we speak about others can be just as harmful.

Some people may be able to go on living their lives after a frightening event, but others may have difficulties. Everyone is different, so it makes sense that each person will have different reactions. Children in particular need support when they are experiencing distress such as Sara, and there are specific things their families can do to help them. If you are worried about your child, our professionals are here for you. They can give practical advice and discuss with you the best ways to help yourself and your child.

We believe that it is important to start talking about difference with our children at an early stage. Diversity is what allows us to be unique, but it can

also separate us from others. If we do not talk about these topics, we leave a vacuum in which negative ideas can germinate in the minds of young children and teenagers of all faiths. They might grow up thinking that people of different religions can never be trusted, or that to be religious is to be dogmatic.

The Jiyān Foundation offers free-of-charge seminars in schools to talk to children about their rights and responsibilities in the community. The girls and boys discuss positive ways to interact with people from different backgrounds and they learn peaceful means of conflict resolution. Our experience is that children benefit when they are given the opportunity to talk about these issues: bullying decreases and there is more tolerance and respect in classrooms.



Our staff and clients have a lot of hope for the future. They believe we can improve our communities together and they have many ideas about how to achieve this. To build healthy communities, we must start by asking ourselves: What does a healthy community mean to us?

What does it feel like to belong to a healthy community?

- ▶ “When you live in a good community, you feel that you are in a safe place.”
- ▶ “When you have a problem you know that your community is going to help you.”
- ▶ “You feel accepted as you are. No one is trying to change you.”
- ▶ “You have a sense of belonging.”

What are some attributes of a healthy community?

- ▶ “A healthy community depends on healthy marriages.”

What do you think a healthy community looks like? And how can we start building better communities?

- ▶ “Stable families.”
- ▶ “There should be equality between men and women. In a healthy community there should be no difference between people. Every person should be equal under the law.”
- ▶ “Radio, television, and journalism operate freely in a healthy community.”
- ▶ “A healthy community is more likely to develop if those leading it listen to its members and see the needs of the people.”
- ▶ “All members of a community can participate in its development.”
- ▶ “A healthy community gives education a priority.”
- ▶ “A clean and safe environment is important.”
- ▶ “Social justice and religious freedom.”
- ▶ “Healthy individuals make up good families and communities.”
- ▶ “Meet each other often.”
- ▶ “Show empathy and participate in each other’s happy and sad experiences.”
- ▶ “Respect each other’s differences, whether social, religious or other.”
- ▶ “Learn about bias.”
- ▶ “See the similarities between each other instead of the differences.”
- ▶ “Show our children how to respect our neighbors and how to help others in times of need.”
- ▶ “Share ideas on social networks or send our thoughts to television programs.”
- ▶ “Raising children well is really important to changing society into something positive.”

What are small steps anyone can take to build better communities?



Interview with Dr Hawre Zangana

Dr Hawre Zangana is a Kirkuk-born social psychologist and expert for theater arts and inter-religious dialogue. He has traveled extensively in Iraq and is currently based in Munich, Germany. In 2005, he co-founded the “Kurdish Cultural School” in Munich to promote exchange and friendship between people of different cultures and religions. Here, he talks about his ideas for rebuilding a more peaceful society together.

Dr Zangana, based on your experience of working with people from different communities, what do you think are key steps towards building healthier communities in Kurdistan-Iraq?

Everywhere in the world and particularly in Kurdistan-Iraq, fostering trust among different communities is an integral part of any peace process. This means talking to each other, engaging with each other, and working together. A healthy community can only exist if there is more than one valid world view – if, for instance, there is more than one accepted way of raising children. All people need to be respected in the same way.

You mentioned children and different ways of raising them. What role does education play if we want to change communities for the better?

Working towards a better community means to begin with the children, for they are the future. So education is really the first step. Schools and universities aren’t just places where children and youths gain professional skills – they are also spaces to learn about difference and respect. In school, children experience differences and similarities between people from a young age. In that sense, education can help you understand others and give you new perspectives – for your own life and for the whole community. But I think our education system needs an ethical concept that promotes equality between all kinds of faiths in our country.

But currently the sectarian divides are huge. You are suggesting that education could help to overcome them?

To learn about religion is a fundamental part of education. It is not something that necessarily has

to separate communities. Instead, our communities can overcome sectarian differences through inter-religious dialogue. We need to encourage people of one religion to understand the others and to see the followers of a different faith as fellow human beings instead of “others”. For this, it’s important that we engage religious leaders of all faiths and reach out to as many people as possible. By highlighting similarities rather than differences, this kind of approach strengthens empathy and trust between members of different faiths. People can learn to respect each other. This just needs time. But if we begin today, we will see the results in the future.

What role do you see for the state and legislature?

Political participation is key. But this is a two-way street: People need to be able to have their say and take part in shaping our country – but they also need to respect the rule of law. Parents and other adults should act as role models, so that children and youths are encouraged to respect the law from a young age.

People can learn to respect each other

And what do you think are small steps that anyone can take to help build better communities?

To begin with, we have to educate ourselves! We can attend workshops or our local community center, but also simply talk to different members of our community. We should make an effort and try to engage with other people, if they are of different faiths. We have more in common than we think!

I also believe we all need to develop a critical perspective on our own actions and thoughts. We can ask ourselves: What stereotypes do I have? Where might these come from? And what stereotypes might others have about me?

Engaging in cultural activities such as arts, music or theater can also help us to look beyond the horizon and understand other people better. And finally, traveling to different places is a great way to learn about diversity. We can take part in other people’s religious celebrations or visit their holy sites.

*Has anyone from a different background
or faith ever helped you in a difficult situation?
How did it make you feel?*

Seran,
23 years old

“I was forced to be the slave of a 53-year-old man. In the beginning, he did not touch me, but later he attacked me and I was very scared. I cried a lot and I felt very sad.

One night, I found a mobile phone. It gave me hope that I might be able to escape. So I hid it in the kitchen and thought about running away.

One evening, I took the phone, walked quietly to the door and looked out. I couldn't see anyone, so I started running. It was dark and I didn't know the area. Suddenly, I saw an old man and ran towards him, thinking he would help me. But he held me tightly and hit me, asking me where I had escaped from. He called my captor, who came to get me and kicked me hard when we got back to the house. I fell to the floor and he said: 'I want to help you, and make you a human! I want you to be a believer, but you want to keep living in blasphemy. If you try escaping again, you will never see the light of day again.' He locked me up that night and I was very scared.

I don't know if I slept or not that night. I felt that something pricked me on my face and that my body was shaking. The next morning, I didn't know where the time had gone. I was extremely tired. I tried to stand up but I couldn't for a while. Some friends of my captor were there again that morning and one of them told me: 'Do not try to escape again or you will get a harsh punishment like last night.'

But later I heard them leave the house and I did not hesitate: I went to the yard, climbed over the wall and ran through the neighborhood again. It was easier than the first time, but still a man saw me, and it was the same man I had seen in the house. He had a gun and I was so scared. I felt like my heart had stopped beating and I just fell to the ground.

My captor came to get me again. He put me in a car and told me that he was changing my name to Zanib, so that it would have an Islamic meaning. He said I wasn't allowed to use my own name anymore. He also said he would take me home to his wife and

that if I lived the way he wanted me to, they would provide whatever I needed. But I wasn't allowed to leave or to have any contact with my family.

When we arrived at his house, I met his wife and she seemed sad and angry. I also met his daughter and sons. I spent very sad days at their house. The children were always insulting me, telling me that as I was a Yazidi, it was better for me to live with them and become a Muslim.

But their mother called her husband a monster, saying that one day he would have to pay the price for what he was doing to me. I was happy to hear this because I thought it meant she would help me – and she did, by allowing me to call my family when her husband and the children weren't there. So I called my parents and told them I was alright. When I hung up, she said she would help me to escape. She told me to take a taxi and to let my family know where I was going, so they could pick me up. She told me which way to go through the town, so that no ISIS men would see me, and she said I

should act normally, and say I had gone out to buy things for her if anyone asked.

So I took her phone again and called my brother – and he gave me the address of one of his friends. And everything went as she said. I made it to my brother's friend, and he took me to Zimar, where my family was waiting for me. When I saw them, I felt as if I had been born again. Even though I now have a lot of pain because of what I have seen and what I went through.”



III.

CHAPTER

A healthy community depends on healthy families

At the Jiyān Foundation, we see every day that trust and resilience begin at home. When there is violence in a family, it can cause terrible pain and affect several generations. But we can stop the cycle of violence and build better relationships by giving support to families. Here, some of our clients talk about the difficulties and pain they experienced in their family – but they also talk about the hope they found in seeking help and sharing their stories with others.

“

My unhappiness and the problems in our family made everyone miserable. Through family therapy sessions, I am beginning to have hope that we can live together more peacefully.

Rasha,
Jiyān Foundation client



Rasha,
39 years old

“My father forced me to marry when I was just 16 years old. My husband is twenty years older than me. He already had a wife and three children. And because I was young, he treated me like a bad child. He would tell me: ‘You need to be told how to behave. I bought you with money, so I have the right to treat you the way I want.’ I quickly gave up hope of being happy. I even tried to kill myself to escape this misery.

I never thought that talking about my problems could help me solve them. But talking to the Jiyān Foundation has made me see that many families have similar problems. In group therapy, I heard from other people who were forced to marry – when they were children or adults – and who have had extremely difficult marriages. And although thinking about so many people in pain is sad, I also found it comforting to know that I am not alone.

The best thing is that my husband agreed to family therapy sessions, because the problems in our family made everyone miserable. Now he is begin-

“The best thing is that my husband agreed to family therapy, because our problems made everyone miserable.”

ning to understand me better, and I am beginning to have hope for my family’s future. I hope that we can live together more peacefully.

I do not want my children to have the same problems. Children need time to play and grow and learn how to make choices about their lives. My wish is for my husband and his other wife to agree with me that we should let the children choose whom they wish to marry.”

Conflicts and poverty have led many families to marry their children off early. Forced marriages were common even before ISIS, but the conflict has exacerbated the practice further. Bakhtyar Hadi, a child therapist with the Jiyān Foundation, gives an example of this:

“In rural areas, families were traditionally dependent on agriculture, and the children were always helping with work on the farms. But when ISIS came, these families had to flee. They now live in

camp, in small tents, sometimes with up to twenty children. These children have a lot of free time and there are no spaces for them to move around and burn off their energy. So when they become teenagers, their parents are afraid that they will have sexual relationships. They prefer to marry them off early because they think that this way they will be safe.”

At the time they take the decision, forcing their children to marry can seem like the right choice to many parents. It can even feel like it is the only choice, and many families believe it will help preserve their family honor. But this often comes at a price.

When girls or boys are forced to marry before they are ready, they are less likely to have a happy marriage. And in the long term, anyone who is not free to make their own choices in life can develop severe psychological problems. At the Jiyān Foundation, every day our staff see clients who were forced to marry and who now suffer from fear and anxiety, sleeping disorders, social withdrawal or despair.

Parents have a big role to play in shaping their children’s future. At the Jiyān Foundation, we want to support parents to make the best possible choices for their children. But forced marriage is not just a parents’ issue. It concerns all of us. This is why we should talk openly about the causes of forced marriage and its negative effects.

According to Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government law, and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, everyone has the right to decide freely whom they wish to marry, without coercion or payment of money.

What does equality in a marriage mean to you? And how do you think you can build trust?

Ewrin,
41 years old

“My husband thinks I will bring shame on the family if he does not control my every move. He beats me for the tiniest things – he told me that beating women is the only way to control us. When I want to go out, even if it is just to the market or to visit my family, he gets jealous and angry. His beatings have become more frequent and more painful over time, and he began to beat our children as well. My eldest son left us to live with his grandparents because he could not stand the abuse. My daughters do not have that freedom. And since they are girls, my husband controls their movements just as jealously as mine.

I’ve felt so lonely for so long. When I cannot choose where to go or what I want to do, I feel like less than a person and more like a doll. And my health suffers – I have breathing difficulties, my back aches all day, and the headaches almost never stop. Some days I wished I would die. I did not know that someone could help me. But the Jiyun Foundation has assisted me to see that it is not my fault. There are many women who have changed their lives for the better after they got help.

Now my husband and I have gone through many therapy sessions together. I want to give him a chance to change his way of thinking and treating me. I know change takes time. But if he does not change, I will leave him. He does not have the right to control me. I am not a doll, nor are my daughters. I am teaching my son never to disrespect his future wife and I tell all of my children that violence is unacceptable.”

We all need to feel trusted and respected. It allows us to be happy and to build loving and peaceful relationships. Ewrin says that when her husband tells her where to go and what to do, she feels like less than a person – like a doll. Like her, many women do not enjoy the same rights as men do.

The unequal treatment of women comes in many forms, and men suffer from it too. We can all develop severe psychological problems when we are not treated with equality and respect. We might have feelings of anger, resentment, guilt or shame – all of which impact on our ability to

live a healthy life and to build loving and lasting relationships.

Women have the right to be treated equally to men under the law. They have the right to decide how they want to live their lives, and to be free from all forms of discrimination. And men, too, live happier lives if their relationships are not based on jealousy and control. Any relationship based on negative emotions will ultimately be an unhappy one and cause more problems. This is neither good for marriage, nor for society.

If you or someone you know is unhappy at home or experiencing feelings of despair and isolation in the way that Ewrin used to, we encourage you to contact the Jiyun Foundation center closest to you. Our services are free and confidential, and our professionals can support you through individual, couple or family therapy. We hope to help you regain a sense of peace in your family.

“Now I am learning to control myself and to trust my wife, so we can live in peace together.”

Hogir,
42 years old

Rona, 36 years old

“You need to know your limits and respect me and others!’ This is what my husband Hogir would say to justify beating me. We married when I was thirteen years old and he was nineteen. He did not know how much his words and fists harmed me and our family. I know men always control women in some way or other – they have been inheriting this power for generations! But I decided I needed help, because his violence was affecting our whole family. Sometimes I became so frustrated with my life that I hated my children and beat them. My children who I love! But I know it is not their fault. I don’t want them to grow up feeling frustrated and to beat their own children too. This is one of the reasons why I went to the Jiyan Foundation. It has helped. We had a good atmosphere in the therapy sessions, and now we can talk about our problems and solve them together.”

Hogir, 42 years old

“I could not control my anger. I always thought women should be obedient and afraid of men, so I beat my wife. I wanted to control everything she did. When I hit her, I thought it was my right to do so because I was tired from work, or annoyed at something that I felt she did wrong. I got so angry when she did not want to have sex with me anymore. She told me ‘I cannot have sex with a man who beats me.’ And then my children started misbehaving too.

I thought no one could help us deal with our problems, because the whole family had problems. I blamed my wife. But I learned that my actions were also part of the problem. I was taking my anger out on my wife, and she took her anger out on our children. Now I am learning to control myself and to trust my wife, so we can live in peace together.”

Every family has its ups and downs. But violence is not the way to solve family problems – it just creates more difficulties. Physical violence can cause permanent damage to the body like chronic pain or infections. It can also lead to severe psychological trauma. Victims often suffer from panic attacks, feelings of shame and guilt, despair, anger and hopelessness.

Verbal abuse is also a form of violence. It can include yelling, screaming, name calling, ordering someone around, mean jokes, and degrading talk or threats. On a psychological level, this kind of abuse has equally detrimental effects compared to physical violence.

If you suffer from violence in your family, we are here to support you. The Jiyan Foundation has helped many couples like Rona and Hogir escape the cycle of violence. We offer individual and family counseling as well as self-help and discus-

sion groups. People who suffer from violence are often afraid to ask for help – but speaking about it is the first step towards recovery.

Domestic violence is a crime. If you consider legal action or divorce, our lawyers will advise you. Our psychological teams are also here to help you. It takes courage, but there are always ways to change a situation that is causing misery and pain. Often, change starts with talking to somebody. What do you hope to achieve? And what steps does this require? We will listen and support you along the way.



Interview with three of our therapists

At the Jiyan Foundation we work every day with clients who are unhappy in their marriages. Many of our clients feel this unhappiness is the beginning of larger problems: “My unhappiness and the problems in our family were making everyone miserable”, one of our clients said. But how can we develop better relationships? Three of our therapists reflect on this together.

What does a peaceful marriage mean to you?

Divan Ali: To me it means listening to each other from the heart – being motivated by a desire to understand the thoughts and feelings of your partner.

Layla Tawfeeq: I think a peaceful marriage is like a healthy body. You know how you maintain good health – and there are also things you can do to keep your marriage healthy.

What helps to maintain a good marriage?

L. T.: In a good marriage, both people participate in family life together. They help and support each other, and both partners have a say. Both people

need to be their own person – everyone has a different personality and a good marriage will respect that.

Dr Wahid Harmz: A happy marriage can depend largely on the man’s attitudes and how he treats his wife. Is he ready to make compromises and get rid of his controlling attitudes?

D. A.: Communicating with each other well is also very important. Be open with your spouse and express your emotions.

L. T.: If there are problems with communication, the marriage can have many problems. Another challenge is the daily routine. It can make the relationship boring. Both partners need to show each other that the marriage is important and continue their love story.

D. A.: You need to try to find new ways to stay active as a couple and you should not neglect your sex life.

What do you recommend to those who are having trouble keeping the peace in their marriage?

Dr W. H.: I always encourage my clients to have enough courage to admit their faults and ask for forgiveness.

D. A.: Yes, being able to forgive each other is part of a peaceful marriage. But also know that ups and downs can actually strengthen your relationship. Conflict will happen, and you will be disappointed at times. This is normal for a marriage. But don’t hesitate to seek family or couple therapy if you need it.

Dr W. H.: Yes, we encourage our patients to see that counseling from experts is not shameful. We all make mistakes and we all need help sometimes.

Divan Ali, Dr Wahid Harmz and Layla Tawfeeq are psychologists with the Jiyan Foundation. They are based in our offices in Erbil, Duhok and Kirkuk, respectively.

Marriage is not easy

Warning signs that your relationship is suffering and you and your partner might need help

- ▶ lack of understanding between you and your partner
- ▶ one of you withdraws from the relationship
- ▶ frequent quarreling
- ▶ shouting
- ▶ imposing your opinions on your partner
- ▶ arguing over the same thing for a long time
- ▶ getting angry about the smallest problem
- ▶ violence, including physical and emotional violence

If any of these apply to your marriage or if you are unhappy in your relationship for any reason, we encourage you to seek help. You can ask someone you know well and trust, like a friend or a neighbor. Or you can contact the Jiyan Foundation center closest to you. We encourage couples to seek help as early as possible.

How can we prepare ourselves when we want to build a family?

Based on their experience of working with couples and families, our staff discussed what tips they have for persons thinking about marriage. How can they prepare themselves for building a healthy family from the start?

► Set yourself a higher goal

Before you decide to get married and build a family, it helps to ask yourself what marriage and family mean to you. What do you hope to achieve and what goals would you set for your family? When things get difficult, having higher goals will help you keep focus and direction. For instance, your goal could be to build a happy life together – one in which you can overcome problems together, whether they are economic or social problems. Your goal could also be to create a healthy environment for children to grow up in.

► Get to know your partner first

Make sure you get to know your partner well before you marry and start a family. Find out if you share the same interests and values. Ask your partner questions about different subjects that matter to you. It is important to talk openly from the beginning and see if the two of you can communicate well.

For example, you might want to talk about your relationship to your family of origin. Are both of you prepared to leave them and live with a new person?

You might also want to know more about your attitudes to sexuality. What hopes and expectations do you have of your sexual relationship? Do you want to have children and if so, how many? Your budget and attitudes to work are also important. Do you have enough money to build a family? And will you both be working? If you are a woman and you want to work, ask your partner what he thinks about this. Will he accept it?

► Learn to share responsibility

Before you have your own family, you are responsible only for yourself. You might have more freedom. But after choosing a life partner and then possibly having children, you will have a responsibility to the members of your family. Together with your partner, you should ask yourselves: Can we take on this responsibility? Are we ready to change ourselves for each other and for our children? You will inevitably have to develop and compromise, and this requires patience and good communication. Once you are a family, you need to make decisions together and support each other when you are confronted with problems in life.

► Learn to deal with conflict

Conflicts are normal for any family, and you should expect to disagree with your partner and children occasionally. There will also be times when you feel disappointed. The other people in our families are just like us: They have hopes and dreams and strengths and weaknesses, and they want to be seen and respected, just like us.

It helps to remember that conflicts can actually strengthen your family. They are an opportunity to learn more about yourself, your partner and your children. If you can work through conflicts, your family will become stronger over time.

► Attend training and seek help when you need it

In our professional lives, we think it is normal to attend trainings and learn new things. Why not take part in a seminar to prepare yourself for marriage and building a family? You can also do a couples training together after your marriage to keep your family happy.

Not marrying too soon has benefits

Make sure you get to know your partner well before you marry and start a family. Find out if you share the same interests and values. Ask your partner questions about different subjects that matter to you. It is important to talk openly from the beginning and see if the two of you can communicate well. For example, you might want to talk about your relationship to your family of origin. Are both of you prepared to leave them and live with a new person? You might also want to know more about your attitudes to sexuality. What hopes and expectations do you have of your sexual relationship? Do you want to have children and if so, how many? Your budget and attitudes to work are also important. Do you have enough money to build a family? And will you both be working? Ask each other what you think of this. Will you accept the other's choices and support each other?



IV.

CHAPTER

Children are the foundation of our future

Many of our clients see their sons and daughters struggling when there is conflict or violence in the family or community. Children are our collective responsibility. When they are unwell, it is up to us adults to recognize and address their pain. We have the opportunity to rebuild our society together, so let us include our children from the start. If we treat them with care and respect, they will grow up to be responsible human beings.

“

Working towards a better community means to begin with the children, for they are the future.

Dr Hawre Zangana,
expert in theater and inter-religious dialogue



Raising children is challenging – no one knows this better than parents. Bakhtyar Hadi is a child therapist at the Jiyan Foundation. He works with children every day and has helped many parents support their daughters and sons through difficult times.

What do you think parents need to remember above all about their children's needs?

One of the main things I have learned from my work is that, as parents, many of us focus on the physical health of our children. We think that if our child grows up physically healthy, everything will be okay. But oftentimes we need to work hard to make sure our children have all of their psychological needs met as well, such as good self-esteem and respect for their individuality. Children are like us: Each one is different and has different strengths and weaknesses.

What are some warning signs that children need help?

Children who are struggling might not be able to say so. But they express their distress in their own ways. Some might wet the bed, some will be sad or withdrawn, others are overly afraid of the dark.

What we need to remember is that children do not act like this on purpose. They cannot really control their reactions. When they experience traumatic

events such as ISIS attacks or losing a loved one, they may behave in ways we might think of as 'bad'. But becoming aggressive, doing poorly at school or wetting the bed are normal consequences of a bad experience. We have to see the whole situation and respect their reactions.

How can parents make their children feel supported?

Focusing on what your child does well is very important. If we focus on the negative things – that a child isn't getting good enough grades, for instance – we might make it more difficult for them to succeed. If they are struggling with something, it's good to find ways to make the activity more fun or more suited to their strengths.

It's also very important to listen to children. Sometimes we forget that children need to feel free and respected just as much as we do. Often, we order them to do things and we don't give them a chance to express themselves. Letting children talk and listening to them with respect can help them feel

much better, especially when they are having difficulties. For example, when children have trouble in school with other children, they might need a space to talk about it at home.

If a child does not want to talk, he or she might not know how to express complicated feelings in words. But there are many ways to help children express themselves. You can give them paper and colorful pens, so they can express their feelings through drawing. We see many benefits from this technique when we work with children in art therapy.

When parents are afraid to bring their child to therapy, how can you reassure them?

We know that bringing your child to a therapist can be scary. That's why we always talk to the parents first and explain what we do. And during the course of the therapy we talk about every step we take and try to involve the parents as much as possible.

Becoming well again is often a long process – it needs time and space, and all the adults involved in caring

Children need to feel free and respected as much as we do

for the child need to cooperate. This includes the parents, the therapist and their teacher at school. We have to work together in the interests of the child.

Every child has vital psychological needs

Love and respect

Children need to feel they are loved and are a valuable part of our society.

A safe, secure feeling at home

When there is love in the family, children will thrive.

Patience

Listen to your children and try to understand them.

The chance to play and be carefree

Talking to your children about your problems can make them grow up too soon. And they will become unsettled if they see you suffer. If you seek help for yourself, your child will benefit hugely.



Raising children well is important for building a better society. We asked our staff and clients how they think we can empower children and raise them to become happy and strong members of their communities.

- ▶ “Children need good self-esteem to succeed. This means we need to find ways to raise them without physical or psychological violence.”
- ▶ “We should teach children about their rights and their responsibilities in the community.”
- ▶ “For our children to be as healthy and happy as possible, we need to be aware that neglecting or spoiling a child has similar negative effects.”
- ▶ “It’s important to teach young people how to take care of their finances.”
- ▶ “You can talk to them and read them stories about their rights.”
- ▶ “Educational TV programs can be helpful.”
- ▶ “We must teach them how to accept people with different beliefs.”

How do you think we can support children to be happy and responsible members of their communities?

- ▶ “Sometimes children have fights with their friends. Parents need to talk to their children about fighting and its negative effects on the community.”
- ▶ “Parents need to explain what community means to children from a young age. We all have rights as individuals, but we also belong to communities that we want to keep safe for everyone.”

The Jiyan Foundation offers seminars for children and parents

We run free-of-charge seminars in schools to talk to children about their rights and responsibilities in the community. We also discuss good ways to interact with people from different backgrounds and religions. These classes are very effective: According to feedback from teachers, bullying and violence decrease dramatically when children are given the opportunity to talk about these issues and to learn peaceful means of conflict resolution.

We also offer free-of-charge seminars for parents. Exchanging experiences with others can help parents understand their child better and deal with difficult situations. It also gives them a chance to think about the kind of parent they want to be. Traditional ways of raising children often ignore their feelings, but girls and boys need space to grow, play, run, and talk to their parents. When parents take the time to learn about their children’s needs, they empower themselves to become better parents.



CHAPTER

More about the Jiyan Foundation

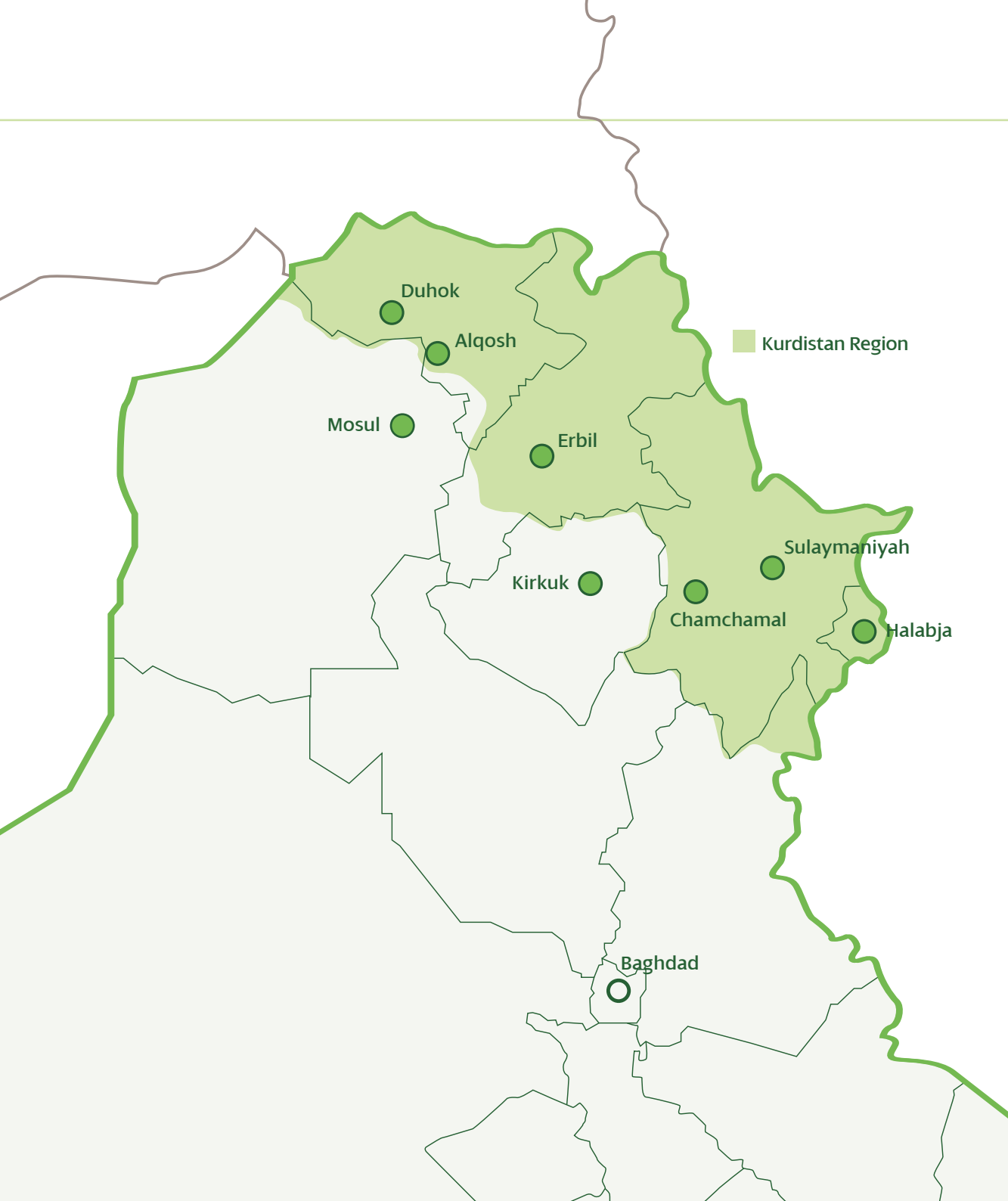
Jiyan is the Kurdish word for “life”. The Jiyan Foundation strives for a society where adults and children enjoy the right to life and liberty, where the dignity of the human person is protected, and where citizens are free from torture and terror. We support democratic values and defend fundamental freedoms in our country.

We support the physical rehabilitation, mental well-being and social reintegration of survivors and their family members by providing them with medical treatment, psychotherapeutic support and socio-legal counseling. In addition, we seek to protect survivors of past human rights abuses and prevent future acts of violence through professional training, human rights education, public awareness-raising, and political advocacy.

On the following page, you will find our contact information and learn more about our approach to therapy.

I never thought that talking about my problems could help me solve them. But me see that many families have similar problems. And although thinking about so many people in pain is sad, I also found it comforting to know that I am not alone.

Rasha,
Jiyan Foundation client



Did you experience something terrible you cannot forget about or have you lost someone you love? Are you always sad and don't know why? Did you lose interest in life, have problems sleeping or even thought about ending your life? Do you sometimes get angry or afraid and cannot control yourself? Do you have a problem you cannot talk about?

No matter what problem you have, you do not have to deal with it alone! You should always seek help and talk about your problems. Maybe a friend or someone in your family is very close to you and can help you?

If you have no one to talk to or no one you trust enough, you can always call us or come to one of our centers! Many persons come to us because they have problems like yours.

We will not tell your relatives or anyone else about your worries if you don't want us to. Everything you say will be kept between you and our team. You can choose to talk to a man or a woman.

All our services are free-of-charge and we help you no matter what age, sex, religion or ethnic background you have.

► **Jiyan Foundation in Erbil**

104 Zaniary Quarter, Area 26, House 4
Erbil
+964 750 8920079

► **Jiyan Foundation in Duhok**

Malta, Wargah St, House Z25/43/2
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+964 750 7375111

► **Jiyan Foundation in Sulaymaniyah**

126 Zargata Quarter - 9/79
Sulaymaniyah
+964 771 0136137

► **Jiyan Foundation in Kirkuk**

Rahimawa, Ali Mardan Street
Kirkuk
+964 770 9361514

► **Jiyan Foundation in Nineveh**

Mar Qardakh Quarter
Alqosh
+964 750 6677880

► **Jiyan Foundation in Mosul**

Hay Alzirai Road, opposite Larina Supermarket
Mosul
+964 772 7617979

► **Jiyan Foundation in Chamchamal**

Shoresh Piryady
Chamchamal
+964 770 0353322

► **Jiyan Foundation in Halabja**

Farmanbaran Quarter
Halabja
+964 770 6833041

How you can contact us

How to support our work

How to Support Our Work

The Jiyan Foundation helps women, children, and men from all walks of life to build a self-determined, healthy future. We welcome you to support us. There are several ways to make a financial contribution.

Donation Account in Germany

Ethikbank
BIC/SWIFT: GENODEF1ETK
IBAN: DE48830944950003319644

Donation Account in Iraq

Kurdistan International Bank for Investment and Development
BIC/SWIFT: KIBIIQBA
IBAN: IQ04KIBI986030068200003

Donations are tax-deductible within the SEPA-area.
Please leave your postal address in the transfer reference or send us an e-mail.

Paypal

Donations can also be made through Paypal at donate@jiyan-foundation.org.

Betterplace

You may also support one of our projects at betterplace.org:
www.betterplace.org/en/organisations/9002-jiyan-foundation-for-human-rights.

Betterplace is a German-based donation platform and forwards 100% of the donation to the cause.

Art and the Jiyan Foundation

At the Jiyan Foundation, we believe that art is a fundamental part of life. Through art we can explore our inner worlds, express feelings and share our stories. Similar to therapy, making art is a process of self-exploration and expression.

Our experience shows that combining therapy with art can help trauma survivors process difficult experiences and develop hope for the future. That is why we promote art in all aspects of our work.

Many of our experts use art therapy with their clients. For those who find it hard to talk about their difficult experiences, art provides an outlet. Art therapy also works well with children who are not able yet to put their complex emotions into words. Drawing and painting gives them the opportunity to tell their stories tactilely through colors and lines.

We also commission local artists to assist us in our publications. All the drawings in this publication are by Mina Sabah Rashid, a young artist from Sulaymaniyah.



Mina Sabah Rashid:

Despite the violence in our country, I attempted to draw the illustrations for this booklet in a way that expresses hope and encourages readers to think about peaceful coexistence, freedom, and love. I believe that art can have a positive effect on our future.



www.jiyan-foundation.org