

INTERVIEW

WITH BASMA ALDAKHI AND SARAH HASSAN

Basma and Sarah are our two extremely dedicated and hardworking team members in Dohuk, here they share with you their personal experiences, thoughts and what they would like people to know about the work they do everyday and the challenges and successes they have had.

Hello Basma and Sarah, can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Basma: I'm Yazidi from Sinjar, I started with Wadi in October 2014. I am on the team that is working full power in Dohuk we are working to help all who need it without discrimination.

Sarah: I'm from Sinjar also Yazidi and I have been working with Wadi since 2014. 2014-2017 we were working with the women survivors from DAESH who were returning, we helped them start again, taking them to the hospital providing psychosocial assistance, helping them with paperwork and re-establishing their identities. I have to say that I feel very proud about the work we did, even though it was difficult, but the need was really there.

I know you are working on the 'No to Violence' project, can you tell us a little bit about it?

Basma: We started with the project in 6 schools in 5 camps, it is now a successful project, that has been praised by the ministry of education, we are bringing awareness and the students and teachers and staff have benefited a lot, from these trainings. There was a lot of violence in these schools, both between the students and from the teachers who were unfortunately using corporal punishment and were hitting the children for being late, or not paying attention. Our goal for the start of this project was to lower the violence rate at each school substantially.

Sara: We saw so many challenges with this project. People were literally laughing at us, they would say "how can you say not to hit the children? If we don't hit them, then how will they learn?". I mean it is the worst way you can teach children, there are so many children who are in primary one and can't write their own names! It's obvious that the traditional way is a disaster. But now that we have really been working on this topic with the schools it is getting better, we did find a way to get through,

and violence is down by about 80%. But there are two schools in Sinjar, that even though we have been working with them they are still hitting the children, and the level of education is terrible, for us, its really a disaster to see this, I mean after everything we have been through, the Genocide, and these children are our future, they deserve better education and treatment than this.

How has the ‘No to Violence project’ been received in the area where you are working?

Basma: People were very resistant, especially the educational sector, the schools were not convinced of the concept they would say “if you don’t hit them, they don’t learn anything” this was really the biggest challenge for us as the Wadi team. We provided alot of awareness and training and seminars to the school staff, and also to the children. We still

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BASMA ALDAKHI

face a lot of challenges, there is such an endemic problem of violence in the camps. Right now there is also a big issue of violence between the students. Most of the schools we have been working with are getting better, but we have to continue working until physical and verbal violence is not present anymore.

It has been about 8 years since the horrific genocidal attack on Yazidis



SARA HASSAN (L) AND BASMA ALDAKHI (R)

in Sinjar, what would you like people to know about the situation today?

Basma: Apart from the difficulties that we are facing from living in the camps, the continuing lack of security in Sinjar, and the large numbers of people kidnapped. There are also 2878 Yazidis missing. We don't know what happened to them. There has been no effort to find out what happened to them by the Iraqi government, or other governments or the UN to find out the fates of the people. Also the women who were freed or escaped from DAESH and their children who are still in Iraq live in the camps, there has been no funds set up for them to get income. They survive on donations, or charitable organisations. It's really terrible.

Sara: Our message to everyone, is to amplify Yazidi voices and the messages of Yazidi people, to defend us, and to support our voices and the IDPs voices, who for 8 years now have been surviving in tiny containers that feel like tombs, in the freezing cold and in the boiling heat, 4 metres, 8 people, no privacy, no feeling of family, we are asking for the most basic of human rights to be respected, and till now nothing.

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SARAH HASSAN

You are also working on the environmental project, what has that been like?

Basma: The topic of the environment in the camps, or in the areas in general where we work, I'm sorry to say but it is a disaster. There is no interest from the government with regards to the environment, most people don't have any idea of the negative effects of pollution on their health. For example in Isyan camp there is an oil refinery nearby, and the incidence of cancer in the camp is quite high with the kind of cancer that is caused by pollution from oil production. The biggest issue in the camps is the burning of trash, plastic and other toxic materials. We went to the local municipality to try and set up better trash collection so people don't have to burn the garbage, but they were not interested in providing support for a cleaner camp. It is really frustrating, this impacts people's health. We can do all the awareness training, but until we have better investment and systems for trash either by NGOs or the government it won't really matter.

Sara: I mean when we started it was bad, they were just burning the plastic next to the school, and this is really bad for health. Maybe people see this as a trivial topic, like why are you bothering with this, as well as violence against kids. But we have to keep going and hope that we will succeed. We are IDPS and we are working for IDPs. We are this community and what we suffer from they suffer from and this allows us to connect with people and give us support.