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SUCCESS STORY

Iraq: Protecting Children in Conflict

By working with and training parents, teachers, community members, and specialized service providers through SC/US, USAID helped ensure child protection services and programs can effectively respond to the needs of Iraqi children.



“I love Hanaa, my teachers, and all my new friends. I am much happier now as the other children are no longer afraid to play with me.”

—Ahmed, aged 11, SC/US beneficiary in Basra

Ahmed, an 11-year-old boy from Basra, was acting erratically and aggressively in class and at the Child-Friendly Space (CFS) in his school run by Save the Children/U.S. (SC/US). Hanaa, an SC/US Community Mobilizer, discovered that Ahmed was imitating controlling behavior from his elder brother, who was head of the household following their father’s death. Ahmed’s story is not unique. Despite the decline in insecurity in Iraq following intense conflict in the mid-2000s, children remain vulnerable to psychosocial distress. The loss of parents and caregivers and damage to governmental and social institutions strips away protection buffering children from the worst of the conflict.

In 2011, USAID supported SC/US across eight governorates and 14 districts in Iraq to improve care and protection of vulnerable children. Through SC/US, USAID conducted training and outreach for parents, teachers, community leaders, and health service providers on issues such as psychosocial support, the rights of children, and protection of children from kidnap and sexual abuse. SC/US also created supervised play opportunities for children by establishing children’s clubs in public schools and training parent leaders to set up play groups.

Hanaa, under the auspices of the USAID-supported SC/US’s child protection programs, worked with the CFS facilitator to engage Ahmed through team work- and confidence-building activities, such as enrolling him in the school choir and giving him additional responsibilities. After 6 months of follow-up, Ahmed was a completely different boy—happy, joyful, and no longer violent.

As of October 2011, the USAID-supported SC/US child protection program has benefited over 83,000 Iraqi children and adults through establishing CFSs and training teachers and principals in 100 schools, changing the lives of children like Ahmed for the better. By building the capacity of parents, teachers, community members, and specialized service providers, USAID helped ensure that child protection services and programs can effectively respond to the needs of Iraqi children in their homes and schools for years to come.