

Better Parenting Skills Transform Lives

Ghadeer's story

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Erbil, Iraq, 30 October 2023 – Ghadeerⁱ is a 45-year-old Syrian woman who fled from Syria to Iraq in 2013. She first arrived in the Kawargosk refugee camp then moved to the Darashakran refugee camp in Erbil where she currently resides. She has been married for 21 years and has three children, a 19-year-old boy and two girls aged 12 and 15.

“When we initially got displaced, I was so scared that my children would be left alone, considering the risk of our tent going up in flames at any second,” Ghadeer recalls.

Settling in a new environment was not easy for Ghadeer and her family, especially since her new community members had different social norms and traditions. She isolated herself and her family and opted to stay in the tent most of the time.

Ghadeer's psychological well-being was heavily affected. Oftentimes, she would become frustrated and angry and take it out on her children. She even started believing that her daughters should be married off at the age of 12.

"I was angry most of the time, and my children also began to show signs of aggression," Ghadeer adds.

Unicef-Supported Child-Friendly Center Offers Respite

At the camp, in cooperation with the Erbil Directorate of Social Affairs, a UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Center provides psychosocial support to children in need. At the center, parents like Ghadeer also acquire better parenting skills.

The social workers visited Ghadeer and encouraged her to enroll her children at the Child-Friendly Center to help them gain new skills. The children quickly settled into the center and felt very comfortable with the new environment. They made new friends, and they enjoyed their classes and their teachers.

One day, Ghadeer visited the center to see how it transformed her children's lives.

"I learned about the center from my children and my neighbours who encouraged me to enroll," Ghadeer recalls. "I really wanted to get rid of my anger and stress and be a better parent for my children."

Ghadeer has been attending the parenting programme for a year now. She has participated in awareness-raising sessions on parenting skills, including improved communication, anger and stress management, and how to interact with her community. Through these sessions, Ghadeer learned how to better express her feelings and better manage her anger.

"I realized that the world was evolving, and I wanted my children to be a part of this evolution," Ghadeer says.

Ghadeer sent her daughters back to school, as they had dropped out temporarily.

"I wanted them to live their childhood, study, and get an education instead of getting married at a young age," Ghadeer says. "Now, my daughters are happily continuing their education inside the camp, and they have made many friends."

Ghadeer and her peers have seen many positive changes in themselves and their families since their enrolment in the center. She no longer beats her children, displaying empathy and kindness. Ghadeer's relationship with her husband and neighbours also improved.

With funding from the Isle of Man Government and support from UNICEF, the Directorate of Social Affairs in Erbil has been implementing the better parenting programme in Darashakran camp since the beginning of 2023. The programme focuses on enhancing and strengthening parental skills through providing psychosocial support, in addition to awareness sessions on coping and healing strategies, empathy, positive relationships, communication skills, understanding children's psychosocial needs, understanding adolescents' brain development, and respecting adolescents and their changes.

To ensure the sustainability of the parenting programme, UNICEF and DoSA engage parents like Ghadeer in community structure activities, referral mechanisms and capacity-building sessions on child protection and GBV. With these skills, community members are able to identify vulnerable cases among children and

women and refer them to CP partners for further support and may become professional CP and GBV service providers in their own community.

“For the first time ever, I feel that I have done something good for my children and I'm proud of myself,” Ghadeer concludes with a smile.

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¹ Names were changed to protect identity.