



BWOOD
Better World Organization
for Community Development

Voices from Resilient Spirits



Better World Organization for Community Development



"Transforming the Lives of Women, Girls, and Youth from Being Vulnerable to become Visionaries"



In every corner of Iraq and Kurdistan region, stories of resilience, determination, and achievement quietly unfold. These are the stories of individuals and families who, despite facing significant challenges, have found the strength to rise, adapt, and transform their lives. At Better World Organization, we believe that every success, no matter how small, is a beacon of hope that can inspire others to strive for change.

This booklet introduces stories of success and change from our communities that we support through our work. As a celebration of those journeys, the booklet brings together the voices of those who have faced adversity with courage, embraced opportunities for growth, and have come out stronger on the other side. Their stories are more than just tales of personal achievements, they are powerful reminders of the potential within us all to create a better future.

As you read through these pages, we hope you find inspiration in these narratives. These stories highlight the impact of collective effort and the importance of fostering a supportive environment where every member of our community can thrive.

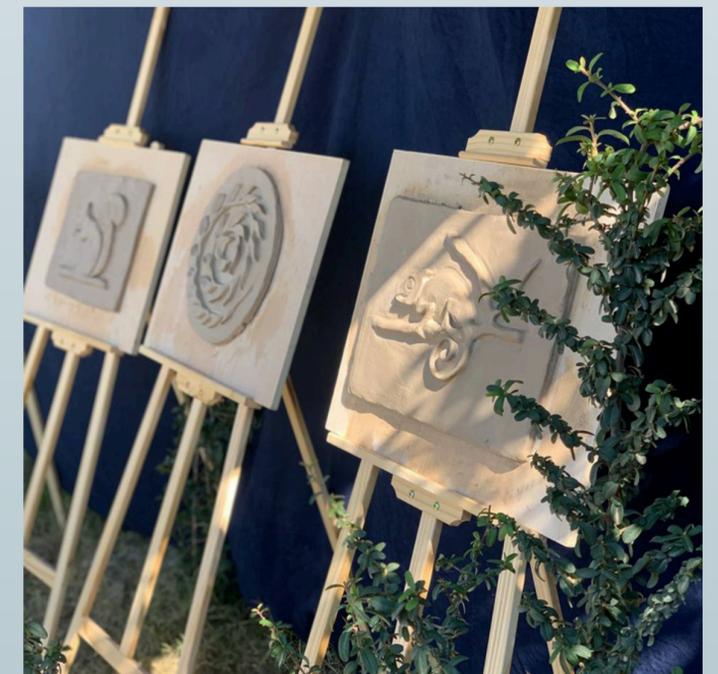
Together, we continue to build communities where every success story is a step towards a brighter, and more inclusive tomorrow.



A Journey from Struggle to Healing



At Better World Organization, we are dedicated to enhancing the well-being of community members, with a particular focus on women and girls affected by conflict. Through our collaboration with Medica Mondial, we have been able to support 40 women who are survivors of conflict in a camp located in the Duhok governorate. One of the participants, Alia, shared her transformative experience with the art therapy sessions conducted in the camp, offering a poignant glimpse into her journey of healing and recovery.



At 33, my life had been marked by solitude and struggle. Growing up as an orphan, I missed out on schooling and social interactions, which led me to a life of isolation. My marriage, unfortunately, brought its own challenges, including neglect from my husband. As a result, I found myself losing patience with my children, my mental state making it difficult to manage my emotions.

When Better World Organization introduced the art therapy course, I decided to give it a try. Initially, I was unsure about the course's purpose and benefits. But by the third day, I began to notice subtle changes in my life.

For the first time, I started to address my deep-seated irritability and gained a clearer understanding of my feelings through drawing. One day, I drew a volcano to represent my release from negative emotions. Painting it red was particularly transformative—it helped me shed my burdens and embrace a new perspective.

Art therapy taught me to set personal boundaries, express myself creatively, and even pass these skills on to my children. Through this process, I not only learned how to draw but also how to connect better with my family. My self-confidence grew, and my relationships improved significantly. Art therapy has been a revelation for me, enhancing my motor and language skills, and rekindling my interactions with family and friends. It has been a profound journey of personal growth and healing." -- **Alia**





Embracing Tomorrow: Rising Above the Shadows of the Past

Layla , a 21-year-old resident of the Al-Zahraa neighborhood, has faced a deeply challenging journey marked by significant adversity. Abused by her father, she endured profound psychological distress, including stress and sadness, which led her to make the difficult decision to leave school during her final year of high school.

However, her story took a hopeful turn when she crossed paths with Better World organization during a field visit conducted by social workers. This encounter offered her a ray of hope and set the stage for a transformative journey. With the support and opportunities provided by the organization, Layla, began to rebuild her life, discovering new avenues for healing and growth.

The pivotal moment in Layla's life occurred when she participated in vocational training at the Better World Organization Center. During her time at the center, Layla developed valuable skills in candle-making and weaving. Encouraged by the social worker's support, she gathered the courage to launch her own social media page, where she began showcasing and selling her beautifully crafted candles and other handmade items.

This new venture not only bolstered her confidence but also opened doors to exciting opportunities. Layla began participating in various bazaars and festivals at the University of Mosul, where she proudly displayed her creations. These activities provided her with a positive outlet, helping her stay focused on the present and embrace a brighter future, rather than being weighed down by past hardships.



Layla said

"These invaluable opportunities allowed me to gain new skills, especially in crafting handmade items. The training not only provided me with practical abilities but also sparked a newfound sense of self-assurance. Moreover, the success of my small business and the positive feedback I received from customers filled me with pride and a deep sense of accomplishment"

As result of our support, Layla now plans to return to school in the upcoming academic year, feeling stronger and more confident as an outcome of the psychological support sessions we provided. Overall, Layla's experience at the Better World Organization Center has been transformative, empowering her to overcome obstacles and embrace new opportunities for personal growth. Embarking on her entrepreneurial journey not only showcased Layla's ability to overcome adversity, but also revealed a newfound sense of purpose in her life.

In Iraq women and girls often face numerous challenges, including violence, abandonment from education, early marriage, and other barriers that limit their opportunities. These issues have been exacerbated by the ISIS crisis. In response, Better World Organization, in partnership with Norwegian People's Aid, has made a significant impact through vocational training, psychosocial support (PSS), and case management services.

Our efforts are transforming women's lives by enhancing their skills and well-being. By providing such support, we are not only empowering women but also fostering a stronger, more cohesive community. This initiative helps create equal economic opportunities for women and contributes to the overall betterment of the community.

Note: "Layla" is a pseudonym used for the purpose of this story. For her safety, she has chosen not to disclose her real name.

Healing to Empowerment: A Mother's Journey



“My name is **Fatma**, a 43-year-old divorced woman and mother of three, living in Mosul. My life has been marked by profound loss and hardship. My first husband passed away from kidney disease. When ISIS took over Mosul, my two sons were drawn into the group by my four brothers, who were close friends with my children and had joined ISIS themselves. Tragically, all four of my brothers and one of my sons were killed by the group. The remaining son was arrested by the Iraqi military and sentenced to imprisonment.

After my son’s arrest, I found myself alone, having lost my parents, my brothers, and one of my sons. I eventually remarried and had a daughter and son with my new husband. Despite my efforts to stay connected with my imprisoned son, including visiting him in Baghdad, my husband objected to these visits and demanded that I choose between him and my son. I chose my son, which led to our divorce and a further deterioration in my mental health.”

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Fatma went on to share, “When I first met the case worker, I felt an immediate sense of comfort and safety. She listened to my story with such empathy, allowing me to open up about my experiences. Attending the psychosocial sessions and individual counseling made a profound difference in my outlook on life. I began to feel a renewed sense of hope, realizing that there are people who genuinely care about me and my situation.”

She continued,

“Being selected as a trainer for the candle-making vocational training was a milestone for me. It brought me immense joy and pride to not only share my skills but also to inspire and support other girls and women in starting their own businesses. I am deeply grateful to the staff of Better World Organization for their unwavering support and for significantly improving my mental well-being and overall sense of hope.”

There are thousands of women and girls who have similar stories as Fatima’s, and who deeply suffered from the ISIS war in Mosul, where their sons, brothers, husbands and even fathers, joined ISIS – some forcibly and some voluntarily. The women and girls have no say over their decisions and, in most of the cases, they were not in agreement with the ISIS ideology because of its negative affect on women and girls. With the support of UNICEF, Better World Organization has supported thousands of women and girls in Mosul and Ninewa governorate since 2021.



Rising Through Adversity

Imagine a decade of displacement where a four-year-old baby now is 14-year-old girl experiencing instability and an unpredictable future!



“My name is **Jackleen Khalaf** , a 14-year-old currently in 7th grade. I’m originally from Khanasor, a village in Sinjar that was devastated by ISIS attacks in 2014. My life has been marked by constant upheaval, moving from one camp to another before finally settling in Shakhan Camp. Despite my young age, I’ve faced numerous challenges and a persistent fear that has made it difficult for me to make decisions about my future,” She continued.

“Everything changed when the staff of Better World Organization reached out to my family and me. Their visit inspired me to join the adolescent girls' program. Initially hesitant and fearful, I found the courage to fully engage after two or three sessions. With each session, my confidence grew, and I began to share my thoughts, ideas, and opinions without reservation. By the end of the program, I had overcome many of my fears. I am immensely grateful to Better World Organization and its dedicated staff for offering me this invaluable opportunity. I hope our community will continue to benefit from similar psychosocial support programs that raise awareness and build self-confidence among its members.”

Note: For Layla and Jackleen's stories, we are unable to share their photos to ensure their safety, as they prefer to remain anonymous



We are thankful to UNICEF, that through our partnership we were able to positively change the life of Jackleen. There are still thousands of girls living in camps who are experiencing similar challenges, and we aim to continue to support more.



From Fear to Freedom: A Boy's Journey to Independence

Adam is a nine-year-old boy living in Duhok city with his siblings and parents. When he was just five years old, he experienced a traumatic event while playing hide and seek with his sisters. They placed him in a dark room and shut the door, which left him terrified of dark and confined spaces.

Despite being a healthy boy, Adam has struggled with his fear ever since. He finds it difficult to be alone in a room, walk to school by himself, or even visit the nearest store. His fear of the dark has also affected his daily life, making it challenging for him to sleep alone, use the restroom independently, and often leading to aggressive behavior.

Adam used to say

"Being alone makes me anxious and I don't feel safe"

While his mother was participating in safe family sessions along with his sister, provided by the Better World Organization staff, she knew about the family counselling and case management service, and she decided to bring Adam with her to have sessions with one of the social workers. Through the sessions, he was able to express why he's afraid of the dark, and how he thinks that mysterious things are scary and dark.

Said Adam

"I found comfort in talking with the social worker of BWO in Zewe Center".

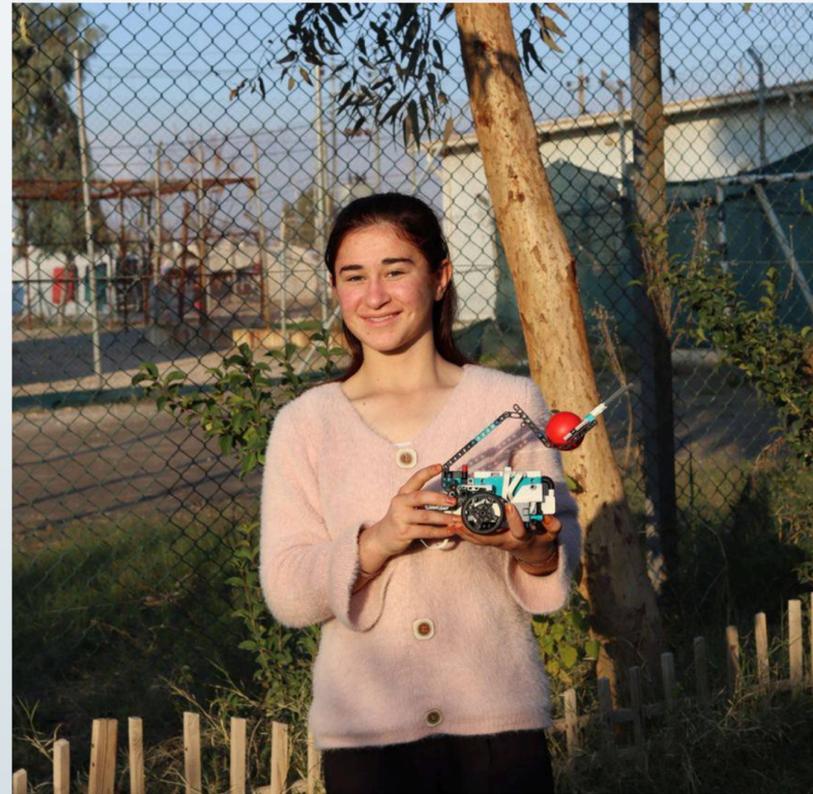


After the continuous support and follow ups with Adam, his mother and sister, Adam's mother shared remarkable updates about his improvement. He now goes to school on his own and confidently visits the store to pick up groceries for the family. Additionally, he has overcome his previous fears and now sleeps alone and uses the restroom independently. Adam has grown into a healthy and confident boy who enjoys playing with his siblings and manages his daily chores with increasing independence.

For one-year, Better World Organization, in partnership with SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit Hermann-Gmeiner-Fonds Deutschland e.V, and in close collaboration with General Directorate of Care and Social Development, has developed family counseling curriculum which is a guiding toolkit for social workers. We have been working in partnerships with SOS since 2021, supporting families in Duhok where the project aims to improve the well-being of community members and empower women by providing different supportive activities. Better World Organization extends its gratitude to the support SOS provided for years to support our community and hopes to generate additional resources to reach more children like Adam.



From Displacement to Innovation



Zahra is a 15-year-old girl living in an internally displaced persons camp in Duhok governorate. In 2014, she was forced to flee her home due to the ISIS crisis. Despite her passion for technology and robotics, she has been unable to access courses or materials to further her interests because of the challenging conditions in the camp, and the high costs associated with such training. However, in 2023, Zahra's situation began to change when she learned about a new program offered by Better World Organization. This program provided her with the opportunity to explore her interests and gain valuable knowledge in the fields she is passionate about.

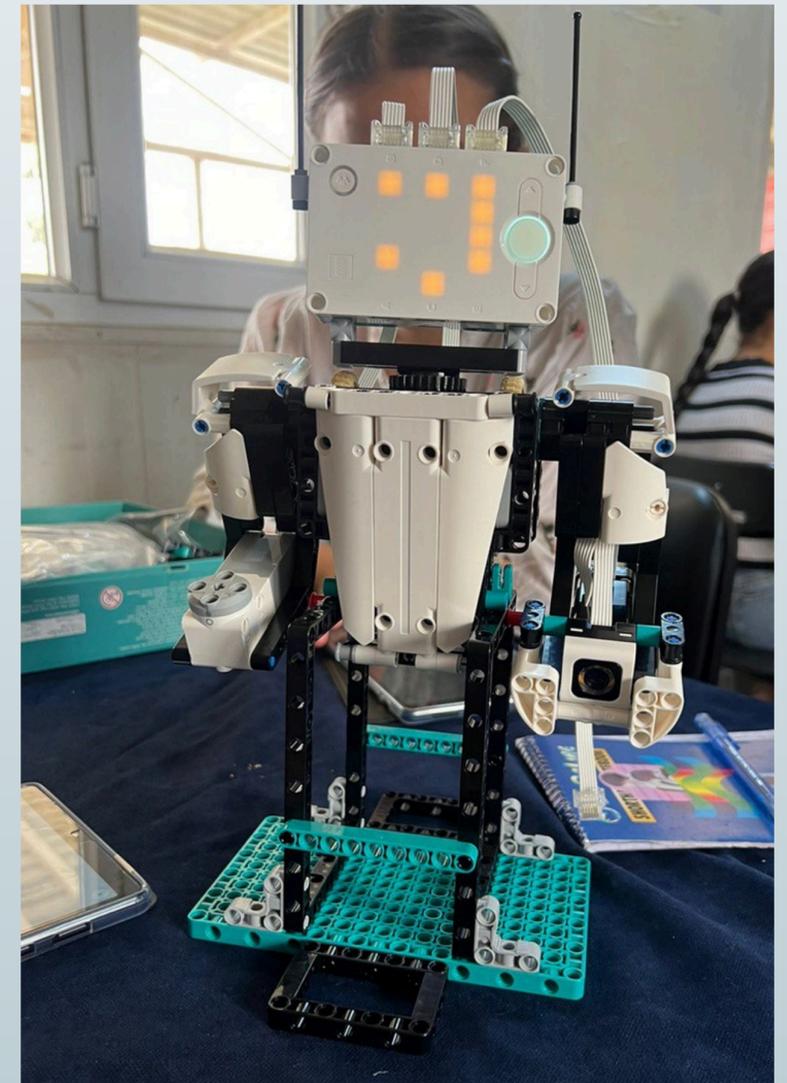
Zahra had the opportunity to join the Robotics Club, held at the organization center in Kabartu 1 Camp. Under the guidance of an expert trainer, she received comprehensive training in robot building and coding, using high-quality materials, and gaining the essential skills to pursue her passion.

Following this training, Zahra participated in an International Women's Day event organized by the German Consulate in Duhok. At the event, she had the chance to speak publicly, interact with media channels, and engage with local government officials to showcase the robot she and her team had built, garnering support for similar programs. This event also allowed her to connect with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, including different religions, and forming valuable friendships and enhancing her networking and communication skills.

As a result of her training and collaboration with her peers, Zahra contributed with the trainer in developing an application designed to help young people (ages 12-16) explore climate change. Generally, this project has boosted her confidence and public speaking abilities. Now, Zahra continues to build on her knowledge and aspires to attend a technology college to pursue her dreams and further develop her expertise.



Better World Organization extends its deepest gratitude to the German Consulate in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for providing funds for women-led organizations to bring new ideas to empower women and girls and foster innovation and progress within the communities. This support is helping Better World Organization to make a meaningful difference in the lives of many.





"Together, We Can Make The World a Better Place. Your Contribution Brings Us One Step Closer."



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